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

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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 Ụkwụanị people who are among the many linguistic groups in Nigeria. It is worthwhile then to examine Ụkwụanị.

It is one of Nigeria’s indigenous languages. Ụkwụanị is a member of the Benue Congo family of languages, i.e. the Kwa group (Osakwe (2010:12). Williamson (1990:139) describes Ụkwụanị as a language in its own right. According to her, ‘Ụkwụanị is a minority language which forms a cluster with Igbo and other languages.’ ‘Ụkwụanị is also classified as a member of the Igboid languages. They include Igbo proper, Ikwerre, Ika, Izii-Ikwo-Ezza-MgboOgba and Ụkwụanị...’ Ụkwụanị 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, 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 AkwaIbom 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, UvwieandOvwhianlects of Urhobo were being treated as languages different from Urhobo.

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

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

Since Ụkwụanị language has no long sounds, Ụkwụanị 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 naïve Ụkwụanị speakers of English as L₂ cannot differentiate between RP /i:/ and /i/. Ụkwụanị sound inventory comprises /i/ and /I/ (with orthography ‘i’). These two Ụkwụanị vowels are differentiated by pharyngealization (±) or tenseness or tongue retraction and not by length. Some Ụkwụanị speakers of English who realize that there is a phonemic between RP /i:/ and Ụkwụanị /i/ often restructure the RP/i/ as Ụkwụanị /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

Park/pa:k/

Cart/ ka:t/

Dark / da:kl

Market/ ‘ma:kit/ (Noun)

UE

* /Pak/

*/kat/

*/dak/

* /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 /ɜ:/ to /ɛ/ by the L₂ speaks of English in question often occasion the following mispronunciations.

RP	UE
Walk/wɜ:k/	* /wɛk/
Fork/fɜ: k/	* /fɛk/
Court/kɜ:t/	*/ kɛt/

(vii) /u:/ Ụkwụanị does not have the above vowel, so it is restructured as /u/ by Ụkwụanị 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 Ụkwụanị vowel inventory. Ụkwụanị L₁ speakers of English as L₂, therefore, restructure it as /ɛ/ in order to communicate in English. This restructuring occasions the following non standard pronunciations by the Ụkwụanịs as observed in the course of interactions with some of them.

RP	UE
Son/sʌn/	*/sɛn/
Won /wʌn/	*/wɛn/
Month/ mʌnθ/	*
Imɛnt/	
Monkey/ mʌ ʒki/	*/mɛnki
Worry/’w ʌri/	* /wɛri/
Brother/’brʌdθ (r)	*/broɛda/

(ix) /ɜ:/ This is a central vowel. It is not in Ụkwụanị vowel inventory as Ụkwụanị has no central vowels. Consequently, the Ụkwụanị people tend to restructure this vowel in various ways depending on its orthographic representations in various environments. It is restructured as /ɛ/ by the Ụkwụanịs 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 Ụkwụanịs pronounce ‘word’ / wɜ:d/ as * /wɛd/. It is also observed that this sound is restructured /ua/ if it is the spelt as ‘eur’. This is why the Ụkwụanịs pronounce saboteur /sæbɔtɜ(r)/ as */sæbotuæ/. Other RP non compliant pronunciations observed among the Ukwuanis as a result of the above restructurings are shown below.

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RP	UE
Sir/sɜ:(r)/	*/sa/
Earth/ɜ:θ/	*/et/
Church/tʃɜ:tʃ/	*/tʃɪtʃ/
Worm /Wɜ:m/	*/wɪm/

(x) /ə/: This is a central vowel which is not in the inventory of Ukwuani vowels. Besides the above fact, it is also a weak vowel which is never found in any stressed syllable in English language. It is called ‘schwa’ (shua). The Ukwuani people find it very difficult to use this vowel.

To begin with, Ukwuani is a tone language which does not use stress. Consequently, the concepts of stressed syllables and ‘unstressed syllables’ are not known by the typical and linguistically naive Ukwuani speakers of English as L₂. Consequently, they cannot manage stress. This problem will be addressed in detail in another section of this study. Since Ukwuani language lacks this sound, Ukwuani speakers of English as a second language restructure it in order to use the resources of their language to communicate in English. This restructuring comes in various forms, depending on the phonological environment and the orthography of the English word concerned. Such restructurings are explained in what follows:

1. If /ə/ is spelt as ‘o’, ‘ur’ ‘or’ or ‘ure’, it is restructured i.e, pronounced as /ɔ/. Examples are given below.

(Professor/prə,fɔ:sə/	*/prɔfesɔ/
Pursue/pə'sju:/	*/pɪju/
Doctor/'dɔktə/	*/dɔktɔ/
Lecture/'Lektʃə/	*/letʃɔ/
Victor/'viktə/	*/Vitɔ/

2. If /ə/ is spelt ‘er’ or ‘a’, it is restructured or pronounced as /æ/ by the average Ukwuani speakers of English L₂ e.g

RP	UE
Teacher/'ti:tʃə/	*/titʃa/
Enter/'entə/	*/enta/
Paper/'peipə/	*/pepa/
Lecturer/'lektʃərə/	*/letʃɪrɔ/
Journalist/'dʒɜ:nəlɪst/	*/dʒɪnəlɪst/

See appendice C₉ & C₁₀

3. If /ə/ is spelt as ‘o’, it is restructured /o/ (Ukwuani vowel) as observed in:

RP	UE
Polic/PƏli:s/	*/polis/
Tonight/tə'nait/	*tonait/
Tomato/ tə'ma:tau/	*/tometo/
Purpose/'pɜ:pəʊs/	*pɔpoz/

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

RP	UE
Tomorrow/tə'mɔru/	*/tumoro/

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

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

The above observations on the restructuring of /ə/ (the schwa or neutral vowel) by the average Ukwuani 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 Ukwuani since it has no diphthongs. Field experience indicates that Ukwuani speakers of English as a second language restructure /ei/ as shown below.

(i) /ei/ is restructured as the Ukwuani /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/	*/bebi/
Lady/'leidi/	*/ledi/

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

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RP	UE
Available/ð'veilðbl	*/avalebul/

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

RP	UE
Capable/'keipðbl/	*/kapebul
Cray fish/'kreifiʃ/	*/kerfiʃ/
Parastatal /pærð'steitl	*/parastata/
Wait /weit/	*/wet/
Lay /lei/	*/le/etc.

The inability of the Ukwuani 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 Ukwuani, /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 Ukwuani people.

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

RP	UE
Won't /wðunt/	*/wunt/
Focus/'fðukðs	*/fokɔs/
Local/'lðukl/	*/poza/
Poser/'pðuzð(r)/	*/lokoæ/
Foe/fðu/	*/fo/ etc

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

RP	UE
High /hai/	/hai/
Tie/tai/	tai etc

(xiv) /au/ This diphthong does not present any difficulty to the Ukwuani as the Ukwuani /æ/ and /ʊ/ can be combined to arrive at /au/. The slight problem that might be observed is that the average Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English may pronounce the English /au/ as individual monothongs whereas it is one sound pronounced in a gradual stretch. This rather wrong pronunciation of this

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

RP	UE
Plough/plau/	*/plɔf/
Foul/faul/	*/faul/

(xv) /ɔi/: This diphthong is not restructured by the ʁkwʁaniş 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) /iə/ This diphthong is restructured by the ʁkwʁaniş in various forms as shown below.

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

RP	UE
Beer/biə/	*/biɛ/
Tear/tiə (noun)	* /tiɛ/
Weird /wiəd/	* /wiɛd/
Here/hiə/	* /hiɛ/
Fierce/fiəz/	* /fiɛz/
Idea/ ai'diə/	* /aidiɛ/

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

RP	UE
Gloria/ˈglɔ:riə/	*/gloriæ/

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

RP	UE
Theory/'θiəri /	*/tiori/

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

RP	UE
Hero/'hiərə/	*/hiro/

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

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

RP	UE
Share/ʃeɪ/	*/ʃɛ/
Chair /tʃeɪ/	*/tʃɛ/
Heir/eɪ/	*/hɛ/
There/d ^h eɪ/	*/dɛ/

/eɪ/ is also restructured /iɛ/ if it is spelt ‘ear’ as shown below

RP	UE
Wear/weɪ/	*/wiɛ/

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

(xviii) /uɪ/ is pronounced as /ɔ / by the average Ukwuani 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/’tuɪrɪst/	*/tɔrɪst/
Tour/tuɪ/	*/tɔ/
Cure/kjuɪ/	*/k/jɔ/
Poor/puɪ/	*/pɔ/

It is also restructured ‘/u/’ if it is spelt ‘u’ and ‘ue’ as shown below

RP	UE
Plural/’p luɪrəl/	*/plura/

If /uɪ/ is spelt ‘ua’, the average Ukwuani L₁ speakers of English as L₂ often pronounce it as /a/ as shown below.

RP	UE
Menstrual/’menstruəl/	*/menstræ/

If /uɪ/ is spelt ‘ur’, it is pronounced /u/ eg

RP	UE
Curious/’kjurɪəs/	*/kuriɔs/

Triphthongs

1. /eiɪ/: The above triphthong is restructured /ajo/, i.e a combination of /a/, /j/ and Ukwuani/o/, if it is spelt as ‘ayo’ as shown below

RP	UE
Bayonet/’beiɪnɪt/	*/bajonet/

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

RP	UE
Payer/'peið/	*/'peja/
2. /ðuð/: The above triphthong is pronounced by the Ụkwụanịs as /uæ/ if it is spelt 'oa'. Eg	
RP	UE
Boa/'bðuð/	*/'bua/
It is also pronounced as /owæ/, i.e. a combination of the Ụkwụanị/o/ , the consonant /w/ and /æ/. If it is spelt 'owe'. E.g	
RP	UE
Lower/'lðuð	*/'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 ỤkwụanịL ₁ speakers of English as a second language as shown below.	
RP	UE
Highr/'haið/	*/'haja/
Fire/'faið/	*/'faja/
Tyre/'taið/	*/'taja/
Choir/'kwaið/	*/'kwaja/
Pliers/'plaiðz/	*/'plajas/
Buyer/'baiðz/	*/'bajas/
It is also restructured '/æjæ/' if spelt 'i.e' Eg.	
RP	UE
Fiery/'faiðri/	*/'fajari/
It is further pronounced '/æye/' if spelt 'uie' eg.	
RP	UE
Quiet/'kwaiðt/	*/'kajet/
4. /auð/: This sound is usually spelt 'ou' and 'owe'. It is normally pronounced by the Ụkwụanịsas /æwæ/. This observation of ỤkwụanịEnglish pronunciation is shown below.	
RP	UE
Hour /'auð/(r)/	*/'awa/
Power /'pauð/(r)/	*/'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	UE
Loyal/'lɔiðl/	*/'loja/
Buoyant/'bɔiðnt/	*/'bojant/

/ɔið/ is pronounced as /ɔjæ/ if it is spelt as ‘oye’. Eg

RP

UE

Employer/im'plɔið /

*/emplɔja/

/u/, which is English vowel 8 is not normally restructured by the Ukwuani speakers of English as L₂, it does not occasion pronunciation errors by the Ukwuanis, hence it was not listed and discussed along with other English vowels discussed above.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper, it has been observed that the Ukwuani L1 speakers of English as L2 produce a lot of non R.P compliant pronunciations following the fact that there are differences in their phoneme inventory and that of English. Besides, there are a number of rules of phonology of English that are alien to them. To bring this situation to normal the set of L2 speakers of English under investigation are to be exposed to the principles of English phonology in question as well as the R.P standard pronunciation.

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