جامعة الحكمة، إلورن - نيجيريا
AL-HIKMAH UNIVERSITY
ILORIN - NIGERIA
...learning for wisdom and morality
The 1st Islamic Faith-Based University in Nigeria

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

A Contrastive Analysis of English Phonology and Phonological Patterns of Nigerian English Speakers: Implications for English Language Teachers (ELT)

[1]Oloko, M. Jamiu
Department of English Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
jamiuoloko@gmail.com. 08032194069
ORCHID NO: 0009-0002-1247-9306

[2]Yusuff, Abduganiyu Aderemi, Ph.D
Department of Languages and Linguistics, Fountain University, Osogbo, Osun State.
yusuff.abduganiyu@fuo.edu.ng, ganiremi@ymail.com 08034547170
ORCHID NO: 0009-0005-3592-091X

Abstract

This paper examined the phonological problem areas of Nigerian English speakers. These problem areas were identified through the contrastive analysis of English phonology and the phonological patterns of the three major Nigerian indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba). The study showed that most Nigerian English Speakers carry the patterns of their mother tongue (MT) to their spoken target language (TL) production. It is from the foregoing that it is recommended that these areas of difficulties should form the points of emphasis for English language teachers (ELT) in the teaching of English phonology at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The study concluded that it was imperative for the phonological patterns of Nigerian English speakers to satisfy the two important criteria of intelligibility and acceptability. It was recommended that English language teachers should endeavour to include extensive phonetics and phonology instruction in their English programs to help Nigerian students learning English as a second language with their pronunciation.
Keywords: Phonology, English, English speaker, ELT

Introduction

Contrastive analysis is an aspect of linguistics which deals with the comparison of two or more languages with the view of explaining areas of similarities and differences. In a comparative analysis of a mother tongue (MT) and a target language (TL) lies the key to ease or difficulties in second language learning. Learners we not encounter difficulties in the production of sounds that have similarities with the sounds in their mother tongue but there are difficulties when there are differences. Errors made in pronunciation, as submitted by Osedume et al (2022), are due to difference in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English. This is why the teacher role here as a model is very crucial. Buttressing this assertion, Walter and Mercellus (2023) made it clear the belief of some people that language teaching and learning, mother tongue interference and transfer, interlanguage and so on contributed to difficulties one may encounter in his or her first language to second language during communication.

The production of sounds is associated with speaking skill. The speaking skill according to Sulaiman (2014) is the most difficult skill and English is indeed crucial especially as the means of communication. As opined by Kheirabadi (2015), Learners of English as second language many at times prefer using their first language because of some difficulties they

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

encounter in the use of second language especially on the area of grammar and pronunciation. In research carried out by Kabir and Bashir et al (2025) on effects of mother tongue on students' academic performance, the results revealed that mother tongue interference negatively affects English speaking and writing skills of students and their academic performance. In Irele (2023) opinion, mother tongue interference is patterned when a person is bilingual, which constitute a problem. Students cannot speak fluently without borrowing from their own language into the language acquired. Swan (2017) also submitted that while English sentences are being changed, difficulties are expected due to the structural differences between the two languages.

Contrastive analysis (CA) started from the efforts of language teachers and linguists to develop language teaching materials. These efforts themselves were encouraged by the fact that linguistics plays a significant role in language teaching and learning. ''In linguistics, contrastive analysis refers to a theoretically grounded, systematic and synchronic comparison of two languages'' (Nwoye, 2023). Contrastive analysis is an improvement upon the earlier role of traditional grammar in language study which dwelt much on the abstractive properties of language.

It is an undisputable fact that English language is spoken across the globe. Several varieties of this language have developed in different parts of the world. Among the prominent ones are Queen English, South African English, Nigerian English and a lot of other varieties. The varieties of the English language known as Nigerian English (NE) was borne out of language growth and improvement, an aftermath of the acculturation that resulted from the contact of the language with indigenous languages. This reveals that Nigerian indigenous languages have generate some features which can be term 'Nigerian' (Balogun 1998). Hence, the phonetic and phonological characteristics of the varieties known as the Nigerian English Accent (NEA) also evolved. NEA is described in relation to Received Pronunciation (RP). It thus presents NEA as a separate phonological system, which has correspondence in RP and some other English Accents.

The RP is the pronunciation of standard British English based on the speech of the educated speakers of southern England. It is the speech used for official functions. The RP is recommended as a model for higher education to use in the classroom and it is the model that sum up and put the varieties of the English language together.

The adoption of English as an official language in Nigeria has helped to aid the various ethnic groups in the country. This has brought about bilingualism and multilingualism resulting in the production of various types of bilinguals with various levels of competence (Adebola, 2023).

Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the 1960's and early 1970's, as a model of explaining why some features of a target language are more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories prevailing at that time, language learning was a question of habit formation and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were learning.

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Historically, it has been used to establish 'language genealogies'. The main function of contrastive analysis in language teaching therefore, should be that of explaining why errors occur rather that predict errors. The theoretical foundations for what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis were

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

formulated in Lado's *Linguistics Across culture* (1957). In this book, Lado claimed that those elements which are similar to (the learner's) native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult. While this 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. This involved describing the languages (using structuralist linguistics), comparing them and predicting learning difficulties.

It is from the foregoing that this paper focusses on the contrastive analysis of English phonology and the phonological patterns of Nigerian English speakers with reference to Nigerian three major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and subsequently identify areas of difficulties and the implications for English language teachers (ELT).

Literature Review

Conceptual Background

Farida (2019) viewed contrastive analysis as the interview between two or more different languages for the purpose of finding points of divergence and convergence between them. According to him, Contrastive analysis aims at predicting the difficulties in studying languages and finding solutions and explanations to these difficulties.

During the 1960's, there was a widespread enthusiasm with this technique, manifested in the contrastive descriptions of several European Languages, many of which were sponsored by the center of Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. It was expected that once the areas of potential difficulty had been mapped out through contrastive analysis, it would be possible to design Language courses more efficiently(Farida, ibid).

In recent years, contrastive analysis has been used in language teaching contexts, syllabus design, and language classroom by language teachers over the world (Ali Akbar, 2019).

Kostova (2022) in his own contribution opined that ‘‘Contrastive analysis has been applied to areas such as the study and practice of translation, L2 writing, understanding and description of particular languages, language typology and the study of language universal’’. Any aspect of language may be covered in contrastive studies including vocabulary, phonology, syntax etc.

Kizi (2023) claimed that the emergence of the concept of contrastive analysis in linguistic is closely related to pedagogy. The aim of contrastive analysis is to compare languages to identify potential errors with ultimate goal to distinguish between what should be learnt from what should not be learnt in a second language setting.

In summary, contrastive analysis refers to the comparative description of particular aspects of two or more languages, noting the differences and similarities. From this comparison, a prediction is made as to what the learners will find difficult or easy to learn.

Theoretical Background

The theory of linguistic interference is otherwise called interference theory in Applied Linguistics. This theory states that in speaking a foreign language, we commonly use, not the sounds of those languages but those sounds of our mother tongue which we imagine to be equivalent with the sounds of the foreign languages. This theory rests on assumption that there is a minimum of two languages and that the production of one interferes with the second. Linguistic interference can also be examined as instance of deviation from the norms of a language as a result of contact with another language. Interference is sub-categorized into two-intra-lingual interference and inter-lingua interference. We have intra-lingual

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

interference when one language has different dialects and inter-lingua interference when one language interferes with the other e. g Yoruba and RP, Igbo and RP and Hausa and RP.

Language acquisition according to Abbas (2023) is a remarkable and crucial aspect of human evolution because it is a means of communication. However, one major difficulty learners encounter in the aquation of second language is mother tongue interference. As Suleyman and Behnaz 92023) opined, a learner encounters mother tongue influence while learning or speaking a foreign language or target language. According to them, mother tongue influence is the impact of a person's usage of his or her mother tongue on the second language which affect his or her thoughts process in sense that he thinks in mother tongue and expresses in English or a second language acquisition.

Interference theory becomes relevant in contrasting Nigerian English Accent with that of the English phonological system when one considers the fact that a second language speaker commonly use, not the sound of that language, but those sounds of his mother tongue which he imagines to be equivalent to the sound of the second language. It should be noted that phonetic realization of phonemes provides a simple way of highlighting the differences between RP and NEA. For example, both accents have the stops / p, t, k/, but while the sounds are aspirated word- initially in RP (and so involve greater time in articulation) they are usually not in NEA.

Methodology

This study used oral production and observation as part of a descriptive research design. Investigating phenomena as they naturally occur, without changing any variables, is a good use for descriptive research design. Because it allowed the researchers to watch and assess how participants pronounced specific English sounds in a natural environment, this design was suitable for the current study. In order to provide a detailed account of oral performance across various ethnic backgrounds, the study used a qualitative methodology bolstered by basic quantitative analysis (percentage rating).

Participants

Participants included 100-level students from Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu Ode's Department of English, College of Humanities. The purpose of the selection process was to evaluate the entry behaviours and foundational competence of students in oral English and related pronunciation-based courses at the beginning of their university education. For the study, fifty (50) participants in total were chosen. Twenty Yoruba students, twenty Igbo students, and ten Hausa students were split among Nigeria's three main ethnic groups. Due to their small population at the university, there were fewer Hausa participants. The need to represent a wide range of Nigeria's linguistic diversity and investigate the potential impact of mother tongue interference on English pronunciation led to the inclusion of these ethnic groups.

Instrumentation

The following were the main tools used to collect data: Oral Production Tasks: Participants had to pronounce certain words that contained target consonants. Observation Checklist: This made it possible for researchers to methodically document and score patterns and accuracy in pronunciation. The percentage rating scale is used to compare pronunciation proficiency and measure performance among the chosen ethnic groups. Together, these tools were utilised to record quantitative metrics (accuracy and frequency rates) as well as qualitative characteristics (phonetic patterns).

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Two phonological and phonetic specialists evaluated the oral production tasks to make sure the chosen words accurately reflected the target consonant sounds and to enssure content validity. Ten students who were not involved in the main study participated in a pilot study to test the reliability of the rating scale and observational checklist. A Cohen's Kappa score of 0.82, which indicates significant agreement among evaluators, was obtained after inter-rater reliability was calculated. As a result, data recording and interpretation were guaranteed to be consistent.

Procedure for Data Collection

During planned class periods, data were gathered. A list of English words to be read aloud was provided to each participant. An audio recorder was used to observe and capture the pronunciation patterns, and an observation checklist was used to take notes. The accuracy of the consonant sounds made by each participant was used to rate their performance. Ethics were taken into account. Every participant verbally consented to participate after being made aware of the study's objectives. Throughout the study, their confidentiality and anonymity were also preserved.

Method of Data Analysis

To find recurrent pronunciation patterns and mistakes, the audio recordings were replayed and examined. The analysis concentrated on how some consonant and vowel sounds were pronounced differently than they are in Standard British English. A percentage scale was used to calculate the ratings from the observation checklist, and performance comparisons among the ethnic groups were conducted. The researchers were able to make deductions from these analyses regarding the impact of mother tongue interference on participants' pronunciation of English sounds.

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Table:

Analysis and Results (The Participants' Responses)

English Sound	Mispronounced by	Substituted with	Example	No of Respondents	Correct (%)	Wrong (%)
/θ/ (thin)	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo	/t/ or /s/	thin → tin or sin	50	NIL	100
/ð/ (this)	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo	/d/ or /z/	this → dis or zis	50	NIL	100
/ŋ/ (sing)	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo	/n/ or /ngg/	sing → sin or sing-g	50	20	80
/ʒ/ (measure)	Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo	/z/ or /sh/	measure → meza or mesho	50	23	77
/z/ (zebra)	Yoruba, Hausa	/s/	zebra → sebra	30	25	75
/ʤ/ (judge)	Yoruba, Hausa	/dʒ/ or /z/	judge → dzodge or zodge	30	24	76
/r/ (red)	Yoruba, Igbo	/ɾ/ (flapped r)	red → led (by Igbo speakers)	40	35	55
/h/ (house)	Igbo, Yoruba	Dropped completely	house → ouse	40	40	60

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

/v/ (van)	Yoruba	/f/	van → fan	20	16	84
/3:/	Yoruba	/ɔ:/	chɔ:ch	20	28	72
/æ/ (pat)	Yoruba	/ɔ/	pæ(a)t → pat	20	47	53
/ʌ/ (rug)	Yoruba	/ɔ:/	rug →rog	20	29	71
/ʧ/ (church)	Hausa, Yoruba	/s/ or /ts/	church → surch or tsurch	30	NIL	100
/p/ (people)	Hausa	/f/	plenty→flenty	10	NIL	100
/v/ (vast)	Hausa	/b/	very→bery	10	NIL	100
/ʤ/ (Justice)	Hausa	/j/	religion→relijin	10	21	79
/r/ (ram)	Igbo	/l/	raw-law	20	10	90

Findings

The study examined how 100-level students at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu Ode, mispronounced certain English sounds. The results from the table show that first-language phonological structures have an impact on English pronunciation by revealing consistent patterns of mispronunciations in the three main Nigerian languages: Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo.

Phonemes with 100% Mispronunciation Rates

All respondents consistently mispronounced certain English phonemes, indicating that these sounds were not present in their mother tongues at all. These consist of:

- **/θ/ (thin) → /t/ or /s/** (e.g., "thin" pronounced as "tin" or "sin")
- **/ð/ (this) → /d/ or /z/** (e.g., "this" pronounced as "dis" or "zis")
- **/ʧ/ (church) → /s/ or /ts/** (e.g., "church" pronounced as "surch" or "tsurch")
- **/p/ (people) → /f/** (e.g., "plenty" pronounced as "flenty")
- **/v/ (vast) → /b/** (e.g., "very" pronounced as "bery")

According to these substitutions, the closest sounds in the respondents' first languages (L1) were used in place of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, affricate /ʧ/, and bilabial plosive /p/, which are absent from the corresponding indigenous languages.

High Rates of Mispronunciation (Above 75%)

While not entirely so, a number of other phonemes displayed a very high degree of erroneous pronunciation. These consist of:

- **/ŋ/ (sing) → /n/ or /ngg/** (80% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/ʒ/ (measure) → /z/ or /sh/** (77% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/ʤ/ (judge) → /dʒ/ or /z/** (76% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/z/ (zebra) → /s/** (75% incorrect pronunciation)

The results indicate that /n/ or an overly pronounced /ngg/ are frequently used in place of nasal ends like /ŋ/. Because many Nigerian languages lack the voiced palatal fricative /ʒ/ (as in "measure"), it is substituted with either /z/ or /sh/.

Moderate Mispronunciation Rates (50-70%)

Results for some sounds were mixed, with a sizable percentage of respondents correctly pronouncing them:

- **/r/ (red) → /ɾ/** (flapped r, 55% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/h/ (house) → Dropped completely** (60% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/v/ (van) → /f/** (84% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/3:/ (church) → /ɔ:/** (72% incorrect pronunciation)

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

- **/æ/ (pat)** → **/ɔ/** (53% incorrect pronunciation)
- **/ʌ/ (rug)** → **/ɔ:/** (71% incorrect pronunciation)

The Yoruba and Igbo phonological systems are clearly influenced here, especially in the way that Igbo and Yoruba speech patterns lose /h/ and substitute a flapping /ɾ/ for /r/. Vowel sounds like /æ/ and /ʌ/ are mispronounced, which indicates a propensity to project English vowels onto already-existing native vowel sounds.

Sounds with Lower Mispronunciation Rates

Certain sounds were comparatively more accurately pronounced:

- **/r/ (ram)** → **/l/** (90% incorrect pronunciation but 10% correct)
- **/ʤ/ (justice)** → **/j/** (79% incorrect pronunciation but 21% correct)
- **/ŋ/ (sing)** → **/n/ or /ngg/** (80% incorrect pronunciation but 20% correct)

These findings suggest that although mistakes are still common, some students showed some familiarity with these phonemes, maybe as a result of more exposure to English.

Discussion

The study highlighted the replacements made by Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo speakers as a result of the influence of their local phonological systems by identifying particular English sounds that they frequently mispronounce. The voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ (as in thin), which is absent from the phonemic inventory of Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, was one of the most commonly mispronounced sounds. This resulted in pronunciations like tin or sin as speakers from all three ethnic groups replaced it with either /t/ or /s/. Likewise, /d/ or /z/ were frequently used in place of the voiced interdental fricative /ð/ (as in this), leading to pronunciations like zis or dis. There was a 100% mispronunciation rate in both situations since none of the respondents could pronounce words correctly. Given the lack of phoneme equivalents in their original languages, this implies that these interdental sounds provide serious articulation difficulties for Nigerian English language learners.

The results show that speakers automatically substitute the closest equivalents from their first language for unknown sounds, hence enhancing the impact of mother tongue interference on second language pronunciation. The necessity of focused phonetic training that specifically teaches students how to articulate non-native sounds is highlighted by these substitution patterns. Learners can improve their spoken English competency by developing the capacity to appropriately generate interdental fricatives through the use of phonetic transcription training, pronunciation drills, and auditory discrimination activities.

The study also found that Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo speakers find the nasal sound /ŋ/ (sing) difficult to pronounce, thus they substitute /n/ or /ngg/. As a result, there was a notable departure from the usual English pronunciation of nouns like sing, which were sometimes pronounced as sin or song-g. Only 20% of respondents were able to correctly enunciate the sound, but 80% of respondents displayed this pattern of mispronunciation. Some Nigerian languages, especially Yoruba and Igbo, lack a final velar nasal sound, which makes it difficult to produce /ŋ/. As a result, speakers either simplify it to /n/ or add an additional consonant sound to make articulation easier. The voiced postalveolar fricative /ʒ/ (as in measure), which is absent from the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo phonetic systems, was another problematic phoneme found in the study. This phonemic gap caused speakers to replace it with /z/ or /ʃ/, resulting in pronunciations like mesho or meza. Just 23% of respondents properly pronounced this sound, representing a 77% mispronunciation rate. The high rate of substitution implies that learners automatically swap out new phonemes for more recognisable native language sounds.

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

These results highlight the necessity for targeted phonetic teaching to assist students in correctly identifying and producing these difficult English sounds, as well as the influence of mother tongue interference on second-language pronunciation. Learners can be prepared to overcome these articulation difficulties and advance their spoken English skills by exposing them to native English pronunciation, limited pair activities, and targeted pronunciation drills. Because the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ (as in zebra) is not naturally found in the phonemic inventories of Yoruba and Hausa, the study found that it presented a substantial pronunciation barrier for speakers of these languages. Speakers instead frequently used /s/ in place of /z/, which led to pronunciations like sebra rather than zebra. 75% of the cases showed this replacement, indicating a considerable inclination among respondents to substitute voiceless fricatives with voiced ones. The rationale for this substitution rests in the phonological patterns of Yoruba and Hausa, where /z/ is either absent or appears infrequently, making it difficult for speakers to discern between /z/ and /s/ while speaking English. Similarly, respondents found it difficult to pronounce the voiced postalveolar affricate /ʤ/ (as in judge), often replacing it with /dʒ/ or /z/ in Yoruba and Hausa. Due to this, speakers either emphasised the original /d/ sound or completely substituted /z/ for it, resulting in mispronunciations like dzodge or zodge. The fact that 76% of cases showed this substitution pattern emphasises how hard it is for Nigerian students to articulate sophisticated affricates that are uncommon in their mother tongues.

The propensity to alter these sounds points to an excessive dependence on native language phonetics, where familiar phonemes are used to simplify or substitute sounds. These results highlight the necessity of focused phonetic training that emphasises enhancing affricate articulatory precision and differentiating between voiced and voiceless sounds. Teachers can assist students in improving their awareness and precision while producing these difficult English sounds by implementing guided pronunciation practice, limited pair drills, and listening exercises. In the end, this would enhance voice clarity and general English communication proficiency.

According to the study, Yoruba and Igbo speakers had trouble pronouncing the English /r/ sound (as in red), especially when the /r/ was flapped. This caused the pronunciation to sound more like lead than red, which is what Igbo speakers most frequently do. The phonological principles of Igbo and Yoruba, where the rhotic sound is usually produced as a tap [ɾ] instead of the approximate [ɹ] present in normal English, cause the flapping of /r/. Only 55% of respondents were able to produce the correct articulation due to this phonetic interference, resulting in a 45% mispronunciation rate. The influence of native language phonetics, where people automatically adapt their first-language articulation patterns to English speech, is the reason why it might be challenging to pronounce /r/ correctly.

Similarly, some Yoruba and Igbo speakers fully deleted the /h/ sound (as in house), making the pronunciation sound more like ouse than house. These languages frequently exhibit a speech pattern called "h-dropping," in which the /h/ consonant is either barely audible or not present at all. Consequently, English nouns that start with /h/ are frequently pronounced without it, turning words like "hair" into "air" and "hat" into "at." According to the survey, this pronunciation error happened 60% of the time, indicating that Yoruba and Igbo speakers frequently miss the letter "h" from their spoken English. In informal speech, where speakers are less aware of pronouncing sounds that are not inherent in their mother tongue, this pattern of omission is especially common.

These results support the necessity of systematic pronunciation instruction that focusses on the articulation of /r/ and /h/. Learners can enhance their spoken English skills and gain a

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

better knowledge of these sounds through targeted phonetic drills, auditory discrimination activities, and corrective feedback. Students can overcome these pronunciation issues and improve their general English communication abilities by incorporating useful strategies like breath control exercises for /h/ and tongue placement exercises for /r/.

Significant pronunciation issues with the English /v/ sound (as in van) were also noted by the study, especially among Yoruba speakers. Many times, /f/ was used in place of /v/, resulting in pronunciations like fan rather than van. 84% of respondents made this substitution, suggesting a significant Yoruba phonological effect. In Yoruba, the /v/ and /f/ sounds are frequently seen as interchangeable since the language lacks a distinctive /v/ sound. Yoruba speakers often substitute the more recognisable /f/ for /v/ when speaking English since the language does not naturally distinguish between voiced and voiceless labiodental fricatives.

Furthermore, the pronunciation of vowels, especially the long mid-central vowel /ɜ:/ (as in church), was difficult for Yoruba speakers. The more rounded back vowel /ɔ:/ was commonly used by responders in place of the proper articulation, resulting in chɔ:ch instead of church. A widespread propensity among Yoruba speakers to substitute foreign core vowels with those from their native phonetic inventory is shown in the 72% of cases in which this mispronunciation was documented. Because Yoruba has no real equivalent to the English /ɜ:/ sound, the substitution of /ɜ:/ with /ɔ:/ implies that Yoruba speakers automatically use the closest vowel in their language.

Similarly, Yoruba speakers found it difficult to pronounce the short front vowel /æ/ (as in pat), as many would substitute it with /ɔ/, resulting in pronunciations like pat rather than pæ(a)t. 53% of cases had this mispronunciation, indicating a moderate level of difficulty differentiating between the more rounded back vowel /ɔ/ and the low front vowel /æ/. This regular pattern of replacement results from Yoruba's vowel system's lack of the precise /æ/ sound. Another troublesome vowel for Yoruba speakers was the /ʌ/ sound (as in rug). They replaced it with /ɔ:/, which resulted in rog instead of rug. 71% of cases had this inaccuracy, suggesting that it is common to have trouble telling the difference between the English back and central vowels. Yoruba speakers' preference for /ɔ:/ over /ʌ/ is consistent with the vowel structure of their native language, which excludes the open-mid back unrounded vowel /ʌ/. Speakers consequently resorted to the closest Yoruba equivalent sound, highlighting the effect of mother tongue interference on English pronunciation. These results emphasise the need of focused phonetic training by demonstrating the systematic impact of Yoruba phonology on English vowel and consonant articulation. Yoruba-speaking learners can enhance their spoken competency and gain a better knowledge of English vowel distinctions by addressing these pronunciation problems through auditory discrimination tasks, minimal pair exercises, and explicit phonetic training.

The study also found that Hausa and Yoruba speakers had serious trouble pronouncing certain words, especially the English affricate /ʧ/ (as in church). Respondents either used the affricate /ts/ or the fricative /s/ to appropriately pronounce this sound instead, resulting in mispronunciations like tsurch or surch. There was a 100% mispronunciation rate because this inaccuracy was seen in every instance. This swap was probably influenced by the fact that the /ʧ/ sound was missing from both the Hausa and Yoruba phonetic inventories. For instance, Hausa lacks the palatal affricate /ʧ/ but has a high concentration of ejective and implosive sounds. As a result, speakers mimic Hausa with well-known substitutes like /s/ or /ts/. Likewise, Yoruba speakers, whose language lacks /ʧ/ as a separate phoneme, substituted /s/, a more recognisable and accessible sound, for it.

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

Hausa speakers frequently substituted the labiodental fricative /f/ for the bilabial plosive /p/ (as in people), leading to mispronunciations such as flenty instead of plenty. This is another significant pronunciation issue. Additionally, this substitution had a 100% mispronunciation rate, suggesting that it is consistently difficult to tell these two sounds apart. The /p/ sound does not exist as a separate phoneme in Hausa phonology, which is known to exhibit this pattern. Instead, because /f/ is more prevalent in their linguistic repertoire, Hausa speakers frequently use it to imitate /p/. Similar difficulties were encountered by Hausa speakers, who frequently substituted the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ for the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ (as in vast). This resulted in another example of a 100% mispronunciation rate, with words like extremely being sounded as bery. Hausa's phonetic structure, which lacks a native /v/ sound, is the reason for this substitution. Rather, speakers fall back on /b/, the closest voiced bilabial consonant.

These results underline the importance of systematic phonetic training to correct these recurring mispronunciations and show how native language phonology affects English pronunciation. Specific pronunciation drills that emphasise affricates, bilabial plosives, and labiodental fricatives would be beneficial for Hausa and Yoruba speakers. Learners may become more proficient in spoken English by using auditory discrimination exercises, articulation training, and minimal pair drills to assist them distinguish between these sounds.

The study also found that Hausa and Igbo speakers had significant trouble pronouncing the alveolar approximant /r/ (as in ram) and the voiced postalveolar affricate /ʤ/ (as in justice). Hausa speakers often used the palatal glide /j/ instead of /ʤ/ because they had trouble pronouncing it correctly. Mispronunciations such jeneral instead of general, jamp instead of jump, and relijin instead of religion resulted from this. 79% of respondents who spoke Hausa used the substitute, although only 21% were able to pronounce it correctly. Due to Hausa's absence of a distinguishing phoneme for the /ʤ/ sound, the closest option in their native phonetic inventory is /j/. This substitution trend is consistent with the well-established phenomenon of phonological interference, in which speakers of a language that lacks a specific sound frequently substitute it with a sound that they are more accustomed to.

In a similar vein, Igbo speakers frequently substituted the lateral approximant /l/ for the English /r/ sound, which they found extremely difficult to pronounce. Law was used in place of raw, lice in place of rice, and liver in place of river as a result. One of the most common phonological issues among Igbo speakers, this mispronunciation was found in 90% of cases. Because the alveolar approximant /r/ is absent from standard Igbo and its closest phonetic equivalent is /l/, the substitution takes place. As a result, Igbo speakers frequently pronounce words incorrectly by producing /l/ where English calls for a /r/.

The need for focused phonetic interventions is shown by the high rates of mispronunciation of both /ʤ/ and /r/. Exercises that highlight the difference between /ʤ/ and /j/, including minimal pair drills (e.g., judge vs. youth and jam vs. yam), would be beneficial for Hausa speakers. In a similar vein, Igbo speakers need instruction on how to pronounce the letter /r/. This instruction could involve practicing rhotic sounds in a variety of linguistic situations, auditory identification tasks, and tongue positioning exercises. Learners can increase the clarity of their spoken English and lessen the intrusion of their native tongue by tackling these pronunciation issues through organised phonetic instruction.

Conclusion

The results of this study show how Nigerian students' original linguistic backgrounds alter their articulation of English sounds, highlighting the systematic influence of mother tongue phonology on English pronunciation. The sounds that are absent from the Yoruba, Hausa, or

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

Igbo phonemic inventories have the highest rates of mispronunciation, leading speakers to replace them with more recognisable phonemes from their native tongues. These results highlight the critical need for focused phonetic instruction in classrooms to assist pupils in overcoming these pronunciation difficulties. Students can improve their articulatory precision by using systematic phonetics education that includes auditory discrimination exercises, minimal pair drills, and exposure to native pronunciation models. This study emphasises how crucial it is to incorporate pronunciation instruction into English language programmes at all educational levels in order to improve students' spoken English fluency and communicative competence.

Recommendations

From the results of this study, it is important to mention that universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria should not take it for granted that students at this level already acquired pronunciation skills from the primary and secondary levels of their education. It is therefore advised that they should include extensive phonetics and phonology instruction in their English programs to help Nigerian students learning English as a second language with their pronunciation. This includes oral drills that target troublesome sounds like /θ/, /ð/, and /ʒ/. To improve learning, the usage of audio-visual aids like interactive pronunciation applications, recorded natural English speech, and phonetic transcription software should be promoted. In order to assist students to recognise and fix common replacements, teachers should use a contrastive analysis approach to clearly teach the differences between English phonology and indigenous languages.

To enhance articulation and lessen linguistic interference, intensive pronunciation drills such as minimal pairs training, word stress exercises, and tongue twisters should be used on a regular basis. In order to improve fluency, students should also be exposed to native or proficient English speakers through English-speaking clubs and oral communication practice sessions.

It is also important to provide teachers with up-to-date linguistic teaching techniques and to achieve this, emphasis should be placed on teacher training and ongoing professional development in phonetics. In order to prevent fossilised pronunciation problems, legislative improvements should encourage early phonetics education at the elementary and secondary school levels, and curriculum reviews should prioritise pronunciation skills in oral English courses. Students can improve their overall communicative ability in English by using these tactics to improve their pronunciation accuracy.

References:

Abbas, H (2003). A contrastive analysis of thematic and information in English and Arabic contexts. *World Journal of English Language, 13* (3).

Adebola, O (2023). A contrastive analysis of some structures of English and Edo languages. *The international Journal of Business Management and Technology,* pp.42-47.

Adetugbo, A. (1997). *English phonetics: A course text*. Lagos: University of Lagos press.

Adetugbo, A. (2004). Problems of standardization and Nigeria English phonology. In Dadzier A.B K and Awonusi S (Ed) *Nigeria English: Influences and characteristics.* Lagos: Concepts Publication.

Akinkotu, A. (1996). *Modern approaches to philosophical foundations of education.* Abeokuta: Goal Educational Publisher.

Ali Akbar, K and Farhad, P (2019). Contrastive analysis hypothesis and second language learning. *Journal of ELT Research, 4* (1), pp. 35-43.

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

Awonusi, S. (2004). *Some characteristics of Nigerian English phonology* in Dadzie A.B.K and *Awonusi (Eds) Nigerian English: Influences and Characteristics.* Lagos: concepts publications.

Bolanle, D. (2002). *Yoruba for beginners.* Lagos: Docemo Publishers Ltd.

Balogun, T. (1998). Variances of English in Nigeria. In Oyedola, S. (Ed). *Perspective of English language in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Ben el books.

Bouryana, K. (2022). The potential of contrastive analysis in the study of discourse. *Studies in Linguistic Culture and FLT, 10* (2), pp. 68-80.

Chioma, I. (2006). A critical linguistics study of variation. *Journal of English studies*.

Crystal, D. (1996). *Prosodic system and intonation in English.* London: Cambridge university press.

Farida, M (2019). Contrastive analysis ‘’Objectives and Level’’. *International Journal for Arabic Linguistics and Literature Studies 1* (4), pp.144-157.

Garba, A. (1997). Hausa WH interrogatives: Hausa L2 speaker perspective. *Ibadan: Journal of the school of languages.*

Gimson, A.C. (1980). *An introduction to the pronunciation of English.* London: Arnold.

Grady, W.O. and Dobrovolsky, (1991). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction.* New York: St. Martin's press.

Hasanova, K (2023) The emergence of contrastive analysis in linguistic and the view of linguists on this concept. *International Journal of culture and Modernity, 28,* pp.1-4.

Irene, J, Kamnishwary, S, Marina, M, Shereen, S, Benjamin, J and Mahendran, M (2023). The effects of mother tongue interference among ESL learners’ speaking skills. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 13* (7) pp. 892-908.

Igboanusi, I. (2002). *Igbo English in Nigerian novel.* Ibadan: Emicronfit publishers

Jibril, M. ((2004). *Phonological variation in Nigeria English.* In Awonusi, S. (Ed) Some Characteristics of Nigerian English phonology. Lagos: Concepts Publication.

Jones, D. (1987). *English pronunciation dictionary.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Kabir, M, Bashir, U and Bello, M (2025). Effects of mother tongue on students’ academic performance in Taraba State University, Jalingo: An overview of English language. *International Journal of English Language and communication studies, 10* (1) pp.1-9.

Kheirabadi, S (2015). Effects of mother tongue language on learning second language learners: Elementary schools. International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature, 3 (7), pp.81-88.

Mekiluwa, O. (2008). *Introduction to applied English linguistics*. Lagos: Fardson and Sons.

Nwoye, C (2023). A contrastive analysis of English and Igbo segmental features: Implications in ESL learning. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*.

Osedume, I, Gladys, A and Michael, O (2022). Mother tongue interference in learning of English language in primary schools in Cross River State. Conference paper presented at *Education for Today,* Faculty of Education, University of Calabar.

Owolabi, K. (1989). *Ijinle itupale ede Yoruba* (1): Fonetiki ati fonoloji. Ibadan: Oniboje Press and Books Industries Ltd.

Oyedola, S. (1998). *Nigerian English myth or reality*. In Oyedola, S. (Ed). Perspectives on the English language in Nigeria. Ibadan: Ben El Books.

Suleyman, K and Behnaz, E (2023). The influence of mother tongue on English as a foreign language. *Research in Language and Education, 2* (2).

Al-Hikmah Journal of Education (AJE)
Volume 12 Number 1 May, 2025
e-ISSN: 2705-2508; p-ISSN: 2384-7662

Sulaiman, A (2014). The influence of mother tongue/native language in one's English language speech production. *International Journal of English and Education*, 3 (3), pp.365-368.

Swan, M (2017). A practical English usage: Complete topic-by-topic grammar guide over 250 vocabulary problems. London: Oxford University Press.

Website:

http://en.wikipedia.org.wiki/contrastiveanalysis

www.hausaonline.wordpress.com

Www.goggle.com