

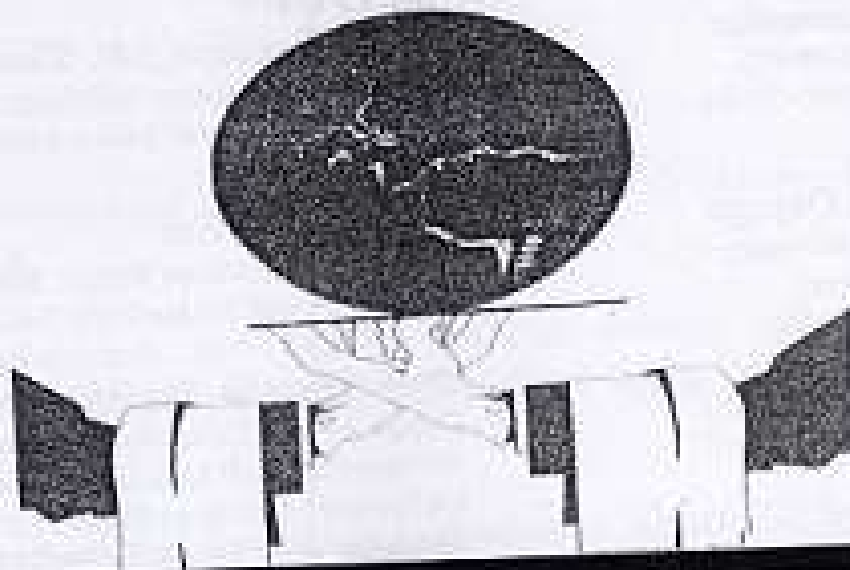
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Prof. N. Panchanathan
Annamalai University,
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Editor-in-Chief

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OBSERVED RESTRUCTURINGS OF SOME ENGLISH PHONEMES BY SOME UKWUANI L₁ SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AS L₂

HAPPY DUMBI OMENOGOR, Ph.D

*Department of Languages
University of Delta, Aghor,
Delta State.*

Abstract

This study is focused on the articulation of the vowel phonemes of English by the Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂. The general objective of the study is to find out exactly objective how the group of L₂ speakers of English in the study articulate the English vowel and to find out any non compliance with the R.P. standard of pronunciations. The objective of the study also include the finding out of the possible consequences on the spoken English of the L₂ English speakers being investigated and state the difficulties they are likely to encounter while speaking English. The research method adopted are observation of the respondents, analysis of the data, the respondents are randomly selected from different of communities of Ukwuani nation. These differences are brought about by differences in the number and distribution of phonemes in the two languages. This work among other advantages further improves the spoken English of the Ukwuani people.

Introduction

English is an international language. In fact, the most international of all languages. 'It is a member of the Indo-European family of languages called West Germanic', as Oyeleye (2003:1) recalled. Three major periods can be identified within the evolution and development of the English language: old English, middle English and modern English periods as Jowitt (2009:12) and Umera-Okeke (2009:31-33) observe.

There are three basic categories of English usage: as a native, foreign and second language. There are also circles of World Englishes. The 'inner circle', made up of the Anglo Englishes (older Englishes) which includes the U.K, the U.S.A, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The outer (extended) circle which contains the non-Anglo Englishes (NEs, New Englishes) is one of the categories. The expanding circle involves the countries that recognize the importance of English as an international language, though

they were not colonized by the members of the inner circle. English has a very high degree of global importance. The importance of the English language will therefore be examined in the following section.

It is the official language of Britain, the U.S and most parts of the common wealth countries. Osakwe (2011:9) notes that 'English is the mother-tongue of hundreds of millions of people in Britain, the U.S, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.' The importance of a language is not only determined by the number of its speakers and the size of its territory, it is also determined by the importance of its speakers. It is strongly believed among scholars that the following factors must have contributed to the growing importance of the English language.

- i. English is the unquestioned language of international business, trade and commerce.
- ii. English-speaking U.S.A emerged as the prominent country of influence and power in world affairs and
- iii. English is the dominant language of research and academic enterprise.

Osakwe (2011:10) affirms that:

English is superlatively outstanding: not by size of vocabulary (although large), or other linguistic or aesthetic criteria, but on political, economic and demographic realities.

It is the major lingua franca in Nigeria hence Osakwe (2005:12) asserts that:

Of all the items of merchandise that sailed in within the cultural cargo, the most important was the English language ... English ... became the living instrument and vehicle for conveying and preserving the cultures of both its home and host communities.

From the above facts about English, we can submit that it is of unparalleled relevance and inevitable to Ukwuanj people who are among the many linguistic groups in Nigeria. It is worthwhile then to examine Ukwuanj.

It is one of Nigeria's indigenous languages. Ukwuanj is a member of the Benue Congo family of languages, i.e. the Kwa group (Osakwe (2010:12). Williamson (1990:139) describes Ukwuanj as a language in its own right. According to her, 'Ukwuanj is a minority language which forms a cluster with Igbo and other languages.' 'Ukwuanj is also classified as a member of the Igboid languages. They include Igbo proper, Ikwerre, Ika, Izii-Ikwo-Ezza-MgboOgba and Ukwuanj...' Ukwuanj people share boundaries with the Isoko, the Urhobo, the Ika, the Igbo and the Ijaw people.

It is spoken as a mother tongue in Orogun, Delta State as well as in Ndoni, River State all the speakers understand one another, there are however, dialectal varieties indicative of the speakers' geographical locations. Ukwuanj plays some useful roles for its native speakers as it is part of their culture which is very important to mankind. This usefulness will therefore be examined in the next section.

Though a local and a relatively minority language, Ukwuanj is very important to the citizens of the Ndokwa nation. Through the language, their rich cultural heritage is preserved. It also serves as their mark of identity and distinction besides its communicative function which is highly important. With the aid of Ukwuanj language, the Ndokwa nation is able to hand down its rich cultural heritage from generation to generation as well as preserve it.

The observation made by Agbedo (2007:151) on Ukwuanj while discussing language wars in Nigeria' forms part of the related literature in it. He claims that Ukwuanj, Ika and Enuani language communities in Delta state speak dialects of Igbo language. Following Emenanjo he states that:

Nigerian languages which hitherto had regional, local or limited significance have now been either demoted for [from] the regional languages or promoted from erstwhile local language to state importance.

Agbedo substantiates the above claim by pointing out that with the creation of South Eastern region in 1967 and Cross River State in 1976, Efik became a language of wider communication (LWC). The fortune of Efik dwindled as a result of the creation of Akwalhom State in 1987 as Ibibio became the language of wider communication in the new state. Furthermore, the scholar in question states that:

Igbo lost its status as the language of wider communication (LWC) in the old Eastern region and suffered what Emenanjo termed 'linguistic balkanization or atomism since Ikwere and Echie, which are originally lects of Igbo were suddenly accorded major independent language status in Rivers State.

Similarly, Agbedo(2007:151) asserts that in Delta state:

The three lects of Igbo: Enuani, Ndokwa [Ukwuanj] and Ika were recognized as discrete languages on their own just as Okpe, Uvwie and Ovwhian lects of Urhobo were being treated as languages different from Urhobo.

From the above claims, it would appear as if Ukwuanj is actually a dialect of Igbo but this is not the fact. To start with, Williamson classifies Ukwuanj as a minor language which forms a language cluster with Igbo and other languages.

Perhaps, the submission of Emenanjo (2006:45) on the determination of what language is will end the controversy on whether Ukwuanj is a language or a dialect.

The word 'language' has indeed a very wide usage. But in a very special way, the word, 'language has a political aspect to it.

It also has religious, ethnic ... and other non linguistic features which sometimes may hold the ace to the definition of what is a language.

Emenanjo (2006:45) further states that:

'A language is a dialect with a navy, an army, an anthem, a constitution of its own, a flag and seat at the United nations.'

Shaw as Emenanjo (2006:45) recalls, sarcastically observes that:

Norwegian and Swedish are really mutually intelligible languages.

But they are now two different languages because Norway and Sweden are two different countries.

Observed Restructurings of Some English Phonemes by Some UkwuanjL₁ Speakers of English as L₂

(i) /i:/ This vowel is long, therefore, length is its most significant feature. Its quality is not very different from the Ukwuanj /i/. The main difference between the English /i:/ and the Ukwuanj /i/ is the quality of the sound.

Since Ukwuanj language has no long sounds, Ukwuanj first language speakers of English as a second language usually restructure English /i:/ as /i/. This is why they have no pronunciation difference for beat/ bi:t/ and bit/ bit/. They pronounce the two words as /bit/ which is not right.

As earlier explained, the linguistically naive Ukwuanj speakers of English as L₂ cannot differentiate between RP /i:/ and /i/. Ukwuanj sound inventory comprises /i/ and /i/ (with orthography 'i'). These two Ukwuanj vowels are differentiated by pharyngealization (±) or tenseness or tongue retraction and not by length. Some Ukwuanj speakers of English who realize that there is a phonemic between RP /i:/ and Ukwuanj /i/ often restructure the RP/i/ as Ukwuanj /i/ articulated with reduced degree of tenseness and tongue retraction while the RP /i:/ is often articulated as /i/ by the set of L₂ users of English under study.

(ii) /e/ our investigation shows that Ukwuani does not have any vowel in the exact position of the RP /e/. Ukwuani speakers of English as a second language therefore restructure the RP vowel in question to the Ukwuani vowel orthographically represented as 'e' and pronounced /ɛ/. This makes the pronunciation rather different from RP /e/ as the /ɛ/ is too open and rather close to the RP /æ/ whereas the RP /e/ is actually between the half open and half close position of the tongue.

(iii) /æ/ observations indicate that Ukwuani language does not have any vowel that has exactly the same features with RP /æ/ Ukwuani users of English as L₂ restructure RP /æ/ to an Ukwuani vowel which is written 'a' and pronounced /a/. The /a/ in Ukwuani is a front vowel any way, but it is more open and lower than the English /æ/. It is as low as the RP /a:/. This is why the typical and an average Ukwuani speaker of the English language cannot produce perfect pronunciations of the following words as his or her /a/ sound is more open than the RP /æ/. Cat /Kæ t/

Pat / P æt/ Bat/bæt/etc.

(iv) /a:/. This sound is restructured as the Ukwuani /a/ since Ukwuani language has no long vowels. This point has been made earlier. This is why a typical Ukwuani speaker of English as a second language would produce the following RP non compliant pronunciations.

RP	UE
Park/pa:k/	* /Pak/
Cart/ ka:t/	* /kat/
Dark / da:k/	* /dak/
Market/ 'ma:kit/ (Noun)	* /maket

(v) /ɔ/ or/D/: The set of L₂ users of English being studied, actually identify the above sound, with the Ukwuani /ɔ/ spelt 'o' but it is observed that they are unable to make this vowel as open as it is in RP standard. This situation will not however, occasion serious pronunciation errors.

(vi) /ɔ:/ This vowel is not in Ukwuani, Ukwuani speakers of English as L₂ restructure it to /ɔ/. This observation is given credence by Jowitt's (1991:74) when he states that.

PNE (i) and PNE (Y) appear to identify /ɔ:/ with/ɔ/, but since /ɔ/ accommodates RP/ʌ/ and RP /ɔ/, such speakers tend to neutralize the distinctions between pairs such as port-pot and caught-cut or in a series such as short – shut – shot.

Note: 'PNE(I)' in the above quotation means 'popular Nigerian English, Igbo' while 'PHN (Y)' means 'popular Nigeria English, Yoruba.

The observed restructuring of /ɔ:/ to /ɔ/ by the L₂ speaks of English in question often occasion the following mispronunciations.

RP

Walk/wɔ:k/

Fork/fɔ:k/

Court/kɔ:t/

UE

* /wɔk/

* /fɔk/

* /kɔt/

(vii) /u:/ Ukwuanj does not have the above vowel, so it is restructured as /u/ by Ukwuanj speakers of English as a second language. This has been explained under the vowel inventories of the two languages.

(viii) /ʌ/. This is a central vowel which is not found in Ukwuanj vowel inventory. Ukwuanj L₁ speakers of English as L₂, therefore, restructure it as /ɔ/ in order to communicate in English. This restructuring occasions the following non standard pronunciations by the Ukwuanjs as observed in the course of interactions with some of them.

RP

Son/sʌn/

Won /wʌn/

Month/ mʌnθ/

Imɔnt/

Monkey/ mʌŋki/

Worry/'wʌri/

Brother/'brʌðə(r)/

UE

* /sɔn/

* /wɔn/

* /mɔnki

* /wɔri/

* /brɔðə/

(ix) /ɜ:/ This is a central vowel. It is not in Ukwuanj vowel inventory as Ukwuanj has no central vowels. Consequently, the Ukwuanj people tend to restructure this vowel in various ways depending on its orthographic representations in various environments. It is restructured as /ɔ/ by the Ukwuanjs if it [ɜ:] is spelt as 'ur' or 'or'. It is also restructured /æ/ or /e/ whenever it is spelt as 'ir', 'ear' or 'er'. This is why the Ukwuanjs pronounce 'word' / wɜ:d/ as * /wɔd/. It is also observed that this sound is restructured /ua/ if it is the spelt as 'eur'. This is why the Ukwuanjs pronounce saboteur /sæbɔtʃ(r)/ as * /sæbotuæ/. Other RP non compliant pronunciations observed among the Ukwuanjs as a result of the above restructurings are shown below.

3. If /ə/ is spelt as 'o', it is restructured /o/ (Ukwuanj vowel) as observed in:

RP	UE
Polic/Pəli:s/	*/polis/
Tonight/tə'nait/	*/tonait/
Tomato/ tə'ma:tau/	*/tometo/
Purpose/ 'pɜ:pəs/	*pɜpoz/

4. /ə/ is also pronounced /u/ by the average Ukwuanj people if it is spelt as 'o' as noticed in :

RP	UE
Tomorrow/tə'mɔ:rəu/	*/tumoro/

5. /ə/ is also observed to be restructured /e/ (Ukwuanj vowel) by the Ukwuanj Li speakers of English as L₂ as shown below.

RP	UE
Ago/ə'gəu/	*/ego/
again/ə'gen/	* /egen/
Against/ ə'genst/	*/egenst/

The above observations on the restructuring of /ə/ (the schwa or neutral vowel) by the average Ukwuanj speakers of English as L₂ are given credence to by the observations of Adetugbo (2009:179-199) and Awonusi (2009:95) on the restructuring of the same vowel by other groups of Nigerian L₂ speakers of English.

(xi) /ei/: This vowel is non-existent in Ukwuanj since it has no diphthongs. Field experience indicates that Ukwuanj speakers of English as a second language restructure /ei/ as shown below.

(i) /ei/ is restructured as the Ukwuanj /e/ if it is spelt as 'a' as observed in the following words.

RP	UE
Cater/'keitə /	/Keta/
Vacant/'veikənt/	*Vekant/or *Vakant/
Baby/'beibi/	*/bebī/
Lady/'leidi/	*/ledi/

The vowel in question is also restructured '/æ/' if spelt as 'a' as observed in available.

RP Available /ə'veiləbl/	UE */avalebul/
-----------------------------	-------------------

In fact, /ei/ is variously restructured by the L₂ speakers of English under study as shown below

RP Capable /'keipəbl/ Cray fish /'kreifɪʃ/ Parastatal /pærə'steɪtl/ Wait /weɪt/ Lay /lei/	UE */kapebul/ */kerfiʃ/ */parastatai/ */wet/ */le/ etc.
--	--

The inability of the Ukwuanis to combine the /e/ and /i/ in a word could be traced to what they are already used to in their language concerning the principles of vowel harmony. Under the principles of vowel harmony in Ukwuanis, /i/ and /e/ (which is similar in pronunciation to the English /e/) cannot co-occur since /i/ is a set 1 vowel. This fact is purely a case of negative interference of L₁ on the target language i.e L₂ in the spoken English of the average Ukwuanipeople.

(xii) /əu/: Ukwuanij does not have this vowel. It is therefore restructured as Ukwuanij /o/ and /u/ as this researcher observed in the following examples.

RP Won't /wəʊnt/ Focus /'fəʊkəs/ Local /'ləʊkl/ Poser /'pəʊzə(r)/ Foe /fəʊ/	UE */wunt/ */fokəs/ */poza/ */lokoæ/ */fo/ etc
--	---

(xiii) /aɪ/ This diphthong hardly occasions any pronunciation error among the average Ukwuanij speakers of English. This is because, the first element of this diphthong, which is /a/ only differs a little in quality from the Ukwuanij /a/. Consequently, the L₂ speakers of English in question are able to pronounce almost correctly, the following English words.

RP High /haɪ/ Tie /taɪ/	UE /hai/ tai etc
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(xiv) /aʊ/ This diphthong does not present any difficulty to the Ukwuanis as the Ukwuanij /æ/ and /ʊ/ can be combined to arrive at /aʊ/. The slight problem that might be observed is that the average Ukwuanij L₁ speakers of English may pronounce the English /aʊ/ as individual monothongs whereas it is one sound pronounced in a gradual stretch. This rather wrong pronunciation of this

diphthong by the Ukwuanjs can however, occasion some imperfect pronunciations as shown below.

RP
Plough/plau/
Foul/faul/

UE
*/plɔf/
*/faul/

(xv) /ɔi/: This diphthong is not restructured by the Ukwuanjs since they are able to pronounce it fairly correctly. The only minor problem they may encounter is that they are not able to elongate the first element /ɔ/ and shorten the second element /i/ as is required by a standard pronunciation of English diphthongs.

(xvi) /iɔ/: This diphthong is restructured by the Ukwuanjs in various forms as shown below.

It is restructured as /iɛ/, that is a combination of English vowel 2 and Ukwuanj vowel 4 i.e. /ɛ/ if it is spelt as 'eer' 'ear', 'eir', 'ere', 'ier' and 'ea' as illustrated in the following example.

RP
Beer/biɔ/
Tear/tiɔ (noun)
Weird /wiɔd/
Here/hiɔ/
Fierce/fiɔs/
Idea/ai'diɔ/

UE
*/biɛ/
*/tiɛ/
*/wiɛd/
*/hiɛ/
*/fiɛs/
*/aidiɛ/

It is also restructured /iæ/ if it is spelt 'ia' as observed below

RP
Gloria/'glɔ:riɔ/

It is restructured /io/, that is, a combination of English vowel 2 and Ukwuanj vowel 7 as can be understood from the following example.

RP
Theory/'θiɔri/

It is also restructured /i/ if it is spelt as 'e' as observed below:

RP
Hero/'hiɔrɔu/

UE
*/glɔriæ/

UE
*/tiori/

UE
*/hiɔ/

(xvii) /eɔ/: The restructurings observed in the above diphthong are as follows. If it is spelt: 'are', 'air', 'eir' and 'ere', it is restructured by Ukwuanj speakers of

English as L₂ as: /ɛ/, that is Ukwuanj vowel 4. The following examples illustrate the above observation.

RP	UE
Share/ʃeɪ/	*/ʃɛ/
Chair /tʃeɪ/	*/tʃɛ/
Heir/eɪ/	*/hɛ/
There/dɛə/	*/dɛ/

/eɪ/ is also restructured /ɛ/ if it is spelt 'ear' as shown below

RP	UE
Wear/weɪ/	*/wɛ/

/uɔ/: The observed restructurings with respect to this diphthong are:

(xviii) /uɔ/ is pronounced as /ɔ / by the average Ukwuanj L₂ speakers of English if it is spelt: 'ou', 'our', 'oor' and 'ure'. The following examples illustrate the substandard pronunciations that arise from the restructurings.

RP	UE
Tourist/'tuɔrist/	*/tɔrist/
Tour/tuɔ/	*/tɔ/
Cure/'kjɔ/	*/k/jɔ/
Poor/'puɔ/	*/pɔ/

It is also restructured 'u' if it is spelt 'u' and 'ue' as shown below

RP	UE
Plural/'p luɔrɔl/	*/plura/

If /uɔ/ is spelt 'ua', the average Ukwuanj L₁ speakers of English as L₂ often pronounce it as /a/ as shown below.

RP	UE
Menstrual/'menstruɔl/	*/menstræ/

If /uɔ/ is spelt 'ur', it is pronounced /u/ eg

RP	UE
Curious/'kjuɔriɔs/	*/kuriɔs/

Triphthongs

1. /eɪ/: The above triphthong is restructured /ajɔ/, i.e a combination of /a/, /j/ and Ukwuanj/o/, if it is spelt as 'aye' as shown below

RP	UE
Bayonet/'beiɔnɔt/	*/bajonet/

This triphthong is also pronounced as /ejæ/, i.e, a combination of Ukwuanj/e/ (vowel 3), the consonant /j/ and /æ/ if it is spelt 'aye' as shown below.

RP

Payet/'peið/

UE

*/peja/

2. /əuð/: The above triphthong is pronounced by the Ukwuanis as /uæ/ if it is spelt 'oa'. Eg

RP

Boa/'bəuð/

UE

*/bua/

It is also pronounced as /owæ/, i.e. a combination of the Ukwuanj/o/, the consonant /w/ and /æ/. If it is spelt 'owe'. E.g

RP

Lower/'ləuð/

UE

*/lowæ/

3. /aið/: If the above triphthong is spelt 'ighe', 'ire', 'yre', 'oi' 'ier' and 'uyer' it is restructured or pronounced '/æjæ/' by the average UkwuanjL₁ speakers of English as a second language as shown below.

RP

Highr/'haið/

UE

Fire/'faið/

*/haja/

Tyre/'taið/

*/faja/

Choir/'kwaið/

*/taja/

Pliers/'plaiðz/

*/kwaja/

Buyer/'baiðz/

*/plajas/

*/bajas/

It is also restructured '/æjæ/' if spelt 'ie' Eg.

RP

Fiery/'faiðri/

UE

It is further pronounced '/æye/' if spelt 'ue' eg.

*/fajari/

RP

Quiet/'kwaið/

UE

*/kajet/

4. /auð/: This sound is usually spelt 'ou' and 'owe'. It is normally pronounced by the Ukwuanisas /æwæ/. This observation of UkwuanjEnglish pronunciation is shown below.

RP

Hour/'auð/(r)/

UE

Power /pauð/(r)/

*/awa/

*/pawa/

5. /ɔið/: This triphthong is spelt 'oya', 'oye' and 'uoya'. The Ukwuanis as observed pronounce this triphthong '/oyæ/' if it is spelt 'oya' and 'uoya' E.g.

RP

Loyal/'ɔið/

UE

Buoyant/'bɔiðnt/

*/loja/

*/bojant/

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