

## **CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND YORUBA MORPHOLOGICAL SYSTEMS- IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS OF ENGLISH.**

**Ogundepo, Abimbola Olusola**

Emmanuel Alayande College of education, Oyo  
Lanlate Campus, Lanlate

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines the differences and similarities in the morphological systems of English and Yoruba languages. It establishes the preeminence of English language in Nigeria's linguistic firmament and posits that an average Nigerian needs to learn and acquire proficiency in the use of English if he is to adequately fulfill his roles in the society. It agrees with earlier scholars who have asserted that most errors observed in English language use of most bilinguals are traceable to their first language and thus recommends that English language teachers should undertake contrastive study of the mother tongue of learners and the target language as this will be of a tremendous help in the effective discharge of their duties. It will help them, amongst others, to understand how differences in the morphological systems predispose learners of English to committing errors in English language.*

**KEYWORDS:** Contrastive study, Morphological systems, Implications.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Language is one of the greatest gift of God to mankind. It is a means by which man expresses his ideas and gives meaning to his existence. Little wonders, Bloomfield and New mark (1963) defines language as fundamentally the means by which men communicate with each other and with themselves. Oyedokun-Alli (2014) describes language as an effective tool in socialization and social intercourse. He argues that the manifest use of language distinguishes man from other animals. In a similar vein, Babatunde (2002) explicates that language is the expression of culture, the depository of culture and crucial mode of culture transmission. Like Oyedokun-Alli, Olutayo (2004) describes language as one of the basic characteristics of human beings. It is a useful feature that differentiates him from other creatures. Ojetunde (2013) observe that language performs transactional, interactional and educational functions.

### **English Language in Nigeria.**

English language is arguably one of the most valuable assets left behind by Nigeria's colonial master. According to Kolawole (1998) as a result of the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria and for administrative purpose, the English language has been adopted as the second language. Ajulo (1989) asserts that the role of English language in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country such as Nigeria has been one of integration. Oyedokun- Alli (2014) corroborates this when he posits that English is the most enduring of the legacies of colonialism. And that the utilitarian use of the language for inter-ethnic communication, for politics and administration and as a medium of institution in education and mass-communication. cannot be over emphasized. For decades English has remained the language

of government, law, administration politics, mass media, commerce and all sorts of social engagement for people from different language groups in Nigeria.

It is the language of education and medium of instruction in school. All these are corroborated by Adeyanju (2002) who states that English language in Nigeria has for long championed the course of human co-operation by performing effectively all the above mentioned roles. All these show that the English language has such preeminence in Nigeria than any other Nigeria language. In fact it is the official language of Nigeria.

In view of the importance attached to English, an average Nigerian is expected to have more than just a working knowledge of the language. To fulfill one's roles effectively in the society one needs a good command of the language. It has become so important that we cannot avoid speaking and writing it in a way that is universally accepted. This presupposes that an appreciable degree of competence is expected from the learners of English.

It is quite disheartening however that most Nigeria learners of English as a second language find it difficult to attain the required proficiency in the language. Literature abound on the falling (?) standard of English in Nigeria (Adelabu 2006, Ayodele 1987, Adelabu & Fadimu 2003, Adesanoye 1973, Adepoju 1999, Ajulo)

This poor performance of student in all area of English language competences has been a topic of debates and complaints among all stake-holder and should be of a great concern to English language teachers and researchers. This is because the poor performance in English leads to poor performance in other school subjects. (Fadimu & Ogundepo 2014, Adelabu 1990)

Oyedotun-Alli (2014) noted that the perennially poor performance of student taking English language examinations in Nigeria public school has contained to impact negatively on Nigeria's education objectives. If English is as important as described above and the standard is either falling or fallen, then there are several things to be done to remedy this situation in order to avoid the concomitant effects of such lack of communicative competence on the educational system and life generally in Nigeria. One major thing to be done is to find out factor precipitating the poor standard of English usage amongst students.

Several researchers have identified several probable causes of this phenomenon. (Ayodele 87, Adelabu. Fadimu 2003, Shaibu 2007, Ihejirika 2007, Foyewa & Ogundepo 2014 Olatayo, Alabi and Ogundepo 2008) some of the factors identified by these scholars include lack of appropriate text books, students' negative attitudes, complexity of the language, roles of teachers, and national language policy Others include overcrowding in schools, inadequate number of qualified teachers, lack of dedication and commitment on the part of teachers and age of students in schools nowadays.

### **Linguistic Interference**

One major factor which indeed needs more examination is the effects of the learners' mother tongue on their target language (English). This is in agreement with Oyedokun- Alli's (2014) submission that a bilingual speaker is probably never equally competent in both languages. In fact, scholars like Lado (1957), Langaker (1972), Bollinger (1972), James (1964), Afolayan (1968), Banjo (1969) and others have through their works highlighted the importance of this

particular factor, yet more works need to be done as recent evidence points at it as a major factor responsible for the infelicities experienced in student language use.

In the view of Adelabu (2014), mother tongue interference continues to be regarded as the most obvious cause of difficulty which cannot be ignored. Little wonders William (Cited in Adelabu & Fadimu, 2004) declares that

*If therefore we look at the speech and writing of the foreign learner, there is little reason to doubt that we will find many mistakes which can be traced to the mother tongue.*

The interference refers to the instances of deviation from the norms of either language in a bilingual situation which occurs in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language (Ojetunde 2013, Akindele and Adegbite 2005). It is a linguistic situation whereby an overlap in two different languages causes a bilingual to transfer the linguistic systems of a language into the other in the process of producing that other language which happens to be the second or target language.

Lado (1957) underscores the effects of L1 on L2 when he remarked that:

*Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by the natives.*

This perhaps, is why Fries (1945) put up the review that for foreign language teaching, “the most effective materials are those based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner”.

It is in view of the above that a synchronic study of English and Yoruba morphological systems is undertaken here. It is believed that a comparative study of this type will reveal the differences which are assumed to be responsible for linguistic interference and are thus sources of difficulties for a Yoruba learner of English.

### **Statement of the Problems**

This study aims at finding solutions to the following research problems:

- (i) are there similarities and differences between English and Yoruba morphological systems
- (ii) at what language level are these differences and similarities noticeable?
- (iii) How do these differences pose learning problems?
- (iv) How can the learning problems be solved?
- (v) How do the similarities facilitate learning of either language?
- (vi) What are the benefits of a comparative study to a language teacher?

The research brought into focus the differences in these identified language areas with a view to determining how the differences account for observed deviation from the norms.

The English alphabet consists of 26 letters made up of five vowels and twenty-one consonants:

<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>		
<i>l</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>q</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>x</i>
	<i>y</i>	<i>z</i>										

These differ significantly from the Yoruba alphabet that has 25 letters made up of seven vowels and 18 consonants:

[illegible]

besides the difference in the number of letters and vowels/consonant distribution, there exists in each language some letters that are not found in the other.

In Yoruba alphabet there are letters ‘s’ ‘e’ ‘o’ ‘gb’ which have no equivalent in English language. As sounds though, equivalents can be found for ‘s’ ‘e’ but the ‘gb’ and ‘o’ have no known English equivalents either as letters or as sounds.

There is also the absence of ‘c’ ‘q’ ‘v’ ‘x’ ‘z’ in the Yoruba alphabet.

At the segmental levels, the English sound system consists of 44 sound segments made up of 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds thus:

Consonant sounds: /t/ /b/ **d** /p/ /f/ /v/ /m/ /n/ /s/ /ʃ/ /l/ /r/ /j/ /tʃ/ /k/ /**dʒ**/ /w/ /h/ /g/ /ʒ/ /ŋ/ /θ/

Vowel sounds:

Pure vowels /ɪ/ /e/ /æ/ /ɒ/ /ʌ/ /ʊ/ i: / u: / ɑ: / ɔ: / ɜ: / ə/

Diphthongs    /eɪ/ /aɪ/ /ɔɪ/ /əʊ/ /aʊ/ /ɪə/ /eə/ /ʊə/

The Yoruba sound systems however has 30 sound segments made up of 18 consonant sound and 12 vowel sounds. The vowel sounds in Yoruba are made up of 7 oral sounds and 5 nasal vowels this

Consonant sounds /t/ /b/ /d/ /f/ /m/ /n/ /s/ /l/ /r/ /j/ // /ʃ/ /k/ /kp/ /gb/ /w/ /h/ /g/

Vowel sound /a/ /e/ e // i/ /o/ /o/ /u/

The sound segment unique to English are /v/ / tʃ/ /dʒ/ /ʒ/ /ŋ/ /θ/ /ð/ /æ / /ʌ/ /ʊ/ and /ə/

while/ /kp/ /gb/ /o/ and all the nasal vowels are unique to Yoruba language. Little wonders why Yoruba learners of English have difficulties in distinguish the long and short vowels / æ / and /a:/ / ʊ / and /u:/ /ɪ/ and /i:/ in their vowel length and quality.

They also tend to substitute /f/ for /v/, /s/ for /z/, /t/ for /θ/ and /d/ for /ð/.

Because of the absence of diphthongs in Yoruba sound system, Yoruba learners of English experience difficulties is articulating the closing and the centering diphthongs. They also experience difficulties in distinguishing voiced and voiceless final consonants in words. Perhaps because most Yoruba words hardly end in consonants.

English language has consonants clusters but this is alien to Yoruba language. Hence Yoruba learners of English tend to insert an intervening vowel in consonant clusters.

At the supra-segmental level significant differences occur in the two languages. Yoruba is a tonal language while English in an intonational language. Yoruba relies on tone to bring about change in meaning of words as in ra (disappear) ra (rub) and ra (buy) or oko (hoe) oko (vehinle) and oko (husband). English on the other hand relies on the stress which is achieved by length, higher pitch or greater amplitude. These stress and intonation are capable of bring about changes in meaning of utterances.

### **Noun and Pronouns in English and Yoruba**

There are certain phonological and morphological processes that take place in Yoruba noun formation without a corresponding equivalent in English Language. The Yoruba Language has two forms of nouns. These are the full form and the reduced form. In the reduced form of nouns in Yoruba language, consonant elision and vowel assimilation are often experienced. Here the middle syllable drops its consonant and its vowel is assimilated by the vowel of the preceding syllable.

*Egunun (Masquerade) becomes Eegun Otito (Truth) becomes Ooto Agogo (Bell) becomes Ago.*

Yoruba plural nouns are hardly ever realized the way English plural nouns are. Plurals are realized through the addition of plural marker 'awon' to proceed the Yoruba noun to be pluralized. Also, Yoruba Nouns have no gender markers for proper nouns and personal pronouns.

Two or more nouns in Yoruba language can combine to form two different relationships in Yoruba. This is not possible in English. For example, possession in Yoruba can be expressed through a combination of two nouns 'Ibon ode' (Hunter's gun) 'iwe ade' (Ade's book) 'Ile Ayo' (Ayo's house) etc. There are other possible relationships such as (i) place 'eti odo' (River bank), (ii) 'time' ale ana, (Yesterday night) use e.g 'Iwe eri' (Cerificate) material 'Irun agbon' (Beard).

Adjectives in English and Yoruba exhibits significant differences. First Yoruba adjectives do not mark degree of comparison as observed in English. In English the comparative and

superlative degrees are marked by addition of ‘\_er’ or ‘\_est’ or ‘more’ and ‘most’ as the case may be e.g.

<i>Tall</i>	<i>Taller</i>	<i>Tallest</i>
<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>More beautiful</i>	<i>Most beautiful</i>

Structures like the above do not exist in Yoruba adjectives. Rather Yoruba uses ‘ju’ and ‘julo’ to indicate a higher quantity or quality of the phenomenon being described. This expresses an idea of surpassing i.e. having more of a particular quality. This is perhaps why Yoruba learners of English who are yet to acquire proficiency in the use of English often say “Yemi fine pass Busayo” the idea of surpass in Yoruba’s “ju” or “julo” is transferred to English.

Another problematic area is the word order of adjectives and nouns qualified in both languages. While adjectives in Yoruba come after the noun modified adjectives come before their nouns in English. e.g.

<i>Omo buruku</i>	<i>(boy bad)</i>
<i>Ile giga</i>	<i>(building tall)</i>

In English, the correct order will be:

<i>Bad boy</i>
<i>Tall building</i>

### English and Yoruba Proverbs

Both languages make use of proverbs to embellish their discourse. In fact it is a mark of wisdom and erudition to interlace utterances with appropriate proverbs when speaking in both languages. However in Yoruba cultural practices, proverbs are considered exclusive preserve of the elders. Though the youths are not strictly prohibited from using proverbs but they must accompany such proverbs with what Olaoye (1993) termed “cultural apology” such as “*Toto o se bi owe*” or “*E fori ji mi*” I crave your indulgence for speaking in proverbs or I beg of your pardon. Though proverbs abound in English that could be employed for use when the need arises, experience has shown that most Yoruba English learners prefer to translate or transliterate Yoruba proverbs into English and this often leads to clumsiness in language processing.

### Loan Words

No language is an island. Every human language is known to have borrowed words and expression from other language through contacts. Yoruba has borrowed many words from English, while English has done the same from French, Latin Greek etc. Such borrowed words are known as loan words. They are words taken over from one language into the vocabulary of another language. Because most Yoruba words end with a vowel and consonant clusters are not usually observed, most borrowed words of English into Yoruba undergo some morphological changes reflecting this phenomenon. The consequence of this is



that Yoruba learners of English tend to pronounce the original word in English as adapted when borrowed into Yoruba language.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the discussion so far, it would be observed that English and Yoruba morphological systems have both similarities and differences. While the similarities facilitate the learning of English by a Yoruba learner, the differences constitute major sources of errors in English. It is in view of this that it is being recommended here that English language teachers in a second language situation like Nigeria should endeavour to undertake contrastive analysis of the mother tongue of the learners and the target language

If a language teacher engages in contrastive study of language as done above, he will be in a good stead to evaluate the language and culture contents of textbooks. It will afford him an opportunity to prepare new language teaching materials and diverse language testing techniques. It will also facilitate a cultural understanding of certain underlying factors that predisposes students to some deficiencies in target language competence.

## CONCLUSION

This paper attempted a contrastive study of Yoruba and English languages. It establishes the preeminent position of English language in Nigeria's linguistic firmament and posits that an average Nigerian needs to learn and acquire proficiency in the use of English if he is to adequately fulfill his roles in the society. It agrees with earlier scholars who have asserted that most errors observed in English language use of most bilinguals are traceable to their first language and thus examines the similarities and differences in the morphological systems of English and Yoruba. This was done with a view to understand how differences in the systems predisposes learners of English to committing errors in the target language.

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