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The Phonological Appraisal of Kanuri Speakers of English

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ABSTRACT

The English language spoken in Nigeria can be identified with many faulty realizations, as a result of the diverse multilingual, sociolinguistic and phonological influences on the language. The aim of this paper is to determine the phonological collision between Kanuri language (as L1/MT) and English language (as L2/TL) that are noticeable in the area of phonology and some other social causes. The paper attempts a comparative analysis of English and Kanuri language's phonetics symbols in order to identify the English phonemes that are absent and difficult to pronounce by the native Kanuri. A reading test or pronunciation drills were designed for randomly selected Kanuri speakers of English, so as to get the percentage of phonemes that constitute problems. However, it has been observed by this research that, a second language learner of English may not have native-like dexterity in English pronunciation. Thus, some recommendations were given to correct the learner's pronunciation errors to have near native speaker's proficiency in spoken English.

Keywords: Phonology, language acquisition, language learning, mother tongue (MT), target language (TL).

1. Introduction

1.1 English language

In its origin is the native or mother tongue of the people of Britain and USA. Like any other language, a distinct feature of the English language is its varieties. These include; spoken, written, social, regional, professional and stylistic varieties. For instance, in Britain, English spoken in Northern Ireland, Wales and Yorkshire. Dialectal varieties identified by certain features as conditioned by the environment are present in the utterances. Also, the professional registers like language of law, advertisement, literature, engineering, medicine, architecture and so on. And, later in the process of its development came into contact with French and German. The development of modern English has been divided into three main phases; *The Old English*, When the Celts were influenced by the use of Latin imposed by the Roman invaders made an official language after the invasion. *The Middle English*, the Norman Conquest, which brought and assigned prominence to French, The grammar and vocabulary in this era was heavily influenced by French language. *The Modern English* began to emerge 1450 AD and spans through the renaissance, the Elizabethan era and Shakespeare. It is the period when the nation states of English took their modern form. See Crystal (1997). Brook (1958). Other includes, the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) as coined by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1860-1943). A set of regular sound changes affecting the long (tense) vowels of English (Akmajian 2010).

2 New Englishes

The term New Englishes, comes to the fore in the study of World Englishes around early 1980s. It is used to refer to non-native varieties of English spoken in former colonies of Great Britain, particularly in South Asia, South-East Asia, West Africa and East Africa. In other words, New Englishes is a regional or national varieties of the English language used in places where it is not the mother tongue of the majority of the population. It is otherwise called by various terms as: New Varieties of English, Non-native Institutionalized Varieties of English or Non-native Varieties of English.

However, looking at its definition given above, one can easily understand that New Englishes falls within the outer circle of English speaking countries. These are the second Diaspora of English, which spread through colonization by Great Britain in a many countries in Asia and Africa. English is not the native language in these places, rather, it is an important lingua franca used for communication between various ethnic groups. The countries that speak New Englishes include Nigeria, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya, non-Anglophone South Africa and others. The English spoken in these countries shares a number of superficial linguistic characteristics which, taken together, make it convenient to describe them as a group separately from British, American, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand English.

2.1 English in Nigeria

Nigeria is multilingual society with many dialects within the languages, and the speakers of these languages are interacting with one another, and the natives can easily recognized where one comes from through mode and manner of his/her spoken language and the influence of his/her mother tongue when employ the medium other than the mother tongue. Ard (1981) states that ‘‘there is no phonological representation of a second language that is automatically available for a learner. The learner must construct one....’’ Therefore, the position of English in language ecology of Nigeria plays a vital role as explain by different scholars. The English language is spoken by the speakers of the majority languages and that makes it national language. In this sense, it is a lingua Franca, which is a common language that people of different ethnic backgrounds are used to communicate. Roger Bell (1976) states that; ‘...by adoption of language of the ex-rulers as the national official language on orientation which implies a greater valuation of the achievement of operational efficiency....’’ English has number of roles which include the following broad areas; *education*, as medium of instruction, National Policy of Education (1981) states that, ‘The junior secondary school student shall study English and two Nigerian languages while the senior secondary school student shall study English and one Nigerian language.’ *Social life*, English is used as language of debate in national assembly, state and even the local government legislative council. The Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, (updated in 1999). *Economic life*, Roger quoted in Banjo (1972). ‘...the vast majority live practically all other lives in their mother tongue but use English basically for business and official purposes.’ *Communication*, it is the language of mass media: radio, TV, newspapers and magazines. *Global life*, the entire world is becoming a small village, and the English language is use for international connection. *Job opportunity*, because it is the language of administration, you will not be able to work in the civil service or any reputable organization if you cannot speak and/ or write English.

2.2 Kanuri language

Is a dialect spoken by some four million people, as of 1987, in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, as well as small minorities in southern Libya and by a Diaspora in Sudan. It belongs to the Western Saharan subphylum of Nilo-Saharan. Kanuri is the language associated with the Kanem and Bornu empires which dominated the Lake Chad region for a thousand years. Norbert C. & John P. (1990), which include present Yobe State. Kanuri has three tones: high, low, and falling. According to Cyffer (1999) as quoted in Sambo M.B. (2007), 'the Kanuri language is one of the major languages in central Africa. It is spoken around Lake Chad by more than four million people. More speakers live in Borno, North-eastern Nigeria and eastern part of Niger....' Traditionally a local lingua franca, its usage has declined in recent decades. Most first-language speakers speak Hausa or Arabic as a second language. Norbert C. & John P. (1990).

2.3 English and Kanuri Language Sounds

The speech of the community can only be effectively studied when we took a cursory look at the sound system, which often looks at in terms of pulmonic air flow, function of the larynx and the vibration of the vocal folds. Phonology, is the subfield of linguistic that studies the structure and systematic patterning of sounds in human language (Anderian 2010). Also Osundu (2014) states that, phonology, is the study of the sound system of a particular language. Phonology explain the factors responsible for the speech errors committed by nonnative speakers of a language, for instance, Nigerian speaker of English, through phonology we realized that the inherent differences in the sound system of language are one major factor responsible for speech errors. Alabi (2008) quoting Ofunya (1996) '...errors that do spring as a result of phonological needs in second language learning ... can thwart communication...'

However, English and Kanuri phonetic symbols, their similarities and differences could be identified. That would give a concrete foundation to base our argument and have facts on what English sounds appears difficult for Kanuri speakers of English. The following tables present the phonetic symbols of the languages under study.

2.4 Significance of Study

The study is significant in the sense that the researcher:

- Discloses some roles of English language like; medium of instruction in formal education, language of commerce and official language in Nigeria.
- Identify the English sounds that are not available in Kanuri language and suggestions on how to eliminate or harmonies these problems of English by bilingual speakers.
- Unravel some factors responsible for the negative influences of mother tongue on spoken English.

3. Methodology

The data collected for this research depends largely on primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the interview, which was oral because of the researcher was expected by the nature of the research to seat face-to-face with respondents. The researcher selected some word with problematic sounds and presented them to the respondent to pronounce them loudly, then listen carefully and ticked () for correct pronunciations and marked (x) for wrong pronunciations.

3.1 Data analysis

It is clear that spoken and written English make somewhat different demands on language producers. Close examination of learner's data can tell us a lot about how activity design affects output. We observed that, there is no one-to-one correspondence between English sounds and English letters e. g. three /θri:/. Where the sounds and letters are pronounced alike is coincidence, e. g. set /set/. Let us examine the oral test conducted.

3.2 Category one: Absents sounds in Kanuri phonemes. The consonant sounds like; /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/ and /f/. The absent of this sounds in Kanuri cause a problem. M. Finochiaro (1974) states that, 'the individual learner restructure in his own way, the materials we may present based on his past experiences.' e. g. The labio-dental /v/ is wrongly pronounced as bilabial /b/. Bilabial /p/ as labio-dental /f/, while /θ/ and /ð/ are replaces with the nearest similar sounds. Therefore, some respondents produce sound like;

- 1-Vest /vest/ as → *[best] 2- chain /tʃein/ as → *[shen]
 3-Then /ðen/ as → *[den] 4- theory/θiəri:/ as → *[teori]

3.3 Category two: Short and Long vowels. In the field, the respondents pronounced short and long vowels as the same without elongation on words with long vowels. While the differences are as follows;

- 5-Ban /barn → /bæn/, /ba:n/ 6- pack / park → /pæk/, /pa:k/
 7-fit /feet → /fit/, /fi:t/ 8- dip/deep → /dip/, /di:p/

3.4 Category three: consonant cluster. The syllable structure of English is quite different. Obanya (1982) 'In most Nigerian languages, a consonant is immediately followed by a vowel English on the other hand, can have a string of consonant in a syllable without any vowel intervening.' Though, Kanuri languages have double consonant like; /mb/, /ng/, /nd/, /ny/, /nj/, /nz/ and /sh/. But some respondents insert vowel sounds between consonants to violate the cluster, example;

- 9-straw /strɔ:/ as → *[sitirɔ:] 10-dwarf /dwɔ:f/ as → *[duwɔ:f]
 11- School /sku:l/ as → *[sukul] 12-tract /træk/ as → *[tiræk]

3.5 Category four: Silent *phonemes* in some words. Some English words are not pronounced according to their spelling, this cause a problem for learners. However, the correct pronunciations of the words in this category are as follows;

- 13- Honest /ɒnist/ 14-knock → /nɒk/
 15-lamb → /læm/ 16-Listen → /lisn/

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3.6 Category five: Nearly similar sound. These words bring confusion to learners of English, as a result of their resemblance in sound and structure. Some respondents cannot pronounce them and clearly differentiates them, as their transcription is;

17-low/law → /ləʊ/, /lɔ:/ 18-coke/cork → /kəʊk/, /kɔ:k/
 19-stow/store → /stəʊ/, /stɔ:/. 20-rear/rare → /riə(r)/, /reə(r)/.

To this end, the data presented the responses of thirty Kanuri speakers of English, and it was observed that most of them have the problem of (L1) manifestation in their (L2). However, other causes of the influence of mother tongue of Kanuri speakers of English include;

Family background: the rich and opportune families sometime have advantage over the poor, because they have access to video, TV, satellite, newspapers etc., and possibly educated parent and taking extra-mural classes.

Peer group: it is realized that cliques of intelligent, serious and constant users of English, mostly improve their English speaking skills than their counterpart.

Environment: those from urban areas or cities have the advantage of knowing and learning some English sound pronunciations compared to those in the village or rural areas.

4. Results and discussion

Table: 1 The English Consonant Sounds. Source: Advance learner's dictionary 8th edition (2010)

S/N	ENGLISH PHONEME	EXAMPLES		
		INITIAL POSITION	MIDDLE POSITION	FINAL POSITION
1	/p/	Pan	Happy	Tap
2	/b/	Big	Table	Rub
3	/t/	Tea	Heater	Rat
4	/d/	Dog	Lady	Bad
5	/k/	Come	Market	Pack
6	/g/	Get	Target	Bag
7	/f/	Fork	After	Cough
8	/v/	Van	River	Live
9	/θ/	Think	Author	Both
10	/ð/	This	Father	Breathe
11	/s/	Sip	Racing	Place
12	/z/	Zink	Razor	Raise
13	/ʃ/	Ship	Lashes	Fish
14	/ʒ/	Genre	Vision	Garage
15	/h/	Hat	Behave	-
16	/tʃ/	Chair	Teacher	Search
17	/dʒ/	Joy	Enjoy	Badge
18	/l/	Lock	Follow	Sell
19	/r/	Rag	Borrow	-
20	/w/	Win	Beware	-
21	/j/	Yes	-	-
22	/m/	Man	Remain	Lame
23	/n/	Net	Manner	Man
24	/ŋ/	-	Singer	Song

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While for the secondary, the researcher depended on textbooks and journals that discussed the issues related to the topic of study.

These sources were specifically selected, due to time and financial constraints, and it is available with the respondents in the community, it therefore become necessary to use thirty (30) randomly selected Kanuri speakers of English.

Table: 2 The English Vowel Sounds. Source: Advance learner's dictionary 8th edition (2010)

S/N	VOWELS	EXAMPLES		
1	/i:/	Peel	Beat	Seat
2	/i/	Bit	Sit	Women
3	/e/	Bed	Hen	Set
4	/æ/	Bat	Cat	Sat
5	/a:/	Car	Calm	Part
6	/ɒ/	Odd	Hostel	Want
7	/ɔ:/	Port	Cork	Want
8	/u/	Put	Book	Should
9	/u:/	Pool	Shoe	Two
10	/ʌ/	Hut	Cup	Cut
11	/ɜ/	Bird	Herb	First
12	/ə/	About	Baker	Pilot
13	/ei/	Eight	Day	Aid
14	/əi/	Isolate	Item	Dry
15	/ɔi/	Toy	Voice	Boy
16	/əu/	Go	Home	Know
17	/au/	Over	Pole	Slow
18	/iə/	Ear	Here	Fear
19	/eə/	Air	Hair	Fear
20	/uə/	Poor	Tour	Sure

Table: 3 The Kanuri/Manga Consonant Sounds. Source: Bulakarima S. U et al. (2003) Kanuri English Dictionary

S/N	CONSONANTS	KANURI WORD	MEANING
1	/b/	Bultu	Hyena
2	/c/	Cida	Work
3	/d/	Dâ	Meat
4	/f/	Fatomá	Host
5	/g/	Gadé	Different
6	/h/	Háptá	To lift
7	/j/	Jéne	Skirt
8	/k/	Kanyî	Goat
9	/ɣ/	ɣengin	I will go
10	/l/	Liwula	Needle
11	/m/	Málam	Teacher
12	/mb/	Mbōl	Wine

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13	/n/	Nâ	Place
14	/ng/	Dangîn	I will stand
15	/nd/	Ndalâm	Strong desire
16	/ny/	Nyiyâ	Marriage
17	/nj/	Njîm	Room
18	/nz/	Kaánza	His/hers
19	/p/	Ndâptá	To tie
20	/r/	Ráwa	Uncle
21	/s/	Sáwa	Friend
22	/sh/	Sharâ	Judge
23	/t/	Táda	Boy
24	/w/	Waajîn	Happens
25	/y/	Yâ	Mother
26	/z/	Zárab	Bullet

Table: 4 The Kanuri /Manga Vowel Sounds. Source: Bulakarima S.U.S et al. (2003) Kanuri English Dictionary

S/N	VOWELS (<i>SHIKALWA</i>)	KANURI WORDS	MEANING
1	/a/	Kallá	Noise
2	/e/	Mewú	Ten
3	/o/	Kotórówa	Bridge
4	/i/	Fiwu	Fifty
5	/u/	Kuwûi	Hen
6	/ə/	Rəpta	To buy

Table: 5 Percentages of Kanuri Respondents in Oral Test. Source: field work, 2015

CATEGORY	S/N	WORDS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	CORRECT PRONUNCIATION	PERCENTAGE (%)	WRONG PRONUNCIATION	PERCENTAGE (%)	TOTAL
1-ABSCENT SOUND IN KANURI	1	Vest /vest/	30	16	53	14	47	100
	2	Chain /tfein/	30	18	60	12	40	100
	3	Then /ðen/	30	21	70	9	30	100
	4	Theory/Θiəri/	30	17	57	13	43	100
2-SHORT AND LONG VOWELS	5	Ban/barn	30	18	60	12	40	100
	6	Pack/park	30	17	57	13	43	100
	7	Fit/feet	30	15	50	15	50	100
	8	Dip/deep	30	18	60	12	40	100
3-CONSONANT CLOSTER	9	Straw	30	20	67	10	33	100
	10	Dwarf	30	17	57	13	43	100
	11	School	30	14	47	16	53	100
	12	Tract	30	15	50	15	50	100

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4-SILENT SYMBOLS IN SOME WORDS	13	Honest	30	18	60	12	40	100
	14	Knock	30	16	53	14	47	100
	15	Lamb	30	16	53	14	47	100
	16	Listen	30	19	63	11	37	100
5- NEARLY SIMILER SOUND	17	Low /law	30	17	57	13	43	100
	18	Coke /cork	30	16	53	14	47	100
	19	Stow /store	30	17	57	13	43	100
	20	Rear /rare	30	20	67	10	33	100
percentage					57.5		42.5	

Conclusion

This study has been undertaken to identify the phonological errors that are found in the pronunciations of some Kanuri speakers of English, which interferes in their communication in English as second language. The paper showcases and compares the phonetic symbols of English and Kanuri. It also looks at the sounds that pose problems to Kanuri speakers of English and highlight some other factors of mother tongue influence. Krashen (1981) asserts that, 'In non technical language, acquisition is picking up a language.' Yule G. (1996) states that, 'learning is a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language.'

Recommendation

Susan (1989) observed that, 'there are many who achieved very high levels of proficiency, given enough time, input and effort, and given right attitude, motivation and learning environment. The Kanuri linguist should review the phonetic symbols of Kanuri language, and assimilate the absence ones where applicable and update the transcription in their language dictionary. Teaching oral English, especially pronunciations drills should be encouraged, because most of the English words have no one-to-one representation with their phonetic transcription.'

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