

CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE IZZI DIALECT OF THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT: *This exploration is a contrastive assessment of the sound systems of the English language and the Izzì dialect of the Igbo language. It highlights areas of similarities and differences of the two tongues in order to predict the difficulties that Izzì speakers of the English language would experience in the study of the English Language as a second language. This inquiry therefore, concentrates on the similarities and differences found at the segmental level of both languages. The Primary, Secondary and the cannons of Contrastive Analysis are employed in the course of this investigation, and this survey reveals that some sounds in the English Language such as /ʌ/:/and /ɔ̃/ are absent in the sound system of Izzì dialect, and recommends that Izzì speakers of the English Language should make keen efforts to master the correct pronunciation of the English sounds in order to make themselves intelligible to other users of the English Language.*

KEYWORDS: Contrastive Analysis, Izzì Dialect, English Language, Segmental Sounds

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition and language learning are two concepts in applied linguistics that are closely related; yet different in many ways. Language acquisition has to do with learning a first language usually at a very early stage in an individual's life. Language learning, on the other hand, deals with learning a second, third, or even a fourth language at a later stage in life. Language learning involves a conscious effort in learning an additional language while language acquisition is done through a natural and effortless process. Children naturally acquire the language of their speech communities as they become conscious of their surroundings and interact with adults around them. At this stage, they are highly motivated and surrounded by a conducive linguistic environment. When they are grown and begin to attend school or mingle with people from other speech communities or other cultures there arise the need to learn a new language that will give them access to the world. In this case, an individual has the two languages (the mother tongue and the second language) at his disposal to use in different situations to solve real life problems. For instance, in Ebonyi State, the majority of the citizens have complete mastery of at least two distinct speech forms – the local speech of the community and another speech forms (like the English Language) for wider communication. Complete mastery of the second language, however, is often difficult for most people to achieve especially where a prestigious speech form is involved. Errors occur and are most noticeable in the pronunciation of the second language.

The Behaviourists believe that the first language is to blame since habits of the second language are affected by habits transferred from the first language. This study focuses on a systematic comparison of the phonological systems of the English and the Izzì dialect of the Igbo language

in a bid to find out the differences and similarities. Further, this will enable the researcher to predict the difficulties that could lead to errors in the speech of Izzi speakers of English as a second language.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Second language learning in Nigeria

With the adoption of the English Language as the official language of Nigeria, it became the language of government, commerce, education, mass media, law etc. It, thus, behooves on Nigerians to learn and use the English language effectively if they want to remain relevant in the society. Subsequently, the English language began to dwell alongside our native language and led to widespread bilingualism in Nigeria. In most cases, therefore, Nigerians are either bilingual or multilingual and the knowledge of their first languages generally interferes with their usage of the English language. So, in the speech of Nigerian speakers of the English Language, one can make out errors especially in the pronunciation. The mastery of a second language is almost impossible. Sometimes the accent is so thick that it sounds like a different language altogether. This is as a result of several reasons of which the most common is interference.

Interference is identified in regional variations and is most observed in the phonology and lexis of the second language. Onike (2009) asserts that interference is a psycholinguistics concept which is a reality in language learning. Idowu (1999) observes that certain pronunciation patterns are identified with members of an ethnic group and when all the markers of the group's accent are present in a particular speaker, it gives him away as belonging to that ethnic group by birth, upbringing or both. Thus, it is relatively easy to identify an Izzi speaker of English simply by listening to him speak English. In addition, Bhela (1999) opines that in as much as the second language learning environment encompasses everything the language learners hears and sees in the new language; the learner-goal is mastery of the target language. In other words, before a learner gains complete mastery of the target language, his usage of the second language (L₂) is greatly influenced by his first language (L₁). Bhela (1999) further comments that L₁ interference in speech or writing of a second language is a lifelong experience which needs continuous attention even till adulthood.

From the forgoing, phonological errors in the second language exist as a result of interference which results from the fact that sound systems of the source and target languages are not completely identical. Many speech sounds in the English sound system are absent in the sound systems of native Nigerian languages. As a result, Nigerians (especially the uneducated) fill in with elements of sound from their dialects as seen in the speech of Hausa accented Haruna in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006). Haruna therefore, replaced the consonant /f/, which is lacking in the Hausa ontology with /p/ present in the Language.

He told us that our **Patter** was the best Big man he had ever had. Did we know our **patter faid** his children's school **pees**? Did we know our **patter** had helped his **wipe** get the messenger job at the local government **oppice**? We were lucky to have such a **patter**.

FOR

He told us that our **father** was the beat rich man he had ever had. Did we know our **father paid** his children's school **fees**? Did we know our **father** had helped his **wife** get the messenger job at the local government **office**? We were lucky to have such a **father**.

As Bamgbose (1971) rightly observes, most of the characteristics in the English spoken by Nigerian can be traced back to the transferred features from their local languages. Hence, this study is set to examine the phonological differences observable among speakers of the English language from extract of Igbo land. This study will be of great significance to teachers of English in schools within Izzi land as they will understand the influence of L1 on English studies especially as it affects Izzi learners of the English Language. The study will be a reference material for teachers and learners of the English Language in Izzi land will help them to adjust their approaches in teaching and learning the correct pronunciations.

Theoretical Framework (Contrastive Analysis) (CA)

This study is anchored on the theory of contrastive linguistics. Right from early stage, a native speaker of a language acquires his or her language from the time he or she is able to produce some sounds of his or her language. The child begins with a strong motivation to learn his mother tongue out of desire to communicate effectively with the people within his immediate environment. As a result of his inherent ability to mimic, which is a positive factor in language acquisition, he makes a steady progress in his bid to master his mother tongue. This indicates that "Children do not need explicit instructions to learn their first language but they seem to "just pick the language up" in the same way they learn to rollover, crawl and walk" (Kosur, 2012). So, first languages in children just seem to happen because they have innate ability to acquire language Chomsky (1959). Therefore, first language acquisition occurs unconsciously through implicit learning.

The learning of the second language (L2) is a different scenario. The learner learns the second language in a non-natural setting and manner, which is quite different from the natural way in which a mother tongue is acquired. He faces a lot of impediments as he tries to achieve some proficiency in the language. Prominent among these obstacles is the variance between his native language and the target language. This is the greatest bane of his linguistic life so to say. This happens because by the time he begins to learn the second language; the habits of the first language have already been entrenched in his mind as part of his behaviour. Consequently, the interference of the system of the mother tongue and that of the second language becomes inevitable. So, the learner meets with a lot of learning problems dealing with the sound system, vocabulary, structures and the like. The difficulty in the second language learning attracted the interest of scholars, teachers, linguists, psychologists and so on to attempt to predict the causes of the learning difficulties and possibly proffer solutions to them. The activities of these specialists are of great importance to course designers, language teachers, textbook writers and ultimately the language learners. In order to arrest the second language teaching and learning problems, these language specialists proposed three operational and effective tools:

- Contrastive Analysis(CA)
- Error Analysis(EA)
- Inter-language theory

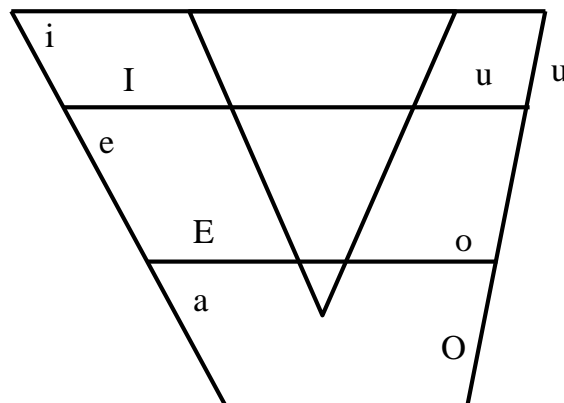
One of the popular approaches advocated by some specialists in language studies for tackling this language teaching and learning problems is the use of contrastive analysis (CA). Contrastive Analysis is also known as contrastive linguistics (CL). It is based on the assumptions of behaviorism that second language learners or users encounter difficulties, which results from the structural differences between their native and the target languages. So, if second language acquisition is disturbed by the habits of your native language, it is advisable to focus on the two languages. Thus, the CA analyst takes the two languages, makes a structural scrutiny of the two languages in order to point out the similarities and differences. From here, a guess of possible difficulties for the second language learners or users are subsequently made. Contrastive Analysis therefore, is the study of two languages with the aim of pointing out their structural differences and similarities for scholarly use. CA was put together in Lado's (1957) *Linguistics Across Culture* where he notes that structures that are akin to the learner's first language structures will be easy to learn while those that are complicated will be difficult to learn. CA therefore, is the study and comparison of two languages, learner's native language (L1) and learner's target language (L2). The similarities in the two languages will facilitate learning of the second language while the differences will impede or hinder the learning of the target language. Thus, this study intends to study the segmental differences and similarities of the Izzi dialect of the Igbo language and that of the English Language to see how the Izzi learner of the English Language would learn and use the English Language with ease.

METHODOLOGY

The sound system of any language is made of two broad components-the segmental and the suprasegmental levels. A comprehensive analysis should study both components but the scope of this study is delimited to the segmental features to allow for an in-depth study. Further, the study will concentrate on English spoken by young learners of English from Izzi extract since older speakers have more experience and might be more conscious of their errors. Both primary and secondary sources of data are used. The investigation presents consonant and vowel charts of the Izzi dialect of the Igbo language. Also, everyday conversation among young Izzi speakers of English will be recorded, transcribed and analyzed to find their realizations of English sounds. Only the sound system of the Izzi dialect will be presented but discussion will focus on both systems under study. It is necessary to present both the consonant and vowel charts of Izzi dialect of the Igbo language because many people may not be familiar with them as extensive studies have not been carried out in that area. The sound system of English, on the other hand abounds and can be referred to.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSIONS**Table 1. Izzi Dialect Consonant Chart**

Manner of Articulation	Sound	Place Articulation
Stop or Plossive	p b t d k g kp gb	Bilabial Alveolar Velar Uvular
Nasal	m n	Bilabial Alveolar
Fricative	I v s z w	Labio-dental\ Alveolar Palatal
Affricate	ʧ dʒ ts kw h	Palate-alveolar Postal velar Palatal glottal
Lateral	L	Alveolar
Roll	r rw	Alveolar Labialized

Figure 1. Izzi Dialect Vowel Chart

From the foregoing, there are similarities and differences found among the sound units in both systems. The consonant sounds /p, b, d, t, k, g, v, ʧ, dʒ, l, w, h, s and z/ and the vowel sounds /I, e, u, ə, and a/ are similar. However, more attention will be given to the area of difference. The charts reveal that the English central vowels -/ʌ/, /ɜ:/ and /ə/ - are completely absent in Izzi dialect. Thus, every Izzi speaker of the English Language would have difficulty in pronouncing the three English central vowels. Izzi speakers of English would substitute the English sounds - /ʌ/ and /ɜ:/ - with /a, e and o/

Examples:

/ʌ/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Hut	/hʌt/	[hot]
Cluster	/klʌstə/	[klostə]
Love	/lʌv/	[lov]

/ɜ:/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Burn	/bɜ:n/	[bon]
Work	/wɜ:k/	[wok]
Dirt	/dɜ:t/	[det]
Bird	/bɜ:d/	[bed]

/ə/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Father	/fæðə/	[fada]
Cluster	/klʌstə/	[klostə]
Doctor	/dɒktə/	[dɒk ^u to]

Vowel Length Distinction

Izzi vowel chart shows no sign of length distinction; there are no long vowels in Izzi as in English. As a result, Izzi speakers of English are bound to encounter difficulties in the pronunciation of English words with long vowels. Among these vowel sounds are

/i:/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Deep	/di:p/	[dip]
Sleep	/sli:p/	[slip]
Belief	/bili:v/	[biliv]
Sheep	/ʃi:p/	[ʃip]

/a:/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Farm	/fa:m/	[fam]
Pass	/pa:s/	[pas]
Card	/ka:d/	[kad]
Palm	/pa:m/	[pam]

Diphthongs

Diphthongs do not exist in Izzi vowel system. This accounts for why Izzi speakers of English have difficulties with the English diphthongs such as /ei/ai/oi/. Instead, these diphthongs are reduced to single sound units as shown below:

Word	English	Izzi realization
Game	/geim/	[gem]
Date	/dit/	[det]
Mate	/meit/	[met]

Izzi speakers of English also reduce the diphthongs /ou/ to [o] as seen below:

Word	English	Izzi realization
Vote	/vəut/	[vot]
Motor	/məutə/	[moto]
Boat	/bəut/	[bot]
So	/səu/	[so]
Go	/gəu/	[go]

Consonants

Some similarities as well as differences can be traced between English and Izzi consonants.

Departure

From the Izzi consonant chart shown above, it can be seen that Izzi dialect has the following consonants, which do not exist in English /kw/gw/kp/gb/. Also English consonant system has three sounds that are not found in Izzi. These are the voiced palatoalveolar fricative sound /ʒ/, and the dental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/. Izzi speakers of English find these sounds extremely difficult to pronounce. Hence, they replace them with similar sounds in their L₁.

/ʒ/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Leisure	/leiʒə/	[leʃo]
Seizure	/si:ʒə/	[siʃo]
Vision	/viʒən/	[viʃən]
Measure	/meʒə/	[meʃo]

/θ/:

Word	English	Izzi realization
Faith	/feiθ/	[fet]
Earth	/ʒ:θ/	[et]
Bath	/baθ/	[bat]
Think	/θink/	[tink]

/ð/

Word	English	Izzi realization
Father	/fæðə/	[fada]
Those	/ðəuz/	[dos]
Then	/ðen/	[den]
Worthy	/wɜ:ði/	[wodi]

CONCLUSION

This study compared the sound systems of the English Language and the Izzi dialect of the Igbo language and found out that while there are areas of similarities there are as well areas of difference, which could pose problems for the Izzi speaker of the English Language. The vowels /i, e, u, ə, and a/ are similar in both systems while the difference include a complete absence of long vowels and diphthongs in the system of Izzi dialect. Similarities in consonant sounds of both systems are sounds like /p, b, d, t, g, v, ʃ, dʒ, l, w, h, s, and z/. However, some sounds, such as the dental fricatives /θ and ð/ and voiced palateo-alveolar fricative sound /ʒ/, which exist in the English sound system is nonexistent in the Izzi dialect system. Also, the English nasal velar sound /ŋ/ is absent in the Izzi dialect system. In addition, the Izzi consonant sounds /kw/ /gw/ /kp/ and /gb/ are absent in the English sound system. This could lead to the complications encountered by the Izzi learners of the English Language in the study of the English Language.

Recommendations/Further Research

Based on the findings of the inquiry, it is recommended that Izzi speakers of the English Language should make a conscious effort to master the correct pronunciation of the English sounds in order to make themselves intelligible to other users of the English Language since English has come to stay in Nigeria. This will be easy since the areas of difficulties have been exposed and the possible problems to be expected have been predicted.

Further Research

A similar study should be carried out to determine the similarities and/ or differences found at the suprasegmental level of the English Language and Izzi Dialect of the Igbo Language. This follow up study will go a long way in promoting the teaching, learning and speaking of the English Language among Izzi speakers of the English Language.

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