

**Influence of Mother-Tongue On English Language Use Selected Mother-Tongue Factors Affecting English Language Usage, A Case Study of Ikom Local Government Area**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Over the years, English Language has been accorded a very high prestige in Nigeria. The status and functions given to English in Nigeria has made it become imperative for every Nigerian citizen to learn how to speak, read and write the language. This is as a result of the pluralistic linguistic situation of Nigeria which has made it impossible for national language. This accounts for why English has been allotted prestigious domains of use in Nigeria. This study was undertaken to investigate and shed more light on the effect that mother-tongue influence has on spoken English in Nigeria. The focus of this study is on selected mother-tongue factors affecting English language in Nigeria. In order to manipulate variables properly to achieve tenable results, this study will focus on the phonetic and phonological levels of mother-tongue interference. 150 Ikom learners/users of English were sampled from SSS3 students selected from three secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross-River State, where Ikom is their native language. Tape recorders and smart recorders were instruments of data collection alongside (phonetic) articulation tests. The technique employed in the analysis of data was descriptive and quantitative. The sources of data were relevant textbooks, magazines, journals, libraries (online and offline) and the internet. The findings revealed that, the mother-tongue of Ikom learners/and users of English negatively influences their spoken English, significantly in their articulation of English consonants, vowels and consonant clusters; and suprasegmentals such as stress and intonation.*

**KEYWORDS:** mother-tongue, English language, mother-tongue factors, English language usage, Ikom local government area

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The research is on the need to unmask the negative influence that mother-tongue influences poses to Nigerian speakers of the English Language at the phonetic levels using Ikom learners of the English Language as a case study. Carrol (1964) is of the opinion that the circumstances of learning a second language are like those of the mother-tongue and that sometimes, there are interferences and occasional responses from one language system that intrudes into the other language. When there are similar units of language structure in both language, linguistic interference can result in correct language production which is termed positive transfer; correct meaning in line with most Speakers notions of acceptability.

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Eha (1992) adds that in terms of structural influences, every individual native language/mother tongue does have an effect, this effect is however not always negative, it can be positive as well. Negative transfer occurs when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages. Studies by earlier scholars have shown that the more similar both languages are, and the more the learner is aware of the relation between them, the more likely positive transfer will occur. The place and position of English language in Nigeria is incontestable and highly significant. In addition to being a second language in all part of the country, it is the language for almost all official communication, both written and spoken.

It is also the language of Education in secondary and tertiary institution. The researcher was preoccupied with revealing explicitly how and why speakers/users of English in Ikom tend to resort to the phonetic features of their language to replace the difficulties in English. Variables such as age, gender, educational level and culture were manipulated accordingly so as to achieve realistic outcomes. Contrastive analysis in a study such as this is indispensable. This is because the similarities and differences between the source and target language are always of great importance when carrying out any analysis that involves mother-tongue interferences. Received Pronunciation (RP), the standard dialect of English, is going to be the anchor point for all error and contractive analysis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

English is the main lingua franca of the global community; little wonder therefore that the average Nigerian strives to not just speak it, but speak it with an appreciable measure of skill. Given also the plurality of Ikom languages in Nigeria and the inability of the Nigerian Government to adopt any one overall others as the official language of nations, English has been accepted by the majority to fit into this very important role. It is safe to say that majority of the Ikom people who necessarily have to use the English language everyday, already have their native language as their mother tongue or first language. English is a second language for them and therefore it will inevitably pose challenges to them. Usually lexical items in Ikom language do not permit consonant clusters; English lexical items permit up to five consonants in a cluster. The English lexical item, school, for instance is realized as /skul/ by the English and /sukul/ by the Ikom people because of their native intolerance or consonant clusters. In syllabic consonants such as /tl/ in the word “little” transcribed as “Litl”, most Ikom English learners/users would insert a schwa /ə/ or short, back, rounded vowel /ɒ/ into the consonant cluster /tl/. This would sound like /litol/ or /litol/. This normally occurs because the syllabic consonant /tl/ is not found in the sound inventory of Ikom language. There’s also a replacement of the phonetic sound known as schwa /ə/ with a short, front, unrounded vowel /æ/ or with the using diphthong /ei/ in the initial position of the word ‘around’ which is realized as /əround/; but an Ikom speaker of English would pronounce it as either /eibout/ or as /a:bout/. The reason is that, schwa being a short-rounded vowel not found in the Ikom sound system, has to be replaced with another vowel or vowels that is present in the Ikom sound system. It is therefore the focus of this paper to study the influence or phonetic factors on an Ikom speaker of the English Language.

### Objectives of the Study

- a. To find out the kind of influence that mother-tongue has on spoken English in Nigeria.
- b. To use Ikom Language as one part that represents the whole to identify select mother-tongue factors and how they influence spoken English in Nigeria.
- c. To discover how phonetic features of Ikom language intrude upon spoken English in Ikom Local Government Area.
- d. To carry out a contrastive analysis between English and Ikom Language.

### Statement of hypothesis

Mother-tongue interference at the phonetic and phonological level will negatively influence spoken English in Ikom Local Government Area.

### Research Questions

Does the transfer of phonetic features from Ikom Language negatively influence spoken English in Ikom Local Government Area?

Does the transfer of phonological factors from Ikom language negatively influence Spoken English in Ikom Local Government Area?

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWOK

Previous works done in this subject area are going to be reviewed under this section alongside the theories that this study is hinged on.

### Conceptual framework

A Conceptual framework stirs the whole research activity. It represents the researcher s synthesis of literature on how to explain a phenomenon. It identifies the variables required in the research investigation. It is the researcher's map in pursuing the investigation. Certain concepts relevant to this study will be discussed alongside previous works done on them.

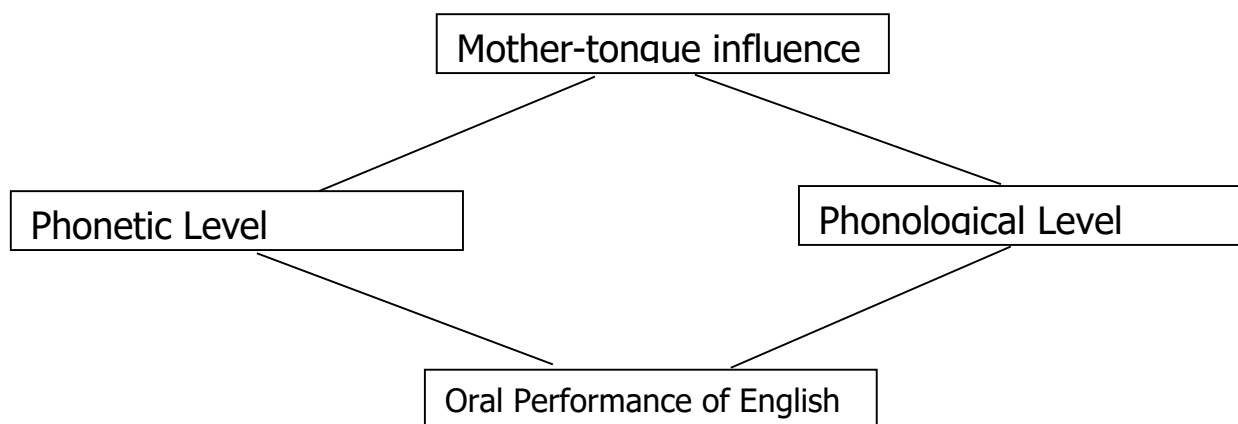


Fig 2.1

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In Figure 2.1.1 above, the relationship between variables are explicitly shown. Mother-tongue influence at the phonetic level and mother-tongue at the phonological levels are independent variables. Students' oral performance of English is the dependent variable. In this study the effect that each of the independent variables has on the dependent variable will be measured.

### **The concept of mother-tongue interference**

Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. According to Wikipedia, Mother-tongue interference is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that occurs as a result of language contact. It can also be known as linguistic interference, language transfer, crosslinguistic influence and L1 interference. This occurs when the features of one language tend to show up in the other language. It refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching but it can occur in a situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language.

Skiba (1997) sees interference as the instances of deviation from the norm of either language which occur in speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. It involves moving the elements of a speaker's native language and equating them with those of the foreign language that is being learnt. The term transfer in language learning is defined by Odlin (1989) as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired, Ellis (2001) refers to inferences as the influence that a learner's LI exerts over the acquisition of an L2. He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable in L2 learning. According to Wardhaugh (1970), transfer is a tool used to account for or explain the errors which actually occur. He further argues that transfer is the basis for predicting which patterns in the second language (L2) will be learnt more readily which one will prove more troublesome. Transfer is a psychological term that is used to describe a situation where one learned event influences the learning of a subsequent event. The influence, in this case may be positive or negative. Positive transfer occurs when terms in the first language are similar to those of the second language. Here the learner acquires the second language faster and with ease. Negative transfer, on the other hand, occurs when items and structure of the L1 and L2 are not similar. This implies that the more the differences that exist between the L1 and L2, the more the negative transfer. Elnaem (2012) avers that interference can be conscious or unconscious. In the former, speakers may guess when producing speech or text in the target language because they have not learned or have forgotten its proper usage. In the latter, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the two languages are different.

According to Words Worth English Language Lab, the evidence of mother tongue influence on English is very obvious. This manifests in the form of incorrect pronunciation. Pronunciation error may be due to many issues. Guesswork or vagueness of the correct form of a word or sentence, or a general ineptness of the language could be the reason of mispronunciation. The most common reason is transfer or interference from the mother tongue. Generally, errors made in pronunciation are due to difference in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and

English. Added to this is the challenge of the fossilized sound system of the mother tongue of the learners that inhibits the acquisition of the pronunciation and sound system of the second language. It is understood that if the second language is introduced to the learners before puberty, the chances of attaining a nation-like pronunciation skill is easier.

According to Sriprahba (2015), every language affects English differently, so we can't simply list out all the common mistakes if one starts learning a local language, one will find oneself understanding mother tongue influence a lot more, and one will be able to correct it far more easily. As mentioned earlier different languages affect English learning in a different way. For some, sentence word order can be a problem for others, sound articulation and placement of primary stress can be a difficult task.

### **Types of interference in language acquisition**

According to Hoffman (1991), there are four major types of interference of the mother-tongue in English Language acquisition:

- i. Interference at the phonological level
- ii. Interference at the lexical level
- iii. Interference at the grammatical level
- iv. Interference in spelling

In the above classification by Hoffman, phonemic interference is subsumed in the interference at the phonological level.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (2005: 39), "phonemic interference is predominant and is brought about because of the differences between the sound pattern of the mother-tongue and that of the target language"

According to Okpara (2001), there are generally two types of interference: proactive and retroactive. Proactive interference is an interference phenomenon that helps in the acquisition of the target language (TL). For instance sounds /b/, /t/, /d/ which occur in most Nigerian languages help in the acquisition of similar sounds in the English phonetic system. Retroactive interference is the one that retards the process of acquisition of the target language. For instance, the absence of the phoneme 'schwa' /ə/ language hinders its acquisition by an Ikom learner/user of English. In a nutshell, Okpara's proactive and retroactive interference refer to the positive and negative language transfer respectively which has already been discussed in the previous section.

### **Tone and intonation**

Tone is a phenomenon of pitch which has received much attention (Pike, 1948), Clements (2000). According to Ladefoged (1993), tone is the distinctive pitch level of a syllable. According to Beckman & Venditti (2010), the terms 'tone and intonation' refer to patterned variation in voiced source pitch that serves to contrast and to organize words and larger utterances. However, the terms are differentiated in typical usage by applying them to different aspects of these linguistic uses of speech. Pitch is defined as the relative height of speech sounds as perceived by a listener and is

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what we are hearing when we refer to a voice being 'high' and 'low', in speech, is the relative highness or lowness of a tone as perceived by the ear, which depends on the number of vibrations per second produced by the vocal cords. Pitch is the main acoustic correlate of tone and intonation (Britannica.com) the varying Pitch levels throughout an utterance form what we hear as intonation: the "falling" and "rising" of the voice (Cruttenden, 1986). The term intonation refers to a means for conveying information in speech which is independent of the words and their sounds. Central to intonation is the modulation of pitch, and intonation is often thought of as the use of pitch over the domain of the utterance (Nolan, 2002). Dictionary.Com defines intonation as the pattern or melody of pitch changes in connected speech especially the pitch pattern of a sentence, which distinguishes kinds of sentences or speakers of different culture.

From the foregoing, it can be established that though tone and intonation have one thing in common "pitch", tone is used to distinguish words while intonation is used to distinguish sentences. English is an intonational (stress timed) language while Nigerian indigenous languages are tonal (syllable timed) languages of which Ikom language is not an exception. According to Urua (2004), tone is an important element in African and Asian languages and it is a well known fact that tone in African languages is used to make lexical and grammatical distinctions.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study will be hinged on two relevant approaches: Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis.

#### **Error Analysis (EA)**

According to Crystal (1995), errors are likely to emerge when learners make the wrong deductions about the nature of the L2. such as assuming that a pattern is general, when in fact there are exceptions.

According to Wikipedia, error analysts distinguish between errors that are systematic and the ones that are not; they often seek to develop a typology of errors. Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself. According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), errors reveal the pattern of learners' developing interlanguage systems, showing where they have overgeneralized a second language rule or where they have inappropriately transferred a first language rule to a second language. They also stated that, many errors which learners do make are not predictable on the basis of contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. For example, adult beginners use simple structures in the target language just as children do.

Glottopedia.org defines error analysis as a branch of applied linguistics. It is concerned with the compilation, study and analysis of errors made by second language learners', and aims at investigating aspects of second language acquisition. Error Analysis was first used as a way of studying second language acquisition in the 1960s. Corder's seminal paper "The Significance of Learners' Errors" (1967) had attention from the teaching perspective to the learning shifted researchers perspective: and therefore also from contrastive analysis, behaviorism and structuralism towards cognitive psychology. The primary aims of error analysis were:



- i. To identify types and patterns of errors
- ii. To establish error taxonomies.

These were supposed to be used to describe interlanguage and its development, i.e. the learner's internal syllabus. Common difficulties in second language is on were to be identified. On this basis. error analysis was supposed to contribute to a comprehensive knowledge about processes of second language acquisition, always assuming with Chomsky that there is something like a language acquisition device. Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated once and for all but Corder presented a completely different point of view. He argued that those errors are important in and of themselves. In Corder (1974), he averred that.

### **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)**

Contrastive analysis hypothesis is an area of comparative linguistic concerned which is concerned with the comparison of two or more language to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes externa to the analysis itself. According to Wikipedia, contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. The theoretical foundations for what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis were formulated in Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures*(1957)". The main idea propounded by Lado in this book was that, it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language by systematically comparing the two languages and cultures. Where the two languages and cultures are similar, learning difficulties will not be expected, but where they are different, then learning difficulties are to be expected; and the greater the difference, the greater the degree of expected difficulty. While it was not a novel suggestion, Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages.

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), contrastive analysis, discussed above, sought to predict all learner errors based on language transfer. Transfer is an important factor in factor in language learning at all levels. Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) 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. According to the behaviorist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. In its strongest formulation, the contrastive analysis hypothesis claimed that all the errors made in learning the L2 could be attributed to interference by the LI. However, this claim could not be sustained by empirical evidence that was accumulated in the mid and late 19/US. it was soon pointed out that many errors predicted by contrastive Analysis were inexplicably not observed in learners language. Even more confusingly, some uniform errors were made by learners irrespective of their LI. It thus became clear that contrastive analysis could not predict all learning difficulties, but was certainly useful in the retrospective explanation of errors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

According to De Vaus, D. A. (2001), a research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. The research problem determines the types of design the researcher should use. A quantitative research design was adopted in this study. The reason is that, the issue of mother-tongue is a general problem for almost all learners of English as a second language in Nigeria. It should be noted that every quantitative research design is hinged on a hypothesis. Most importantly, the results obtained from a quantitative research are always generalized to the population of the study. Tables and figures will be used in this study to present data (collected) in a statistical form. It is going to be an inferential statistical design. Inferential statistics are used in making inferences about the entire population from the findings of a sample (Aboh & Obidigbo, 1998).

### **Sampling techniques**

Simple random sampling was employed on the population of the study. This type of sampling is also known as chance sampling or probability sampling where each and every item in the population has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample. Considering the fact that mother-tongue influence is a general problem that is not age-sensitive neither gender-sensitive, there was no need to stratify the population.

### **Sampling studies**

Data for this study were collected from three secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State. A total of 120 Ikom-English bilingual students were sampled from the population. Forty (40) senior secondary three (SS3) students were selected from each secondary school.

The list of schools is presented below;

- i. Government Secondary School, Ikom
- ii. Holy Child Secondary School, Ikom
- iii. St. Patrick's Secondary School, Ikom

### **Population of the study**

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects, that is the main focus of a scientific query. All individuals or objects within a certain population usually have a common, binding characteristic or trait. Examples are pupils, students, teachers, etc.

The population of this study was comprised of Senior Secondary students in three secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State. The population was made up of 1,200 SS3 students.



### **Sources of data**

- i. Dissertations and theses
- ii. Relevant textbooks
- iii. Journals and periodicals
- iv. Encyclopedia
- v. Internet
- vi. Conversation with students from target schools

### **Instrument of data collection**

Below are the instruments put into use in order to collect tenable data for the research work:

- i. Tape recording and smart phone recording.
- ii. Students were tested in Oral English proficiency in order to find out the errors in spoken English that are caused by mother-tongue influence.

### **Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted with the aim of determining the reliability and the validity of the instrument to be used for data collection. During the sampling process, the researcher made sure that each of the students from the selected 120 is a native speaker of Ikom language. Those with speech impairment problems such as Tourette's syndrome, cleft palate, and lisping issues were disqualified in order to get a reliable sample from the population. Four SS3 students were selected from each of the aforementioned schools and a mock in Oral English proficiency was given to them. Their responses were recorded with tape recorders and smart phones accordingly. This enabled the researcher to know whether the instrument would be reliable for data collection.

### **Reliability of the instrument**

The instrument of data collection were examined meticulously and properly tested for clarity of voices and sounds. The results from the mock tests were analyzed in order to verify whether the error observed were caused by mother-tongue influence or not. The reliability estimate was 0.56-0.76

### **Validity of the instrument**

This study is focused on spoken English in Nigeria, as such the focus is on speech as against writing, therefore, smart phone recording and tape recording are appropriate tools. Test in Oral English proficiency is very fitting for phonetic and phonological analysis compared to speech writing, letter writing and essay writing which are all outside the domain of spoken English.

### **Method of data analysis**

The researcher found frequency and percentage distributions fitting for the presentation and analysis of data. Since frequency and percentage distributions have to do with organized tabulation of numbers that represent individuals or scores, they are very relevant to this study. The analysis of data was done accordingly under the following subheadings consonants, vowels, stress and intonation, and consonant clusters.

**DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS****Data Presentation**

The tables below are going to be used for the analysis of data collected from the three selected secondary schools.

**Table 4.1.1 Sound(consonants) articulation test (results) for SS3 students**

Consonant sounds in English	Number of students observed with correct articulation	Number of students observed with wrong articulation	Percentage of correct articulation	Percentage of wrong articulation
/p/	80	40	66.7%	33.3%
/b/	100	20	83.3%	16.7%
/t/	100	20	83.3%	16.7%
/d/	90	30	75%	25%
/k/	120	0	100%	0%
/g/	50	70	41.7%	58.3%
/f/	108	12	90%	10%
/v/	18	102	15%	85%
/s/	114	6	95%	5%
/z/	60	60	50%	50%
/θ /	12	108	10%	90%
/ð /	18	102	15%	85%
/ʃ /	108	12	90%	10%
/ʒ /	21	99	17.5%	82.5%
/h /	114	6	95%	5%
/tʃ /	30	90	25%	75%
/dʒ /	120	0	100%	0%
/m/	120	0	100%	0%
/n/	114	6	95%	5%
/ŋ/	90	30	75%	25%
/w/	90	30	75%	25%
/j/	100	20	83%	16.7%
/r/	95	25	79.1%	20.9%
/l/	90	30	75%	25%

**Table 4.1.2 Sound (vowel) articulation test (result) SS3 students**

Vowel sounds in English	Number of students observed with correct articulation	Number of students observed with wrong articulation	Percentage of correct articulation	Percentage of wrong articulation
/i:/	30	90	25%	75%
/l/	78	42	65%	35%
/e/	108	12	90%	10%
/æ/	35	85	29.1%	70.9%
/a:/	42	78	35%	65%
/D/	90	30	75%	25%
/ɔ:/	72	48	60%	40%
/ʊ/	90	30	75%	25%
/o:/	84	36	70%	30%
/ʌ/	6	114	5%	95%
/ɜ:/	30	90	25%	75%
/ə/	6	114	5%	95%
/ei/	60	60	50%	50%
/əʊ/	120	0	100%	0%
/ai/	120	0	100%	0%
/aʊ/	108	12	90%	10%
/ɔi/	120	0	100%	0%
/iə/	90	30	75%	25%
/ɛə/	24	96	20%	80%
/ʊə/	44	76	36.7%	63.3%
/aʊə/	6	114	5%	95%
/aiə/	12	108	10%	90%
/ɔiə/	6	114	5%	95%
/eiə/	6	114	5%	95%
/əʊə/	12	108	10%	90%

**Table 4.1.3 Table (result) for the placement of stress in English words**

English words	Number of students observed with correct articulation	Number of students observed with wrong articulation	Percentage of correct articulation	Percentage of wrong articulation
Fertilizer	12	108	10%	90%
Festivity	30	90	25%	75%
Curriculum	24	96	20%	80%
Geographical	30	90	25%	75%
Complication	36	84	30%	70%
Complementary	20	100	16.7%	83.3%
Excuse (verb)	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Refuse (verb)	42	78	35%	65%
Expansive	30	90	25%	75%
Enterprise	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Economic	25	95	20.9%	79.1%
Television	45	75	37.5%	62.5%
Institute	30	90	25%	75%
Emphasis	24	96	20%	80%
Menace	35	85	29.1%	70.9%
Independence	42	78	35%	65%
Consistent	30	90	25%	75%
Inconsistent	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Nationalism	20	100	16.7%	83.3%

**Table 4.1.4 Pronunciation test (result) for SS3 students consonant cluster of English**

English words with consonant cluster	Number of students observed with correct articulation	Number of students observed with wrong articulation	Percentage of correct articulation	Percentage of wrong articulation
Scape	42	78	35%	65%
Scratch	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Screech	50	70	41.7%	58.3%
Spread	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Thread	30	90	25%	75%
Three	30	90	25%	75%
Scrunch	20	100	16.7%	83.3%
Shrill	25	95	20.9%	79.1%
Task	35	85	29.1%	70.9%
Brisk	24	96	20%	80%
Pattern	12	108	10%	90%
Little	50	70	41.7%	58.3%
Brittle	45	75	37.5%	62.5%
Scruple	35	85	29.1%	70.9%
Glutton	6	114	5%	95%
Stretch	25	95	20.9%	79.1%
Strap	50	70	41.7%	58.3%
Strip	40	80	33.3%	66.7%
Splodge	25	95	20.9%	79.1%

### Data analysis and interpretation

The tables in 4.1 above represent the results of tests given to students to test their proficiency in Oral English. Each of the tables will be described and analyzed accordingly with very objective explanations. 40 students were selected from each of the three secondary schools, which summed the number up to 120.

Table 4.1.1: This table showcases explicitly, how English consonant sounds were articulated by Ikom learners (students) of English. It reveals a lot about the difficulties encountered by Ikom learners of English while trying to articulate certain English consonant phonemes. It also revealed their area of strength; that is the Consonants that did not pose any challenge to them and the ones that posed very little challenges.

The voiced and voiceless bilabial plosives /b/ and /p/ are not distinct phonemes in Ikom language as they are in English; rather the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ is an allophone of its voiced counterpart /b/; as such, the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ posed a little difficulty to Ikom learners/users of English when they occur at word final positions (though not significantly). In words such as 'deep' and 'clap' which are phonetically transcribed as /di:p/ and /klæp/ respectively, would be pronounced by an Ikom learner of English as /di:b/ and /klaɛb/ on account of /p/ occurring at the word final positions of the aforementioned words. This has never been the case when it occurs at a word initial position. The voiced bilabial plosive /b/ when it is silenced at a word final position, posed a challenge to Ikom learners of English. The sound /b/ is silenced in

word such as tomb, comb, and plumber which are transcribed as /tu:m/, /koum/, and /pinma/. A great number of Ikom learners of English pronounce these words with the phoneme /b/ significantly heard, owing to the fact that silencing or a phonetic sound during pronunciation is not known in Ikom language. The voiced and voiceless alveolar stops /d/ and /t/ did not pose great challenges to the Students as evidenced in table 4.1.1. It was observed that 83.5% of the students could articulate the phoneme /t/ correctly while only 16.7% could not. Exceptions were observed when the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ functions as an intervocalic consonant. In this case, not even one student was able to articulate the Sound correctly. This was because, they had not been taught the concept of lenition and debuccalization. The voiceless velar plosive did not pose a single challenge to Ikom learners of English. This is evident in table 4.1.1 where 100% of the students could articulate the sound correctly. This is because, the voiceless velar plosive /k/ occupies a central stage in the sound system of Ikom language. Its voiced counterpart does not enjoy the same advantage. In Ikom language, the voiced velar plosive /g/ is not a phoneme; it is an allophone of /k/, as such it presented difficulties to Ikom learners of English when it occurs at a word final position. This is evident in Table 4.1.1 where 58.3% of the students could not articulate the sound correctly. The voiceless labio-dental fricative did not pose a challenge to the students as evident in the aforementioned table. It was observed that 90% of the students were able to articulate the sound correctly, while only 10% could not. Its voiced counterpart posed a great challenge to them as evident in Table 4.1.1 where 85% of the student could not articulate the sound correctly. This was due to the fact that, the voiced labio-dental fricative is not found in the sound system of Ikom language.

The voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ did not pose a challenge to evident in the table. 95% of the students articulated the sound correctly while only 5% articulated it wrongly. The voiced alveolar fricative /z/ posed some challenges the students, especially when it occurs at a word final position. For example, words such as rose and wise transcribed as /rəʊz/ and /waɪz/ respectively, were pronounced by Ikom learners of English as /rəʊs/ and /waɪs/. The voiced and voiceless dental fricatives posed challenges to a large percentage of students as evident in the aforementioned table. For example words like "thought" would be pronounced by an Ikom learner of English as /to:t/ instead of /θo:t/, and words like "that" would be pronounced as /dæt instead of /ðæt/. The reason is that, the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ are not found in the sound inventory of Ikom language, as such the student had to resort to any sound in Ikom that closely relates in sound to English dental fricatives. The voiceless palato-alveola fricative (ʃ) did not present much difficulty. It was observed that over 90% of the students were able to articulate the sound correctly, but its voiced counterpart /ʒ/ posed a very serious challenge to the students as evidenced in the percentage (82.5%) of students who articulated the sound wrongly. For example, the word "usual" transcribed as /ju:ʒʊəl/ was pronounced by the students as /ju:ʃʊəl/, and the word "visual" transcribed as /viʒʊəl/ was pronounced by the students as /viʃʊəl/. The reason is that, /ʒ/ is not found in the sound inventory of Ikom language. The glottis /h/ did not present much difficulty except in words such as honour, honesty, etc where the aitch misled the students into believing that the glottis /h/ occurs in that environment. The voiced palato-alveolar any challenge as evidenced in the table, but its voiceless affricate /dʒ/ did not pose any challenge as evidenced in the table, but counterpart /tʃ/ did to a large extent. In most cases /tʃ/ was always replaced with /f/ words such as watch, catch,

chair, etc. the word watch" would be pronounced as the word "wash, "catch as the word "cash, and 'chair" as the word "sheer". The bilabial nasal /m/, alveolar nasal /n/ and velar nasal /ŋ/ did not pose challenges to the student as evidenced in the percentage of students that were able to articulate the sounds correctly. The bilabial and palatal approximants (/w/ and /j) presented no difficulty to the students. Only a few of them found it difficult to articulate these sounds, especially those who naturally strived to realize the bilabial approximant /w/ as /nw/ at the stem-initial position. The rounded liquid /r/ and the lateral liquid /l/ posed issues of interchangeability. This was noticed among those who talk faster. Table 4.1.2: This table contains the results from sound (English vowels) articulation tests for SS3 students selected from the three secondary schools mentioned in 3.3. This table reveals where the students performed well and where they had challenges. it unveils where interchangeability was an issue and why substitution had to be used.

as the last resort. When one looks closely at table 4. 1.2, one will observe that the short, high, front vowel /i/ posed a very little challenge to the students as evidenced in the table. Only 35% of the students found it very difficult to articulate the sound correctly. Its long counterpart /i:/ posed a very serious challenge to the students as seen in the table where 75% of the students could not articulate the sound correctly. The reason is that, they found it hard to distinguish between the short /i/ and the long /i:/ in their articulation, especially in connected speech. For example, the word "sheep" transcribed as /ʃi:p/ was pronounced as Ship /ʃip/ by a great majority of Students, The front, unrounded vowel /e/ aid hot present much problems. Only a few of them (10%) mistook the vowel sound for the diphthong /ei/. The short front vowel /æ/ and the long, back vowel /a:/ presented difficulties because in most cases, they are used interchangeably. This is always the case, when it involves words that are homonyms. For example, cat and cart, back and bark etc. the back, rounded vowel /ɑ/ did not present much difficulty though sometimes it would be accidentally interchanged with the central vowel sound /ʌ/. The central vowel /ʌ/ presented greater challenges Since it does not exist in the sound inventory of Ikom language. A great majority of the students substituted /D/ for /ʌ/ for their convenience. The short and long, back rounded vowels /ʊ/ and /u:/ did not pose a great difficulty for the students. This is evident in the aforementioned table. The percentage of students who could articulate these sounds correctly surpassed by far those who could not. Though a few of them had interchangeability issues with the two sounds. The central vowel sound /ɜ:/ posed challenges to 75% of the students. Words such as girl /gɜ:l/ and bird /bɜ:d/ were pronounced by Ikom learners of English as /gel/ and /bed/ respectively. The central vowel known as schwa /ə/ present a great difficulty to the student as evident in the table. Only 5% of the students managed to articulate the sound correctly. The reason is that, schwa /e/ is not found in the sound inventory of Ikom language; it is no wonder why it posed challenges to the students. For example. The Word "challenge" transcribed as /tʃæləndʒ/ was pronounced as /tʃæleindʒ/ by a great percentage of students in Ikom. Even the word "menace" transcribed as /menəs/ was pronounced as /menes/ by a large number of students. Diphthongs such as /əʊ/, /a:/, /ɔ:/ and /iə/ posed no challenge to the students as evident in table 4.1.2. There are nearly similar vowels in Ikom language that can be approximated to derive the aforementioned diphthongs. It was also observed that the glide /aʊ/ did not present much difficulty to the students as proven in the table where 90% of the student were able to articulate the sound correctly. The glide /ɛə/ posed a challenge as evident in the aforementioned table where 80% of the students were unable to



articulate the sound correctly. The reason was that, the glide /ɹə/ was mistaken for /iə/ in words like "bear" /bɛə(r)/ and "pear" /pɛə(r)/ mistakenly pronounced as /biə(r)/ and /piə(r)/ respectively. The five triphthongs in English which are /eɪə/, /aʊə/, /aɪə/, /əʊə/, and

/ɔɪə/ posed serious challenges to the students as evident in table 4.1.2. when one takes a closer look at the triphthongs, one will discover that the sound "schwa" is the sound that makes up a triphthong. It is the sound that is always articulated last during the articulation process. As earlier discussed, schwa was very problematic for the students, as such it is easy for one to surmise that, it would continue to be problematic to students wherever it occurs (whether in a diphthong or triphthong). 4.1.3: This table showcases the test results of SS3 students in Ikom, who were tested on "knowledge of primary stress. In table 4.1.3, the evidence that English primary stress pattern is a big challenge that Ikom learners/users of English face, is clearly provided. In English, every word must have a primary stress whereas in Ikom language such a rule does not exist. This accounts for the deviations in the use of English primary stress pattern noticed among the students (Ikom learners of English). The chief reason for this deviation is that, English is an international (stress timed) language while Ikom language is a tonal (syllable-timed) language. In a case like this, mother-tongue influence or language transfer is inevitable.

**Table 4.2.1.** The table below will give us a picture of the errors made by the students

English words	English Stress Pattern	Student's placement of primary stress
Fertilizer	FER-ti-li-zer	FER-TI-li-ZER
Festivity	fe-ST-vi-ty	FE-STI-VI-ty
Curriculum	cu-RRI-cu-lum	CU-rri-cu-lum
Geographical	geo-GRA-phi-cal	GEO-GRA-PHI-CAL
Complication	com-pli-CA-tion	COM-PLI-CA-TION
Complementary	com-ple-MEN-tary	COM-ple-men-tary
Excuse (verb)	ex-CUSE (verb)	EX-cuse(verb)
Refuse (verb)	re-FUSE (verb)	RE-FUSE (verb)
Expansive	ex-PAN-sive	EX-PAN-SIVE
Enterprise	EN-ter-prise	EN-TER-PRISE
Economic	e-co-NO-mic	E-CO-no-mic
Television	TE-le-vi-sion	TE-le-VI-SION
Institute	IN-sti-tute	in-STI-TUTE
Emphasis	EM-pha-sis	Em-PHA-SIS
Menace	ME-nace	me-NACE
Independence	in-de-PEN-dence	IN-de-PEN-dence
Consistent	Con-SIS-tent	CON-SIS-tent
Inconsistent	In-con-SIS-tent	IN-con-SIS-tent
Nationalism	NA-tio-nali-sm	NA-TIO-Na-LI-SM

As seen in table 4.2.I none of the students were able to place primary stress correctly, owing to the fact that English is international while Ikom is tonal. As observed in the table, every syllable in certain words were stressed by the students. This was an interference problem that was caused by their mother-tongue (Ikom language) The stress pattern or Ikom language interfered in the stress pattern of English thereby causing deviations in their oral production. Table 4. I.4: This table was used to showcase test results of SS3 students in the area of consonant cluster. As seen in the table, the percentage of students who were unable to pronounce the consonant clusters correctly was by far greater than those who could.

The errors made by the students are displayed in table 4.2.2 below

English words with consonant cluster	English phonetic realizations	Ikom learners (student) phonetic realization
Scape	/skreip/	/skoreip/
Scratch	/skrætʃ/	/skoræʃ/
Screech	/skri:tʃ/	/skori:tʃ/
Spread	/spred/	/spored/
Thread	/θred/	/tored/
Three	/θri/	/tiri/
Scrunch	/skrʌntʃ/	/skorDntʃ/
Shrill	/ʃrill/	/ʃoril/
Task	/ta:sk/	/tæks/
Brisk	/brisk/	/briks/
Pattern	/pætn/	/pætæn/
Little	/litl/	/litol/
Brittle	/britl/	/britol/
Scruple	/skru:pl/	/skoru:pol/
Glutton	/glʌtn/	/gloton/
Stretch	/stretʃ/	/storetʃ/
Strap	/stræp/	/stroæp/
Strip	/strip/	/storip/
Splodge	/splodʒ/	/spolodʒ/

From the above table (table 4.2.2), it is clearly shown that consonant clusters posed a serious challenge to the students. In clusters such as /skr/ in scrape, screech, scrunch scruple etc, the short, back, rounded vowel /ʊ/ was inserted in between /sk/ and /r/ by the students. This is a phonological process, known as epenthesis or insertion. The same was noticed in clusters such as /str/ and /spr/ strap and spread respectively. The students had no option but to insert /ʊ/ into the aforementioned cluster because the phonotactics of Ikom language does not as such consonant clusters, as such vowels had to be inserted for convenience. brisk" and "task, the /sk/ had to be transposed into /ks/ which as a result sounded as "bricks and tax" respectively. The syllabic consonant /t/ in the words "little" and "brittle did not escape insertion as evident in table 4.2.2 where /ʊ/ had to be inserted in between /t/ and /r/ by the students for their convenience. The syllabic consonant /tn/ in the words "glutton" and "pattern" also experienced insertion. In "glutton", the short, back, rounded vowel /ʊ/ was inserted in between /t/ and /n/ while in "pattern" the short, front vowel /æ/ was inserted. In the word "three", the short, front, unrounded vowel /i/ was inserted in between /θ/ and /r/. the difficulty that the students experienced with consonant clusters was caused by the

influence of their mother-tongue. Their inadequate knowledge of the phonotactics of English was Overshadowed by their engrained knowledge of the phonotactics of their mother-tongue (Ikom language).

## FINDINGS

- i. The mother-tongue of Ikom learners/users of English influenced negatively their spoken English.
- ii. The mother-tongue of Ikom learners/users of English influenced negatively their speech production in the areas of consonants, vowels, stress and intonation, and consonant clusters.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In the course of conducting this research, the researcher discovered that the dissimilarities between Ikom language and English language contributed enormously to the errors observed in the spoken English of Ikom learners/users of English. The outcome of the tests that were given to SS3 students in Ikom revealed that mother-tongue plays a negative role in the spoken English of Ikom learners of English.

### **Mother-tongue interference (consonants)**

It was found out by the researcher than deviations observed among Ikom users of English, during their articulation of English consonant sounds were mostly because of the dissimilarities between the two languages. These dissimilarities account for why substitution became a ready tool for the students. For example, the voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ with its voiceless counterpart /ʃ/. The voiceless and voiced dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ were always substituted with the voiceless and voiced alveolar stops /t/ and /d/ respectively, For example /θ/ in the word "thing" was replaced with /t/; as such /θiŋ/ became /tiŋ/. The same thing was noticed in /ð/when it is in the word "that". It was noticed that "that" which is correctly transcribed as /ðæt was pronounced by the students as /dæt/. This is because, dental fricatives are not found in the sound system of Ikom language. The findings also revealed that the voiced and voiceless bilabial plosives are not distinct phonemes in Ikom language, rather they are allophones of the same phoneme /b/ and this accounts for the errors that were made during the articulation of the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ in a word's final position. It was also observed that when the voiced bilabial stop /b/abuts onto the bilabial nasal /m/ on the right and is consequently silenced, the students, for lack of knowledge of such rules, went on to articulate the sound. This was observed in words such as tomb, womb, comb, plumber, bomber, etc. However, the study revealed that the following consonant phonemes posed no challenge to the students: /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /f/, /s/, /r/, /m/, /n/, n/. The reason for this was that, these consonant phonemes also exist in the sound inventory of Ikom. Mother-tongue interference is at issue here because every deviation observed was due to the fact that an Ikom learner/user of English would always want to transfer items from his language to English for his/her convenience. The poor performance of a large percentage of SS3 students in the articulation of English consonants was as a result of this.

**Mother-tongue interference (vowels)**

Having discussed dissimilarities between Ikom and English consonants the same was observed between Ikom and English vowels. The dissimilarities between vowel phonemes of Ikom and that of English account for errors that were made by Ikom learners/users of English in their oral productions. Substitution of English vowel phonemes with Ikom vowel phonemes was a common problem observed among the students. For example, the word "yearn" transcribed as /jɜ:n/ was realized by a great percentage of students as /jen/; the word "bird" transcribed as /bɜ:d/ was realized by a great percentage of the students as /bed/. This happened because the central vowel /ɜ:/ does not exist in the sound inventory of Ikom language. The findings also revealed that the central vowel known as schwa, which does not exist in the sound inventory of Ikom, posed a challenge to Ikom learners/users of English. Schwa in words such as mother, brother, water, and roster transcribed as /mʌdə(r)/, /brʌdə(r)/, /wɔ:tə(r)/, and /rostə(r)/ respectively, was wrongly substituted with the short, front vowel /æ/. The study revealed that the central vowel /ʌ/ was also problematic in the sense that, it was always substituted with the back vowel /ɑ/ because it is not found in the sound system of Ikom. Other errors noticed were that of short vowels being articulated as long vowels and vice versa, e.g the word cart /kɑ:t/ being pronounced as cat /kæt/ and the word "pool" /pu:l/ pronounced as pull /pul/. The researcher also found out that diphthongs such as /əʊ/, /ɔi/, /iə/, /ai/, and /aʊ/ posed little or no challenge to the students, while diphthongs such as /ɛə/, /ʊə/, and /ei/ proved very difficult for the students as evident in table 4.1.2. triphthongs were so problematic inasmuch that not more than 10% of the students could articulate each of the five diphthongs correctly. This is evidenced in table 4.1.2. this happened because there are no diphthongs in Ikom language as such, mother-tongue (Ikom language) intruded and played a vital role in the errors that were made by the students.

**Mother-tongue interference (stress and intonation)**

The findings in this section revealed that the deviations noticed among Ikom learners of English in the area of suprasegmentally were caused by mother-tongue influence. The reason is that all Nigerian languages are tonal (syllable-timed) while English is international (stress-timed). Ikom language which is a Nigerian language is not an exception. it is no wonder why Ikom learners of English could not place primary stress patterns correctly. If one should take a close look at tables 4. 1.3 and 4.2.1, one will see that the students faced a lot of difficulty in trying to pronounce certain words with their proper stress patterns. A very good example is seen in the word "fertilizer". The stress pattern for the word "fertilizer" is FER-ti-li-zer as evident in table 4.2.1, but a great percentage of the students stressed up to three syllables in the same word as seen in the aforementioned table where FER-ti-li-zer was realized as FER-TI-li-ZER. There were times when all the syllables in a word had to be stressed. A good example is seen in the word "enterprise" as presented in table 4.2.1. The correct stress pattern for the word "enterprise" is EN-ter-prise, but a great number of students stressed every syllable in the word and it sounded like EN-TER-PRISE. This was clearly a mother-tongue interference problem.

**Mother-tongue interference (consonant clusters)**

The findings in this section revealed that mother-tongue interference extended its tentacles to the area of English consonant clusters. The researcher noticed that the syllabic structure of English is

quite different from the syllabic structure of Ikom language. The syllabic structures of English have three consonants at the onset position, a vowel (or vowel sequence) at the nucleus, and four consonants at the coda position. The formula is CCC V CCCC. Ikom language has only one consonant at the onset position, a vowel at the nucleus, and a consonant at the coda position which produces the formula: CVC. This accounts for the mother-tongue interference problems in the area of consonant clusters as seen in the percentage of students who encountered difficulty in articulating certain English consonant clusters (table 4.1.4). Since Nigeria languages including Ikom does not permit certain clusters in their phonotactics, insertion of vowels in between the clusters was unavoidable. Words such as Scrape, strip, splodge had the short, rounded, back vowel /ʊ/ inserted in between the underlined clusters. Words such as three and thread also had the short, front vowel /i/ inserted in between the underlined clusters. Syllabic consonants such as /t/ /tn/ and /fn/ were not exempted. The word little /litl/ became /litʊl/, glutton /glʌtn/ and nation /neɪfn/ became /neɪfʊn/.

## CONCLUSION

The influence of mother-tongue in English language usage in Ikom Local Government Area was the research problem that prompted this research work. From the data collected and analyzed, and the findings one can confidently assert that the research problems have been solved, and the research questions answered, the findings supported the hypothesis that "the mother-tongue of Ikom people influences negatively English language use/usage in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State, at the phonetic and phonological levels". At the phonetic level, mother-tongue influence was observed on the articulation of consonant and vowel phonemes and at the phonological level, its influence on stress marking and intonation, and consonant clusters was marked out by the researcher as significantly negative.

## Recommendations

- i. Teachers should be advised to employ reinforcement measures on the students in order to motivate the students to learn and improve their spoken and written English.
- ii. Students should be instructed to use Received Pronunciation (RP) as their English language model. Received pronunciation which is derived from the standard dialect of English (spoken in London) should be the model on which English language learning is based.
- iii. English is an official language in Nigeria and also the lingua franca of the global community; with this in view, it is advisable that adequate time be allotted to English language teaching (most especially Oral English). This is to help the students acquire effective communication skills in the language.
- iv. This study was focused on senior secondary three (SS3) students in Ikom Local Government Area, therefore further studies that focuses on students in lower classes and higher institution is recommended. It is also recommended that further studies be conducted in other local government areas in Cross River State, in the hope of discovering new problems related to mother-tongue interference and finding a better way of combating the problem.



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