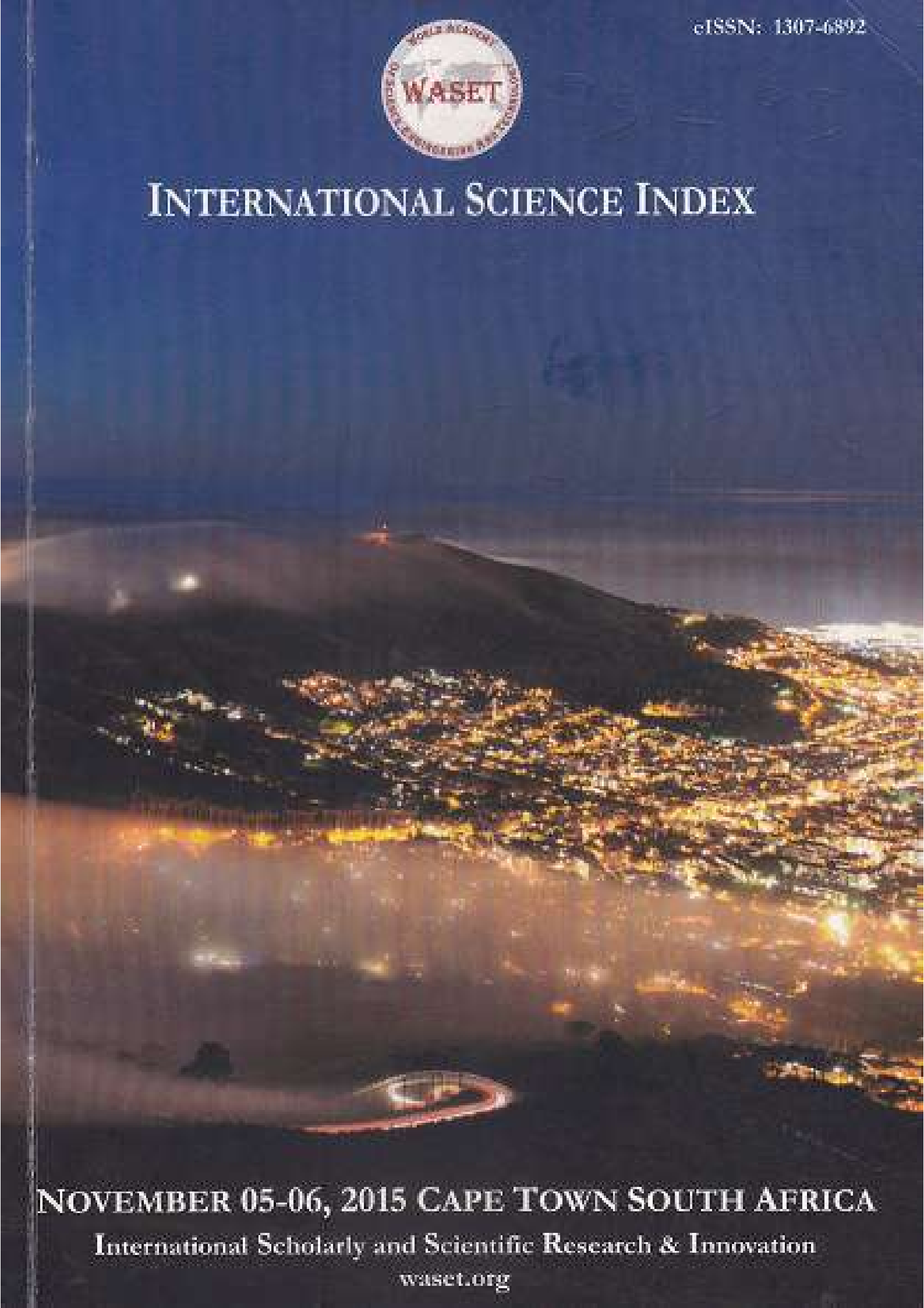




INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE INDEX



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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UKWUANI FRONT VOWELS

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Abstract

This paper examines the areas of convergence and divergence between English and Ukwuani vowel systems with special emphasis on the front vowels. Ukwuani is an Igboid minority language spoken in Delta and River states in Nigeria. The users are politically marginalized and the language has retrogressed in use and intellectual development. The report of this study is a step taken after a long lull in the development of this language. It is intended to motivate further inquiry and the development of Ukwuani native speakers. It specifies the areas of difficulty for the average Ukwuani-speaking user of English as a second language. The paper explains the nature of contrastive analysis, the principles of establishing phonemes, minimal pairs, as well as Ukwuani front vowels. The inclusion of a vowel chart in Ukwuani is part of the highlight of this paper. A case is also made for the development of Ukwuani to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals in its domain.

Keywords: convergence, divergence, English, Ukwuani

2. Introduction

Contrastive analysis (henceforth CA) examines aspects of differences between two or more languages. As Crystal notes:

CA is as general approach to the investigation of language (contrastive linguistics), particularly as carried on in certain areas of APPLIED LINGUISTICS, such as foreign -language teaching and translation. (112)

In a contrastive analysis of two languages, the points of structural differences are identified and these are then studied as areas of potential difficulty i.e.

interference or negative transfer in foreign language learning. C A emerges primarily out of the evidence that when learning a foreign language after acquiring competence of L_1 there is the tendency to transfer features of the first language (L_1) to the target language (TL). The evidence of the transfer manifests primarily in the phonology of any language concerned. This is probably because according to Hyman,

Phonology studies the physical properties of sounds of a specific language, which speakers must learn or internalize in order to use the language for the purpose of communication (1)

In addition to Hyman's view, we draw attention here to the fact that the study of the physical properties of sounds of a language is also the concern of acoustic phonetics. While acquiring a second language, there is the tendency to transfer to the target language (TL), our phonemes and their variants ... (Lado, ii).

According to Lado, C. A. is based on two assumptions:

- a. that second language learning is not the same as first language situation and
- b. that the learner does not approach the learning of L_2 from the scratch (11).

The language learner brings to the task of learning language tacit expectations about what he will be able to do with the language and presupposition about the nature of human language which could be true or false. The above constraints necessitate Nickel's suggestion that:

Both author and teacher require a knowledge of contrastive grammar in order to be able to predict, explain, correct and eliminate errors due to interference between source and target languages.
(15)

The contact between English and *Ukwuanj* is one of the cases of languages in contact, which necessitates C A according to Weinreich's suggestion recalled by Uhunmwangho and Anyanwu, (176).

We subscribe to Nickel's view since C A provides the author and the teacher with a knowledge of common and divergent features of different languages, so long as ideal models are used for description. C A between English and some Nigerian languages have attracted the attention of some linguists. This has been done in Yoruba by Abramson (1976) and Olufumilayo (1960). It has also been done in Esan by Omodiaogbe (1991) and in Bini by Uhunmwangho and Anyanwu (1999). Past studies on the contact of English and Nigerian languages also include Tiffen (1969), Awoniyi (1974), Oluikpe (1978), Amayo (1992) and Igboanusi (1995). This work is another of such studies, in contrastive analysis.

2. The Procedure for Contrastive Analysis:

The term 'procedure' as used in linguistics refers to a particular way of arriving at a linguistic analysis or decision (See Crystal, 387). In a contrastive analysis, a linguistic analysis, of the concerned features of the two languages involved is carried out. Then the features of the two languages analyzed are compared while description of contrasts between the features of the two languages is finally carried out. The effects of the contrasts on the language user are also explained here.

2. English Vowels: There are twelve well established pure vowels in English (See Adeyanju 12), These pure vowels which are also called 'monothongs' are further classified into front vowels, central vowels and back vowels based on their qualities. The following chart of English pure vowels makes our explanation clear.

Police /pə'li:s/

Key /ki:/

[ɪ] as noticed in: Wicked /'wɪkɪd/

Except /ɪk'sept/

Manage /mænidʒ/

Sit /sit/

Baby /'beɪbi/

[e] as noticed in: Many /'meni

Said /sed/

Bury /'beri/

Dead /ded/

Pet /pet/

Breath /breθ/

[æ] as noticed in: Marry /'mæri/

Plait /plæt/

Castigate /'kæstigeɪt/

Campus /'kæmpəs/

Cat /kæt/

Pat /pæt/

Since we have been discussing English language and its front vowels, this study however, is based on English and Țkwɔ̀nɔ̀ front vowels. We will therefore discuss Țkwɔ̀nɔ̀ in the next section.

Țkwɔ̀nɔ̀ language: Țkwɔ̀nɔ̀ is one of Nigeria's about 400 languages (Darah, 5).

Williamson identifies Ukwuanj as a minority language in Nigeria forming a language cluster with Igbo and other languages (40). Ukwuanj is a member of the Benue Congo language family; i.e, the Kwa group (Bendor in Anyanwu, 41). Ukwuanj is spoken as mother tongue in Ndokwa West, Ndokwa East and Ukwuanj Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria. It is also spoken as mother tongue in Orogun in Delta State. Lastly, the language is spoken as mother tongue in Ndoni, Rivers State. The geographical dialects of Ukwuanj are to a large extent mutually intelligible in all the locations where it is spoken.

To a large extent, Ukwuanj is an unexplored language. This is why we will examine the principles of establishing phonemes before we can establish examples of Ukwuanj vowels. We will at least apply some of the principles to be examined in the course of establishing the phonemes of Ukwuanj.

6. The Principles of Establishing Phonemes: The phoneme is the minimal unit in the sound system of a language that can keep utterances apart (Larry Hyman, 59). The phonemes of any language can be established through a number of principles which include distribution and phonetic similarity according to Oladipo et al. (29).

Distribution: This is classified into contrastive distribution, complementary distribution and free variation.

- i. **Contrastive Distribution:** Two sounds contrast if they occasion a difference in meaning. The concept of minimal pair is an established and useful technique for pronunciation practice, which can be presented in word and sentence contexts (See David Williamson, 88). The only compelling criterion is that minimal pairs must have identical environments. For example, word contexts:

Seat /si:t/ }
Sheat /ʃi:t/ } Difference in consonants at the
Ten /ten/ } initial position
Then /ðen/ }

Bath /bæθ/ }
Birth /bɜ:θ/ } Difference in vowels at the
Eat /i:t/ } medial position
Leat /li:v/ }

Sentence contexts:

Put a lock /lɒk/ on the door. }
Put a rock /rɒk/ on the door. } Consonants at initial position

Complementary Distribution: This concerns mutual exclusiveness of a pair, of sounds in a certain phonetic environment (David Crystal, 93). For instance, /t/ stands for all its allophonic variants in any particular language. If /t/ occurs at the initial position in a word and a vowel follows it, as in top /tɒp/ in a stressed syllable, it is aspirated and written phonetically as /tʰ/ to represent sound quality. If [t] occurs in a medial lateral position of little /lɪtl/, it is written phonetically as [t̬] to show sound quality. If [t] occurs in a final position in a word where it is not exploded like in [t̚] in [t̚aɪ]. In this case, its phonetic presentation is [t̚]. The three allophones of the /t/ phoneme are phonetically similar but they occur in mutually exclusive environments. This principle establishes the fact that only aspirated /tʰ/ can occur at the initial position of a syllable.

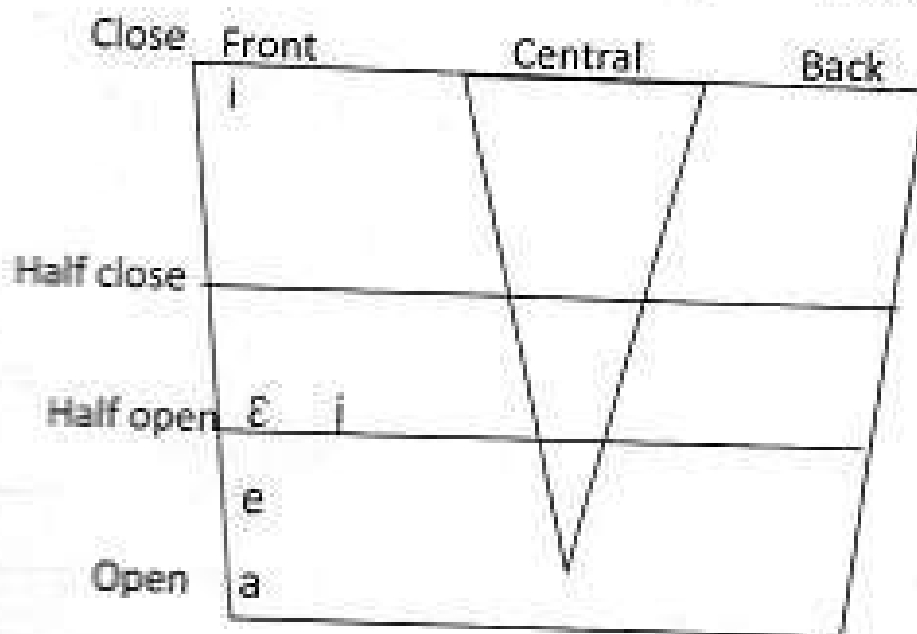
If the variants of the same phoneme i.e. allophones occur in mutually exclusive environments, they are said to be in complementary distribution. The fact that they stand for the same phoneme makes it impossible for them to cause a meaning difference; they are therefore not different phonemes.

iii. **Free Variation:** Two phonemes are in free variation if the occurrence of one is found in an environment where the other is expected without occasioning a change in meaning. For example, the phonemes /f/ and /v/ in English are used interchangeably in Economics /i:kə'nɒmiks/ or /ekə'nɒmiks/ without bringing about a meaning difference. Furthermore, free variation exists in Igbo with the example: Ifeoma/ifeoma/ which is pronounced /lhəɔma/ (See Oladipo et. al. 30).

Phonetic Similarity: The principle stipulates that: all allophones of the same phoneme must be phonetically similar. The allophones of /t/ discussed earlier are similar since they cannot create meaning differences if they are substituted for one another. They may only occasion some wrong pronunciations that might not impede international intelligibility. They are therefore not different phonemes.

Other Procedures: Hockett, quoted in Hyman, notes that the phoneme is a class of phones determined by six criteria. These criteria that determine the existence of phonemes and implication their discovery procedure, include: similarity, non intersection (no phonemic over lapping), contrastive and complementary distribution, completeness, pattern congruity and economy (See Hymn, 16). Some of the above principles have been discussed in this paper while a few were not discussed because they do not fall completely within the scope and ambit of this study.

2. **Ukwuani Vowel Phonemes:** Earlier efforts made by some non linguists at identifying the phonemes of Ukwuani language (See Enubunniga (1990), Ikukaiwe (1990), Ogude and Uti) are to some extent useful for this study. Our aim here is however to investigate linguistically and identify Ukwuani vowel phonemes. For the purpose of this study, only front vowels will receive our detailed attention. The existence of the Ukwuani phonemes in the chart below is evidenced by the minimal pairs in which they occur.



UKWŪANĪ VOWEL CHART

S/No	Ukwuanj words	Phonemes	Gloss/transcriptions
A	/i/ and /a/		
1.	Aka/áká/	/á/	Suffering/sú/áká/
	Ba/áká/	/á/	Stone /áká/
2.	Ba/bá/ aba/	/á/	Multiply/mú/á/
	Bá/bá/	/á/	Live/bá/
3.	Da/dá/	/á/	Talk/dá/
	Dá/dá/	/á/	Endure /in/dá/
B	/E/ and /e/		
1.	Ebi/Ébí/	/É/	A titled man /ótá/Ébí/
	Ebi/ebi/	/e/	An animal /zén 'á/ebi/
2.	Ise/í's/	/É/	Amen /é/í's/ or a men/
	Ise/ise/	/e/	Five /í's/
3.	Egbe/égbé/	/É/	Gourd/é/égbé/ or good/
	Egbe/egbé/	/e/	Gun/é/égbé/
4.	Eni/é/	/é/	We /wé/ (object) or /wé/ (object)
	Eni/é/	/e/	Elephant /é/é/
5.	Ke/é/	/É/	What /wé/ or /wé/ [Amé]
	Ke/é/	/e/	For /f/ (strong form)
6.	Kone/é/	/É/	This /é/
	Kone/é/	/e/	Greet/é/

C.	/V	and	/V	
1.	di/di'		/i/	Be around /bi θ'raund/
	di/di'		/i/	Husband /h'Λub θ'nd/
2.	Chi/ti' / (Obodo)		/i/	Load /lɔd/
	Chi /tʃi' / (kpe)		/i/	Judge /dʒɔ:ʃtʃ/
3.	Fi/ti' (apali)		/i/	Twist /twɪst/
				Or wrest /rest/
	Fi/ti' (uu)		/i/	Wash one's face /wɔʃ w'Λns feɪs/
				w'Λns feɪs/
4.	U/ti'		/i/	Crawl /krɔ:ɪ/
	U/ti'		/i/	Eat /i:t/
5.	Yi/ti'		/i/	Accompany /ə'kɒmpəni/
	Yi/ti' (mmá)		/i/	Pour sb. Water continuously /pɔ:ɪ(r) s'Λm θ'ðɪ wɔ:t θ'ð(r) .../
6.	Mi/mi'		/i/	Suck /sʌk/
	Mi/mi'		/i/	To be deep /h'θu bi: dɪp/

LIST OF UKWUANI VOWELS

1. /i/ as in Ite /itè/ pot /pɔt/
2. /i/ as in ifa / ifà/ Hoe /həu/
3. /ɛ/ as in Eja /'Edʒ'æ/ Sand /sænd/
4. /e/ as in Egbe /ègbè/ Gun /gʌn/
5. /a/ as in Akai /ákàì/ Suffering /sʌfərin/

Having listed the established Ukwuanj front vowels in their order of appearance in the vowel chart, we will now examine them seriatim in order to point out their distinctive features.

Analysis of Ukwuanj Front Vowels

1. /i/ This is a close front unrounded vowel. Its position during articulation is lower than that of cardinal vowel one which is also /i/ as well as that of English vowel one /i/. This Ukwuanj vowel is + lax, + high, and + syllabic. though a front vowel, its position is almost half way between the central and front position in Ukwuanj vowel chart. It is found in ite /ite/, pot /pɔt/ and Iji /dʒi/ yam /jæm/
2. /ɪ/ this sound does not have an exact equivalent of English vowel. It is a half close front unrounded vowel. It is below the cardinal vowel No. 2 which is /i/. This vowel is + low + tense and + syllabic. /ɪ/ is found in ifa/ i`fa`/ hoe /həu/ and Ija/ i`dʒ`æ/ bait /bait/. The closest English vowel to Ukwuanj /ɪ/ is /i/ that is vowel 2, hence, Ukwuanj speakers of English approximate English /i/ to Ukwuanj /ɪ/ sufficiently.
3. /ɛ/. This is an unrounded front vowel that is between the half close and half open position in the Ukwuanj vowel chart. It is however nearer to half open position than the half close position. /ɛ/ is + lax; + low and + syllabic. This sound is found in the following Ukwuanj words. Ekpà/`ekpà/, bag /bæg/, Eka/`ekà/, hand /hænd/ and Eda /`edà/, a fall /ei/ɔ
 /

/i:/ (English vowel 1) and /ɪ/ (English vowel 2) normally identify English /i:/ (English vowel 1) and /ɪ/ (English vowel 2) with ǀkwʰani /i/ (since they are close) and the English /i:/ with ǀkwʰani /ɪ/. The above approximations will not occasion serious pronunciation errors. It will only bring about minor pronunciations mistakes like sheep/ʃip/ (by ǀkwʰani speakers of English as L₂) which may not pose a problem of intelligibility.

ii. ǀkwʰani /ɛ/ and English /e/: The vowels differ because while the English /e/ is half close, ǀkwʰani /ɛ/ is between the half close and half open position. ǀkwʰani /ɛ/ is + low while English /e/ is between + low and + high position. Usage of the above vowels will not create any difficulty as both exist in the two languages. They do not however, have exact qualities since there are differences between them

iii. ǀkwʰani /a/ and English /æ/: They differ in quality. The ǀkwʰani /a/ is lower and it is closer to the central position than the English /æ/

Again, usage of both vowels will not create any pronunciation problem for ǀkwʰani people because even if they differ in some respects, they are similar enough not to occasion any pronunciation distortion. If anything the knowledge of this sound in ǀkwʰani will facilitate the performance of ǀkwʰani L₁ speakers of English as L₂. Besides the ǀkwʰani /ɪ/ which is not in English, there is another vowel in ǀkwʰani /e/ which is not also in English. We will now examine the vowel in order to discover the possible implication of its non existence in English

iv. ǀkwʰani /e/: Though there is an English vowel /e/ with the same phonetic symbol, the two sounds stand for different vowels in the respective languages. Based on its position in the vowel chart, the

Ukwuani /e/ is a half open unrounded front vowel. Ukwuani /e/ is near cardinal vowel /e/, it is + vocalic, + voice + continuant and + low. Ukwuani speakers of English as L₂ often realize the English central vowel /ə/ as Ukwuani /e/ because of the similarity in their sounds even if they are purely different vowels. The presence of Ukwuani /e/ makes the Ukwuani speakers of English as L₂ substitute English /ə/ with Ukwuani /e/ thereby occasioning the use of a stressed vowel in the place of the weak (unstressed) English /ə/, bringing about wrong pronunciation. This is why an Ukwuani man is likely to pronounce

Potato /pəu'tətəu/

To night /təunait/

And correct/ kə'rekt/ without the usual elision in English which should make the pronunciations actually sound as:

Potato /p'tətəu/

Tonight /t'nait/ and correct /k'rekt/

Hierarchy of Difficulties

By its phonetic transcription, the Ukwuani /e/ pronounced like the English /ə/ in ago /əgəu/ could be taken for the English vowels /e/ and /ə/ by some Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂. Here, we have a maximum learning difficulty for Lado makes it clear that when one significant unit or element in the native language equates with two significant units in the foreign language, we have a maximum learning problem.(15)

Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂ will not be able to use the unstressed English vowel /ə/ appropriately. This means that they will not be able to put elision into practices.

- iii. ǀkwǀanǀ L₁ speakers of English as L₂ might not be able to differentiate English vowel [i:] and [i] as length does not feature in ǀkwǀanǀ sound system through the use of diacritics. Consequently, the appropriate usage and distribution of the above sounds may not be achieved by the ǀkwǀanǀ L₁ speakers of English as L₂.
- iv. ǀkwǀanǀ L₁ learners of English as L₂ will also experience a slight difficulty in harmonizing ǀkwǀanǀ /a/ and English /æ/ just as it will be in the articulation of the English [e] as it is not of exact quality with the ǀkwǀanǀ [ɛ]. The contrastive analysis of ǀkwǀanǀ front vowels and English front vowels reveals that ǀkwǀanǀ has five front vowels: [i], [i], [ɛ] and [a] while English has four front vowels: [i:], [i], [e] and [æ]. Both languages have front vowels [i] and [a]. The implication of the above fact is that ǀkwǀanǀ L₁ speakers of English as L₂ will have no difficulty in the use of the above two front vowels.

10. Conclusion

English has [i:] which ǀkwǀanǀ does not have but this will not pose any difficulty to an ǀkwǀanǀ L₁ speaker of English as L₂ since ǀkwǀanǀ has [i] which is almost equivalent to the English [i:]. If not for the difference in length. Substituting [i] or [i] for [i:] will only occasion a minor pronunciation mistake. [ɛ] in ǀkwǀanǀ and [e] in English are slightly different but they are almost the same with respect to their pronunciations. [e] pronounced like the English shua [ɔ], is in ǀkwǀanǀ as a front vowel but it is not in English with such phonetics features. The vowel in English that is close to the ǀkwǀanǀ [e] with respect to their sounds is the central vowel [ɔ] will only

occasion some mispronunciations but will definitely not impede communication. [ə] in English is weak but [e] in Ukwuani is not.

On the whole, the differences in the front vowels of both languages will not bring about serious difficulties for the Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂.

Besides the above findings, the front vowel phonemes of Ukwuani have been established and Ukwuani vowel chart has been drawn. It is hoped that the Ukwuani phonemes established and the vowel chart drawn in this paper will serve as useful guides for any scholar that will research further towards the improvement of Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂'s spoken English. This will be particularly so as the established Ukwuani front vowel phonemes and the chart will be very useful data in further analysis. Furthermore, that a knowledge of the differences and (possibly the similarities) between English and Ukwuani front vowels will contribute immensely to accurate speaking of both languages is not in dispute. The advocacy here is to lift Ukwuani from the state oblivion to the state of relevance by developing its orthography, phonology and encouraging its use. What is more? The area of its use is oil producing, if the language is developed, it will become possible for the people of the area to be well educated about what the government does with oil drilled from their fatherland. This will eventually enable the government to achieve its millennium development goals. This can be achieved with or without the aid of an interpreter in English language.