

A CONTRASTIVE INQUIRY OF THE ENGLISH AND UKWUANI VOWEL

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Abstract

In this study, the spoken English of some Ukwuani native speakers of English as second language was observed. Our choice of phonological model of analysis is the sound patterns of English (SPE) by Chomsky and Halle (1968). In this model, the articulatory features are viewed as basically binary. Among the issues discussed, in this model are phonetic representation and phonetic features. Similarly, our spoken model for English is the Received Pronunciation (RP) while our spoken model for Ukwuani is the pure Ukwuani spoken in communities in the centre of Ndokwa nation such as Utagba-ogbe. Our transcription model is that devised by Gimson (1994), which tallies with the one provided by IPA. The findings in this study include but are not limited to the following. English has more vowels than Ukwuani, some rules of English phonology are alien to Ukwuani speakers of English as second language. The spoken English of Ukwuani people impedes international intelligibility.

Keywords: Contrastive, Linguistics, Phonology, Analysis and Interference

Introduction

English and Ukwuani

English is an international language. '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 unparallel relevance and inevitable to Ụkwụ̀nị people who are among the many linguistic groups in Nigeria. It is worthwhile then to examine Ụkwụ̀nị.

It is one of Nigeria’s indigenous languages. Ụkwụ̀nị is a member of the Benue Congo family of languages, i.e. the Kwa group (Osakwe (2010:12). Williamson (1990:139) describes Ụkwụ̀nị as a language in its own right. According to her, ‘Ụkwụ̀nị is a minority language which forms a cluster with Igbo and other languages. Ụkwụ̀nị is also classified as a member of the Igboid languages. They include Igbo proper, Ikwerre, Ika and Izii-Ikwo-Ezza-Mgbo Ogba ...’ Ụkwụ̀nị 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. The language is, to a large extent, mutually intelligible to all the speakers.

Among these speakers, there are however, dialectical varieties indicative of the speakers' geographical locations.

Ukwuani 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, Ukwuani 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 Ukwuani 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 Ukwuani while discussing language wars in Nigeria' forms part of the related literature in it. He claims that Ukwuani, 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 Akwa Ibom 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 [Ukwuani] and Ika were recognized as discrete languages on their own just as Okpe, Uvwieand Ovwhianlects of Urhobo were being treated as languages different from Urhobo.

From the above claims, it would appear as if Ukwuani is actually a dialect of Igbo but this is not the fact. To start with, Williamson classifies Ukwuani 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 Ukwuani 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.

1. The Nature of Contrastive Inquiry

‘Contrastive’ is derived from ‘contrast’, which Crystal (2008:112) defines as ‘Any formal difference that helps to distinguish meaning in a language’. While contrasting two languages, the areas of diversity at a particular level of language are pinpointed and studied as the ones likely to pose difficulty in the form of interference (negative transfer) in foreign languages learning or usage.

Contrastive Linguistics Process

This simply refers to the procedure to be followed during contrastive analysis as a linguistic enterprise For Lado (1957:12-13), contrasting the sound systems of two languages involves linguistic analysis of the sound systems, contrasting and comparing them as well as describing the troublesome contrasts Carl James (1980:74) however, observes that ‘there are four steps involved in executing a C A of the sound systems of two languages.’ As the above authority stipulates, the four steps are:

1 & 2: taking inventories of the phonemes of L₁ and L₂

3: Stating the allophones of each phoneme of L₁ and L₂ (where they exist)

4: Stating the distributional restrictions on the allophones and phonemes of L₁ and L₂.

Gotz (1974) adds a fifth step: ‘a statement of the frequency of such phonemic contrast within L₁ and L₂. No two different contrastive analyses will have an exact procedure as the topics may not be exactly the same. The relevant steps as stated by the above scholars will be applied in this study to the extent that they agree with the title of this study.

Contributions to Contrastive Linguistics

Scholars that contributed to the development of contrastive linguistics and eventually played one role or the other in its history include Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1956) who wrote books on the linguistic integration of immigrants to the USA.

The books in question gave stimulation to the publication of Lado's works in (1957, (1961), (1964) and (1968). Among other contributions, Lado makes an explanation on the procedure to be followed in a contrastive analysis henceforth 'C A'. The said explanation has been given in an earlier part of this study. The publication of Lado's work in 1957 marks the real beginning of modern 'C A'. Other scholars are Nickel (1971) where he highlights how Contrastive linguistics enhances foreign language teaching in a paper with a title: 'Contrastive linguistics and foreign language teaching', he refutes all the arguments put up against 'C A' by its critics when he critically examines some recurrent strictures on the logical foundation of 'C A' and hence its continued practice in language teaching. Lastly, James (1980:3) who further contributes towards C A as he points out that:

C A is a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing ...contrastive, not comparative two valued typologies...

The present researcher agrees completely with James on the above explanation as this work is mainly interested in identifying the differences between the sound patterns of the languages concerned.

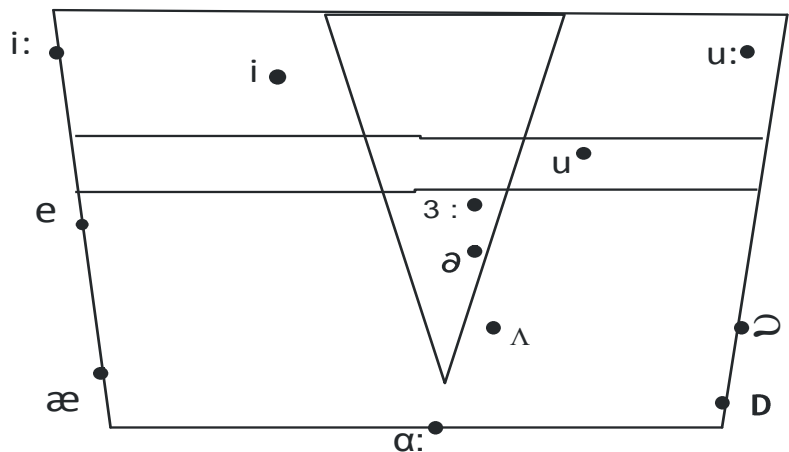
Related Literature on English

The literature found here include Tomori (1967) who contrasts British written English with that of Nigerian grammar school pupils, Afolayan (1968) examines the linguistic problem of Yoruba learners and users. Banjo (1969), in this study, points out that while contrasting English and Yoruba, there will be some theoretical difficulties that are likely to confront the user of English as L₂. Some of these problems as he notes are that an item in Yoruba may seem as equivalent to two items or more in English. Another work is Tiffen (1969). This work presents some guides to the teaching of English as a second language based on the findings of contrastive linguistics. Uhunmwangho and Anyanwu (1999) is another contribution. This work carries out a contrastive analysis of the vocalic systems of Edo (Bini) and English. It pinpoints some contrasts in the vocalic systems of the two languages.

English Pure Vowels (Monthongs)

S/NOS.	Phonemes	Examples of words they Appear In	Transcriptions
1	[i:]	Se <u>at</u>	/ si: t /
2	[I]	S <u>i</u> t	/ slt /
3	[e]	S <u>e</u> t	/set/
4	[æ]	C <u>a</u> t	/ kæt /
5	[a:]	P <u>a</u> t	/ pa:t /
6	[ɔ] or [D]	C <u>o</u> t	/ k ɔ t /
7	[ɔ]	S <u>p</u> ort	/ spɔt /
8	[u]	C <u>oo</u> k	/ kuk /
9	[u:]	F <u>ru</u> it	/ fru: t /
10	[^]	L <u>o</u> ve	/ l ^ v /
11	[ɜ:]	Ch <u>ur</u> ch	/ tʃɜ: tʃ /
12	[ə]	A <u>g</u> o	/ ə'gəʊ /

Based on the above pure vowels, the English pure vowel chart is hereby presented as follows:

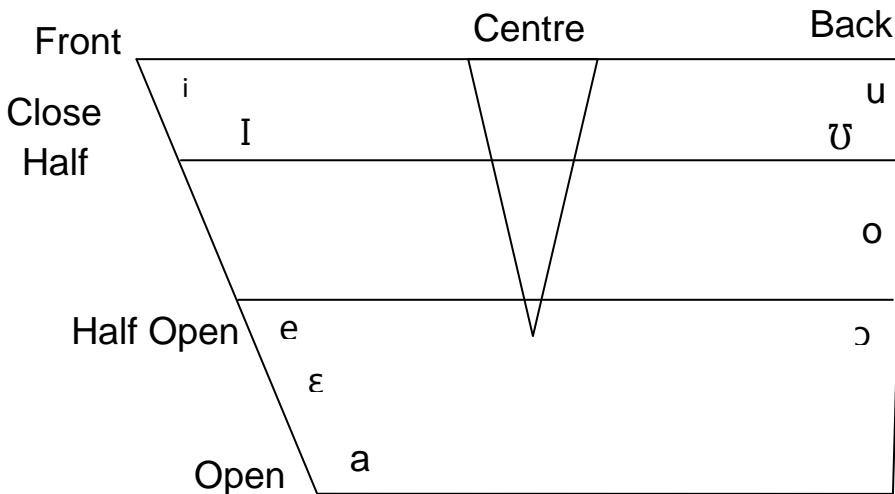


English Pure Vowel Chart
 Figure 4.2 Source: Christophersen (1956:37)

Ukwuani Vowels

- i. [i] as in ite /i`te`/ ‘pot’
- ii. [I] as in igbanaki /i`Bænæki/ ‘trick’
- iii. [e] as in ego /e`g`o/ ‘Money’
- iv. [ε] as in egu /ε`g`u/ ‘Hunger’
- v. [a] as in Akai / æ`ka`i/ ‘suffering
- vi. [ɔ] as in ogo/ɔ`gɔ`/ ‘Bottle’
- vii. [o] as in ogo /o`g`o/ ‘Farm’
- viii. [ʊ] as in ʊta /ʊ`t`a. ‘Bow
- ix. [u] as in Ugu /ùgú` `Hill’

Based on the above Ukwuani vowel phonemes, the Ukwuani vowel chart is drawn as follows.



Contrastive Analyses

Phoneme Inventories: An examination of the phoneme inventories of English and Ukwuani indicates that there are differences in them.

English has twenty five (25) vowels while Ukwuani has only nine (9). This means that English has many vowels which Ukwuani does not have. English has monophthongs (pure vowels), diphthongs and triphthongs while Ukwuani has only monophthongs. Another area of difference is that among the monophthongs of English are central vowels and long vowels which are non-existent in Ukwuani. While the vowels in

Ukwuani are discrete and distinct, there is normally a relationship between a short vowel and a long vowel in English. There is a vocalic difference between English and Ukwuani. That is, there are differences in the vowel inventories of English and Ukwuani. This is why an Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ would find it difficult to distinguish between the short /i/ and the long /i:/ since there are no long vowels in Ukwuani.

Moreover, the Ukwuani learner or speaker of English finds it very difficult to pronounce the central vowels in English correctly since they (the central vowels) are non-existent in Ukwuani. This relevant information on the differences in the quantity and quality of short, long and central vowels in English is necessary for the Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ if he is to pronounce English words correctly. Even the obviously identical vowels in English are not pronounced the same way always since their pronunciation is often determined by the phonological environments in which they occur. For instance, the /i:/ in *bead* /bi:d/ and *beat* /bi:t/ are not equal in length. It is a bit longer in 'bead' than in 'beat' because in the former word /i:/ is followed by /d/, a voiced consonant whereas in the latter word, it is followed by /t/, a voiceless consonant. Christopherson's observation, while commenting on the way in which neighbouring sounds in a word will sometimes affect each other supports our position.

A long vowel is not quite so long when it is followed by a voiceless consonant as when it is followed by a voiced one or no consonant at all. Christopherson (1956:40).

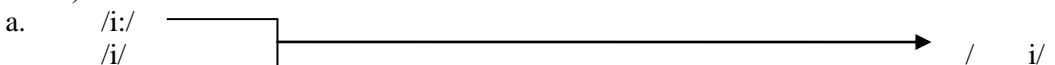
The Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ is ignorant of the above phonological rule and therefore cannot apply it. This ignorance definitely results in incorrect pronunciations of English words by the average Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂. The diagrams below display how the average Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ approximates and uses the resources of Ukwuani language to pronounce English words. These approximations inevitably result in the production of spoken English which differs from the R.P standard and consequently impedes international intelligibility.

RP (Received Pronunciation)

Ukwuani English

(Henceforth

'U.E')



Following the above approximation, the deviant pronunciations below are observed among Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂.

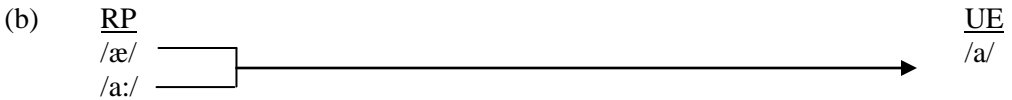
<u>RP</u>	<u>U.E</u>
Seat / si:t/	*/sit/
Meat / mi:t/	*/mit/

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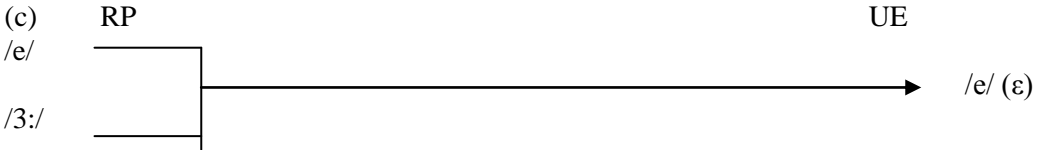
Steal/sti:l/

*/stil/

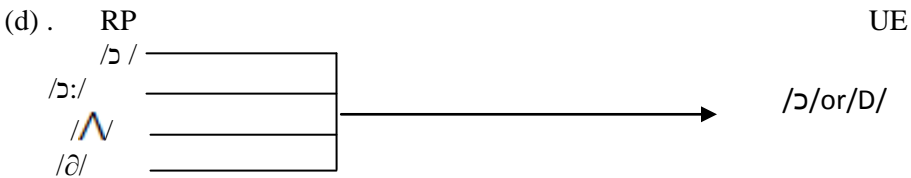
For the set of L₂ speakers of English in question, there is no pronunciation difference between seat and sit as they pronounce both words */sit/.



From the above approximation, it is observed that Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂ cannot differentiate between the above R.P phonemes. This is why they pronounce cart/ka:t/ as kæt/ and cat/kæt./ as /kæt/. For them, there is no pronunciation difference between the words that is, ‘cart’ and ‘cat’ which is not true according to R.P standard.



As shown above, the L₂ users of English in question are not able to differentiate between the long central vowels /3:/ and the short front vowel /e/. A linguistically uninformed Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ would pronounce ‘bird’ and ‘bed’ as /bed/ whereas in RP standard, bird is pronounced /b3:d/ while ‘bed’ is /bed/. Similarly, an average Ukwuani L₁ speaker of English as L₂ would pronounce ‘death’ and ‘dearth’; /det/ whereas according to R.P English, the appropriate pronunciations are ‘dearth’/d3:θ/ and ‘death’ /deθ/

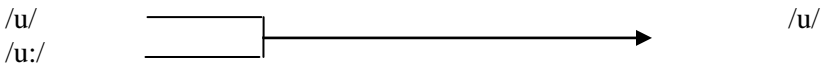


A careful examination of the spoken English of the average Ukwuani L₁ users or speakers of English as L₂ indicates that the above monothongs are collapsed into the monothong /ɔ/ or /D/. These approximations obviously give rise to some non-standard pronunciations of English words by the set of L₂ speakers of English in question as indicated below.

- | | RP | | UE |
|------|------------------------|--|-------------|
| i. | Sports/spɔ:ts/ | | */spɔts/ |
| ii. | Love /lʌv/ | | */lɔv/ |
| iii. | Visitor/'vɪzɪtɔ/ | | */'vɪsɪtɔ/ |
| iv. | rotcudnoC\k kɒn'dʌktɔ/ | | */kɔndɔktɔ/ |

It is further observed that the approximation of /ð/ as /ɔ/ is dependent on its phonological environment. The set of L₂ users of English under investigation also approximates /ð/ as /æ/ in other words as shown below.

RP	UE
Sister/ 'sistð/	* /sista/
Teacher /'ti:tð /	*/ titʃa/
Mother/'mʌ ð ð /	/mɔda/
(e) RP	UE



An observation of the ʁkwʁnɨ L₁ speakers of English as L₂ shows that they collapse /u/ and /u:/ into /u/.

Consequently, the following non RP standard pronunciations are observed among them.

RP	UE
Pool /pu:l/	* /pul/
Fool/ fu:l/	* /ful/
Food/fu:d/	* fud/

The set of L₂ speakers of English are blind to the fact that there is a difference between the short back vowel /u/ and the long back vowel /u:/. This is why they pronounce full /ful/ and fool/. fu:l/ in the same manner as /ful/. Similarly, they are not able to differentiate between the pronunciations of ‘pool’ / pu:l/ and pull/pul/. This is caused by the fact that the concept of long vowels is non-existent in ʁkwʁnɨ vowel system.

Findings

- a. ʁkwʁnɨ L₁ speakers of English as L₂ are ignorant of the phonological rule which stipulates that a long vowel is not quite so long when it is followed by voiceless consonant as when it is followed by a voiced consonant.
- b. The ʁkwʁnɨ language does not have the concept of long vowels.
- c. ʁkwʁnɨ language does not have any central vowels and so they are not able to pronounce most words where any central vowel appears correctly. They approximate any central vowel and end up pronouncing wrongly.
- d. The spoken ʁkwʁnɨ English impedes international intelligibility

Conclusion

From the findings in this study the spoken English of the ʁkwʁnɨ L₁ speaker of English as L₂ leaves much to be desire as they are not likely to articulate words such as seat, cut, love, teacher, visitor etc. correctly as the study has shown. This is so since some vowels in English are non existent in ʁkwʁnɨ.

Recommendation

This type of linguistic inquiry should be carried between English and other Nigerian languages as the L₁ speakers of such indigenous languages may have the problems that the Ukwuani L₁ speakers have. This way their spoken English will improve. Most importantly, any language teacher, instructor or lecturer handling the set of L₂ users of English in this study should concentrate on the English central vowels and the rules guiding pronunciation of long and short vowels among other issues for effective teaching and learning to occur.

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The author should expunge irrelevances noted/ dwell on the topic that is being examined. Ensure that personal sentiment does not becloud his judgement. The study is not on the Igbo and Ukwani languages. Such issues can be mentioned in passing.