



PHONOLOGICAL DEVIATION AMONG SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC NASARAWA, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

In Nigeria today, most speakers of English are second users of the language because they acquire their different mother tongues before they come to learn English. This article studied the phonological deviation among speakers of English at the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa. Adopting the survey research design, the oral production test (OPT) was used whereby thirty (30) students were randomly selected to speak on some topical issues and issues; related to academics such as Examination Malpractice in Nigeria's Higher Institutions, Campus Gangsterism, High Rate of Unemployment in Nigeria, The 2019 General Election and hate speeches among politicians during the 2019 electioneering campaign. The student's speeches were recorded and transcribed in their raw forms and compared with the Received Pronunciation (RP) for the purpose of analysis. The results showed that there were deviations in the production of some sounds that are not present in the phonetic inventory of most Nigerian languages as well as wrong placement of stress on English words. The results also showed that the mother tongue plays a significant role in the wrong pronunciation of English words by most Nigerian English bilinguals.

Keywords: phonological deviation, second language, speakers

1. Introduction

The purpose of learning to speak a second language is usually to be as competent as the native speaker of that language. However, if this does not happen, one would try as much as possible to be intelligible to any speaker of that language. In Nigeria today most speakers of English are second users of the language because they acquire their different mother tongues before they come to learn English. Native speakers on the other hand are those who have acquired the language naturally as their first language during childhood and who are said to be norm-generating (Adetugbo 1997:123). Second language users in Nigeria, therefore, are those who

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learn the language after acquiring their mother language but who make daily use of the second language for inter-communal functions because of the heterogeneous nature of the country. Interest in the concept and existence of Nigerian English (NE) continues to grow among academics and teachers as a result of the frustration that attempts to breed an educated corps of English language teachers and students with overt native-like competence at success. This is a result of the English Language's long and continued association with Nigerian languages. (Awonusi and Dadzie, 2004:15).

Every language has peculiar sounds with which the language is produced and communicated. English Language as an official language and the mainstay of communication in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria has its peculiar sounds with which it is identified, produced and communicated. It enhances human communication and serves as an important key to verbal communication. Whenever we speak, we consciously produce a chain of speech sounds which are sequentially arranged to form syllables and words that will generate exact meanings for our listeners. Some languages have a limited number of phonemes while others appear to possess extremely complete phonologies. The English language has a stream of sounds (speech sounds) which are produced during speech. It, therefore, becomes imperative for a learner to learn how to distinguish the sounds in speaking and listening. English as a language has a pronunciation system that can be classified into two: the segmental elements and the supra-segmental elements. Osisanwo (2012:14) identifies the aspects of phonology viz.

2. Segmental and Supra Segmental Phonology

Segmental phonology studies individual sound segments in a language and how the segments come together to convey meaning. Supra-segmental phonology on the other hand refers to both phonological and grammatical units larger than the segment (Hyman, 1975: 187). Supra segmental features are therefore the features of a language other than individual sounds that are phonemes. The Supra segmental features include: accent; rhythm or timing, and intonation.

These features according to Jowitt (1991:88) "*operate at word and sentence level and appear to be Super imposed on the "Intrinsic" meaning of a word or a sentence, which in most cases is determined by the segments.*" However, Adetugbo (1993:68) identifies Supra segmental features as pitch, melody, tempo, duration and pause. He goes ahead to state that these features are not easily reducible to discrete segments like consonants and vowels. The Supra segmental sounds do not function alone, they have to have a base in the segmental sounds as in the syllable. Both segmental and supra-segmental sounds are therefore interdependent. This article however concerns itself with both segmental and supra-segmental sounds of English and how the mother tongue of Nigerian Speakers of English causes deviation with learning and production of these sounds.

Most Speakers of English in Nigeria have a number of difficulties in the pronunciation of utterances of English. The learner is faced with mother tongue interference apart from grappling with spelling pronunciation. He transfers the sound system of his mother tongue and uses it in learning the target language. Linguistically, the contact between Nigerian languages and the

English Language led to the infestation of the language as most Nigerian speakers of English find it difficult to pronounce certain English sounds and words correctly.

They do deviate from the standard pronunciation which is the Received Pronunciation (RP). This departure always results in misinterpretation of what is being communicated and sometimes renders the speech unintelligible. This is borne out of the fact that most Nigerian speakers acquire their mother tongues which are regarded as the first language (L₁) before learning English.

The phonological system of their mother tongues keeps intruding into that of English in the course of learning English as a second language (L₂). The deviation occurs at both the production and the receptive levels. The learner who cannot hear the difference between the English phonemes /p/ and /f/ in the words "pan" and "fan" will not be able to articulate the difference (Williams, 1999:79). The absence of a particular sound in the mother tongue constitutes the difference between the two languages. This, therefore, becomes a challenge to Nigerian learners of English and the researcher feels it should be investigated because it poses a lot of problems in the articulation of English sounds vis-a-vis the mother tongue.

A critical look at varieties of English spoken in Nigeria shows that varieties are as many as the number of languages or dialects that are spoken in the country. This, therefore, gives rise to the fact that each language or dialect has its own influence on the English language. Therefore, across all geo-political zones, we have transfer and variation in the English spoken, thereby giving rise to several forms of the language in the area of pronunciation with particular reference to specific sounds and the environment of their occurrence.

2.1 Concept of Phonological Deviation

The concept of phonological deviation is viewed from different perspectives by different scholars. While some scholars see the terms "*phonological deviation*" and "*phonological interference*" as synonymous, others maintain that any deviation in the use of English from British norms is classified as "*error*". Yet others associate the term with bilingual speakers. Weinreich as quoted in Ashikeni and Akoshi (2009:136) sees "*phonological deviation*" and "*phonological interference*" as synonymous that is, those instances of deviation from the norms of either Language occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. This portrays that deviation from the norms of a language is tied to ESL speakers who have the command of more than one language. There is the possibility for the phonological systems of the two languages of these bilingual speakers to come in contact resulting in what Trubertkoy cites in Ashikeni and Akoshi as "*numerous mistakes*" and "*misinterpretation*". NCE DSL English Course Book (2009:51) agrees with the above view of Weinreich that the deviation is occasioned by contact with another "*language*".

The deviation of the speaker's output from the norm of a language, therefore, is attributed to the differences in the structure of L₁ and L₂. Williams (1999:79) asserts that phonological deviation from the norm of speech is a continuum, starting from the acceptable variations in accents and worsening to the point where communication breaks down because of the failure to distinguish contrastive features of sound. Banjo (1996:72) also claims that deviation in the use of English from British norms was regarded as errors which users must be encouraged to eliminate.

The researcher does not agree with the view of Banjo (1996:72) who is of the view that the English spoken by educated Nigerians are to some extent intelligible nationally and internationally. The researchers believe that the term "*interference*" and "*deviation*" are synonymous. They both refer to the inappropriate use of a language or the act of moving away from what is acceptable language or norm. The phonological deviation is the act of moving away from the normal or acceptable standard pronunciation which is caused by the already mastered phonological features of the L₁ which later "clash" with the system of the target language (English). In producing the sounds or words of the target language, the bilinguals do transfer negatively, the phonological system of the L₁ to L₂. The deviation that distorts the intelligibility of what is communicated is termed as "errors" while those that do not distort the intelligibility are called "*substandard usage*". The researcher focused on both as well as phonological deviation at the levels of segmental and supra-segmental.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by the theories of contrastive analysis and error analysis.

3.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. In other words, it is the study and comparison of two languages: the learner's target language and the learner's native language by looking at the structural similarities and differences of the studied language. Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of second language acquisition in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. The behaviorist theories at that time assumed that language learning was a question of habit formation and thus could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. The difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (IQ) therefore, depended on the difference between the learner's mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn. The theoretical foundations for what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis were formulated by Robert Lado (1985). Lado asserts that:

"Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively and when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by the native."

He goes further to state that "*those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult*".

Contrastive analysis, therefore, sees language as the transfer of linguistic knowledge. If a structure in the first language is similar to a structure in the second language, there will be no errors because a "positive transfer" will occur. If a structure in the second language is different from or does not exist in the first language errors will occur because of "*negative transfer*". The

contrastive analysis, therefore, is very useful for this study since it concerns itself with the segmental and supra-segmental elements of English which operate at phonologic all levels of the English language.

Using the contrastive analysis, there are some sounds that are present in English la but absent in most Nigerian languages. Take for instance the dental fricative sounds /θ/ / ð/, the palato alveolar affricative sounds /t/ and /dʒ/ as well as palato alveolar fricative sounds /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ which are present in English will constitute learning difficulties for most Nigerians because these sounds only exist in some Nigerian languages e.g., the Igala language, hence "negative transfer" which accounts for errors will occur. On the other hand, sounds like bilabial plosive /p/ and /b /, alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ as well as velar plosives /k/ and /g/ which are present in English are also present in most Nigerian languages will pose no problem for Yoruba learners of English as a second language because "*positive transfer*" will occur.

For example, the distinctions between words like "thin" and "chin" in English might be difficult for native Yoruba speakers of English who have no words that are distinguished by the initial sounds of those words.

3.2 Error Analysis

As the name implies, unlike contrastive analysis, error analysis concentrates on those erroneous parts of the learner's performance in the target language that diverge from whatever norm the performance is compared with. While the contrastive analysis traces all learners' errors to the mother tongue (MT) or source language, error analysis goes beyond that to identify other sources of error. Such other sources could be errors which are intralingual in nature or those which emanate from the learning strategy of the learner or the teaching strategy of the teacher. It could also be due to the age factor. The theory views the learner as one who interacts actively with the new language. Error analysis in second language acquisition (SLA) was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and Colleagues. Error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis. It shows that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors although its more valuable aspects have been incorporated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error analysis has been that many learners' errors are produced by learners making faulty ' references to the rule of the new language.

Error analysis distinguishes between errors which are systematic and mistakes which are not. Errors can be classified according to basic type: omissive, additive, and substitutive. Errors may also be classified according to the level of language: phonological errors, vocabulary or lexical errors, syntactic errors etc. From the above review, errors are evidence that learning is taking place and that error analysis is part of interlanguage. Proponents of error analysis believe in studying the difficulties facing L2 learners rather than predicting such difficulties. Error analysis, therefore, emerged as an alternative to contrastive analysis.

Ashikeni and Akoshi (2009:136) maintain that error analysis is useful in second-language teaching because it provides feedback to the teacher, with respect to the effectiveness of his teaching materials and techniques. It shows the teacher which parts of the syllabus have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention and whether or not he has to devote more time to them in terms of broader planning, and with a new group of learners, they provide

the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a programme of re-teaching. Richard and Schimdt (2002:84) also define Error Analysis as the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners.

Douglas Brown as quoted in Awolaja and Awolaja (2008:8) defines error as "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker reflecting his inter-language competence". According to him, errors are different from mistakes. Error is a systematic deviation from the target language but the mistake is non-systematic and inconsistent because it could be merely a slip of tongue, oversight in writing, etc. S.P Corder (1974:126) states that the most important stages in error analysis are those of recognition, description and explanation of errors. He goes further to give a distinction between an "error" which results from incomplete knowledge and a "mistake" made by a learner when writing or speaking, which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, and carelessness. While distinguishing error from mistake Corder also says: "This is not usually the case with the mistake made by a learner. Not only does he not always recognize his mistakes, out when attention is drawn to them, but he may also even commit another error in trying to do so."

From the above, it can be stated that the difference between error and mistake is ignorance.

3.3 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument that was used to collect the data was Oral Production Test (OPT). Using this instrument, the respondents were asked to speak for one or two minutes on topical issues and issues related to academics in their day-to-day interactions with their colleagues. Their speeches were recorded, transcribed and compared with the British standard pronunciation to determine the degree of deviations. The instrument was tested using the Oral Production Test (OPT) on thirty students from the selected schools and the desired results were obtained and analyzed. Using this instrument, the following results were got from the respondents.

Words	Deviation	Standard Pronunciation
Malpractice	Mælprætis	Mælprektis
Can, as, illegal	kæ:n a:s, Ilega:l	kæn, æz, ili:gl
Student, collaboration	student, kɒlə:bouereisn	stju:dnt, kɒləbðreisn
With, Order	wit, ɔ:də:	wi:θ, ʌðð
Obtain, undeserved	ɔ:btein, ɔndisa:f	ðbtein, ʌndizð:vd
Some, method	sɒm, metə:d	sʌm, mðθðd
Encouraging, peer	enkəreidʒin, Pia:	ink ʌridʒin, pið
students, failure	stjudents, fəiliə	stju:dents, felijð
examination	eksamineisn	igzæmineifn
categories	ka:tigðuris	kætigðriz
study, during	stɔ:di, du:rɪn	stʌdy, djuðrin
focus, lack	fəʊkəs, la:k	fəʊkəs, læk
instruction, result	instrɒksns, risɒlt	istrʌk ns, rizʌlt
prefer, garbage	prɪfə:, gɑ:beɪʒ	prɪfɜ:, gɑ:bidʒ
First, period	fɔ:st, pi:riəd	fɜ:st, piðriəd
Account, performance	a:kəunt, pɑ:fɔ:mɑ:ns	əkaunt, pəfo:mðns
Work, come	wɔ:k, kɔ:m	wɜ:k, kʌm
Things, strength, through,	tɪns, strent, fru•	θɪns, strenθ, θru:

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that, the, this, their	dæt, di, dis, dið	æt, ð, is,
to	tu	tu: or tu
early	a:li	ɜ:li
Unemployment, undesirable	ʊnɛmplɔɪmənt, ʊndɪsəɪrəɪbl	ʌnɪm'ploɪmənt, ʌndɪzəɪdɪəbl,
unhappiness	ʊnhə:pɪnes	ʌn' hæpɪnɪs
social-economic	səʊsiə: ɪkɔnɔmɪk	səʊsiə: kɔn' nʌmɪk
are, and	a:, a:nd	a:r, ænd
political	pɔlɪtɪkə:	pɔ'lɪtɪkl
wave	weɪf.	weɪv
youth	ju:ts	ju: z
Frustration, construction	'frʊstreɪʃn, 'kɔnstrʊ:ksən	fʌs'treɪʃn, kɔn'strʌkʃn
pockets	pɔ:kets	pɔkɪts
consumers	kɔnsu:mə:s	kɔnsju:mɔz
hurts, hunger	hɜ:ts, hɜ:n'gə:	hɜ:ts, 'hæŋgɔ
expert	eks'pɑ:t	'ekspɜ:t
oath	ðʊt	ðuθ
today	'tu:deɪ	tə'deɪ
reveal	rɪveɪl	rɪvi:l
weapon	we'pɔns	'wepən
other, gun, cult, blood	ɔ:ðə:, gʌn, kʌlt, blʊ:d	ʌðð gʌn, kʌlt, blʌd
social	səʊsiə	səʊʃl
within	wɪtɪn	wɪ in
death	deθ	dee
Occurred, government	'ɔkɔ:d, gʌv'ment	ð'kɜ:d, 'gʌvnmənt
national	nə: 'sɪə:nl	'næʃnəl/ 'næfnəl
were	wɪð	wɜ:r
which, achieve	wɪʃ, əsɪ:f	wɪtʃ, ə'tʃɪ:v
therefore, these	dɪəfɔ, di:s	ədfo:, i:z
lecturers	lek'tʃərə:s	'lektʃədɜz
purpose	'pɔs' pʊs	'pə:pəs
infrastructure	ɪnfra: strʊktʃ	'ɪnfɪstrʌktʃ
without, this	wɪtaut, dɪs	wɪ'ðaʊt, ðɪs
water	wɔ:tə:	wɔ:tð
forthcoming	fɔ:tʌmɪn	fɔ: θ'kʌmɪŋ
involve	ɪnvɔlv	ɪn 'vɔ:lv
result, number, buses	rezʊlt, nʊmbə, bʊsɪs	rɪ'zʌlt, 'nʌmbə, bʌsɪz
supply	səplai	sə'plai

4. Findings and Conclusion

From the findings of this research, it is obvious that monophthongs /ʌ/, /ð/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, the consonants /θ/, / /, /ts/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /v/, the plural morpheme /-ɪz/ and /-z/, the past tense morpheme /-ɪd/ and /-t/ as well as stress placement on English words do pose difficulty to most speakers of English in the study area.

It was discovered that the subjects of this study had problems with most of the sounds that are not available in their first language (mother tongue) and they replaced them with the ones that are present. They also pronounced words according to how they are written. This is because in the students' first language (L₁) words are pronounced as they are written.

This research has therefore contributed to fishing out areas of pronunciation difficulties or problems faced or experienced by most Nigerians at large thereby adding to the body of knowledge already existing in understanding the English spoken by Nigerians as a second language. The spoken English of the subjects has greatly been influenced by the first language which as a result of contact with English. This influence is therefore responsible for various forms of pronunciation. The implication it has is significant for the teaching and learning of English by all second learners of the English Language, The sounds which were deviated are the monophthongs /ʌ /, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /ɔ:/, and the consonants /θ/, /ð/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ŋ/, /f/, /v/, the plural morphemes /-iz/ and /-z/, the past tense morphemes /-id/ and /-t/ as well as wrong placement of stress on English words. The findings revealed that the mother tongue plays a significant role in accounting for the wrong pronunciation of words and utterances as well as the wrong placement of stress on English words by some Nigerian, English bilinguals.

S/No	Vowels/Consonants	No of Correct pronunciation	No of deviation	% correct	% deviate
1	Monophthongs /ə/, /ɜ:/, / ʌ /, /ɔ:/	5	25	17	83
2	Voice and Voiceless Dental Fricatives /θ/, /ð/	12	18	40	60
3	Palato Alveolar /tʃ/, /dʒ/	10	20	33	67
4	Velar Nasal /ŋ/	6	24	20	80
5	Labio-dental Fricative /v/	16	14	53	47
6	Plural Morphemes /-iz/, /-z/	5	25	17	83
7	Past tense Morphemes /-id/, /-t/	3	27	10	90
	Total	57	153	190	510

5. Conclusion

Every English Learner's aim is to be as competent and intelligible as native speakers of the language. However, this becomes a mirage for some speakers of English language in Nigeria as a result of cultural differences between the English language and the Nigerian language. This, therefore, accounts for phonological errors that are confronting the speakers of the English language as a second language in Nigeria. This problem requires prompt attention by the stakeholders involved (government at all levels and teachers of English Language) in the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian schools so that at the end of the day the problem will be surmounted and those intending to learn and speak English in Nigeria. This is borne out of the fact that English is the official language in Nigeria.

5.1 Recommendations

- Competent hands should be employed to teach the aspect of oral English in car various Secondary Schools as the problems of the correct pronunciation of English words and expressions begin at this level.
- Government should provide schools with language laboratories to aid in teaching and learning the English language in our schools.

- Students should be encouraged to take the aspect of oral English very seriously in their studies
- There should be provision for frequent fresher courses for teachers of the English Language at secondary school levels. This is because practical spoken English begins fully at this level.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare. I have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. I certify that the submission is original and is not under review at any other publication

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