

An Assessment of Phonological Difficulties Faced by The Students of English Language

(A Case Study of English Department College of Education and Legal Studies Nguru).

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Abstract

This study is designed to find out some Phonological Difficulties faced by the students of English Language in Department of English Language College of Education and Legal Studies Nguru. The objectives of the study and its significance were highlighted. Related literatures were reviewed to give the researchers an insight into the work of others in the area of study. Works of Bulakarima (2001) and Grema (2004) were reviewed. The data collected was analyzed using tabular method. Based on the findings, it was discovered that Phonological difficulties affected the academic performances of students. Also the table shows the different performances and the results of the sound productions of the students. Last but not the least suggestions have been given at the end of this research which might help to improve some of the problems that the students of English encounter.

Keywords: Assessment, Phonological, Difficulties, Performance, Language.

Introduction

This study is based on the phonological difficulties and limited to the English language learners and the way it affects their academic performance.

English came to Nigeria much in the same way spread to other colonies. This is basically seen in the light of three major factors which are: trade, religion and colonization (colonialism). Today English in Nigeria has occupied different forms and functions the point of view of its status. The English is one of the major languages in the world. It is mother tongue of over three hundred and twenty million people

Countries where English is their mother tongue are United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. English also played a great role as second language of people respected with language diversity. To these people, English serves as the official language of communication, such countries are Nigeria, Ghana and many other African countries. (Anglophone) English language is the international language for air traffic control (Baugh Albert C And Cable Thomas, 2002).

Literature Review

A number of scholars have used different methodologies to carry out Phonological analysis of Learning Difficulties. The researchers are to highlight write-up of scholars and other literatures that are relevant to this work (i.e. the phonological difficulties of English language learners). Such as Bulakarima (2001).

(Renaldi, A et al., 2016). Observed the way language learners speak in English. The researchers also classified according to the main points that is phonological difficulties or common errors made by the students of English. Such as; phonemes /r/ and /J/ Voiced Alveolar

Approximant Sound where most of the students pronounced the sound incorrectly.

Most of student learners of English are having difficulty in pronunciation of some English sounds, sometimes even the highly educated ones. This is because sounds maybe absent from the phonemic inventory of the indigenous language such as Kanuri, Hausa and Fulfulde. Sound such as /θ /and /ð/ are absent from the phonemic system of Kanuri, Hausa and Fulfulde and other indigenous language. Therefore, the student learners of English will replace or substitute the English sound with the ones that are available in the phonemic inventory as in /f/ as /p/ or / as /v/. The following are examples taken from different countries. In Jordan, for examples, many studies have been conducted to investigate phonological errors committed by Jordanian school learners of English.

Also the specific goal of this research is to enable student learners of English to speak and write English passages that are grammatically correct, properly punctuated and effectively organized, and to understand and communicate using a variety of nation and linguistic functions based on everyday situations. Various deviant pronunciations of English sound by non-native speakers are due to mother tongue influence and the difference in phonological system. (Bulakarima and Agyeman, 1988) Stated as follows:

"The greatest influence on the pronunciation of English is the sound system of vernacular languages. Most of the phonetic characteristic in the English of Nigeria's can of course be traced to the transfer of feature from their language. Many people claim they can tell which part of the country a Nigerian belongs to from the way he speaks English"

Among the twenty-six consonant of English, the fricatives /θ/, /v/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and the plosive /p/ are not found in some language e.g. Kanuri, phonemic inventory. The Kanuri speakers of English tend to substitute the dental fricatives, which are missing in Kanuri phonemes with alveolar plosive for instance the sound /θ/ is being substituted /d/. The sound /v/ which is not available in phonemes of some language e.g. Kanuri, Hausa, Fulfulde and others. Also according to (Bulakarima, 2001) He made mentioned that:

"The Kanuri speakers of English tends to substitute the dental fricatives which are missing in Kanuri phonemes with alveolar plosive, for instance the sound /θ/ is being substitute by /d/ the sound /v/ which is not available in phonemes of some language e.g. Kanuri is also substitute by bilabial plosive /b/. The post alveolar fricative /ʃ/ʒ/ are very difficult for the Kanuri speakers to pronounce. Also the Sound /p/ Kanuri language does not occur in word initial position unless idiophone" (Bulakarima, S. U., & Shettima, A.K., 2012)

The above quotation shows that Kanuri speakers of English have difficulties in pronunciations of these English sounds.

(Dunstan, 1969). He states that:

"Fula speakers are bound to face some difficulties in learning the sound of English. viz some certain sounds are devoiced which others are substitute by /s/ and /z/ respectively as in 'sought' and thought breeze. Secondly they confused /s/ and /ʃ/ often saying ship for ' chip' and 'share' for 'chair'. Thirdly they tend to substitute /b/ for thus confuses those words as very and 'bury', And the speakers tend to confuse /i/ and i:/s/e/ and /æ/ and replace /ʒ:/ and /e/ by /a:/ and /a/"

The Hausa speakers of English have also their difficulties when they are pronunciation English sounds. (Dunstan E. , 1969) /p/ is not present in many dialects of Hausa and a common error is to use /f/ instead, resulting in confused between such word as 'pat' as 'fat' 'pill' and 'fill', etc. Also /v/ is not present in Hausa; common error is to use /b/ instead, resulting in confusion between such word as 'van' and 'ban' 'vent[n] and [n] are allophones of the same phoneme /n/ in Hausa, some speaker may have" *difficulty in the maintaining the distinction English between such ward as 'ran' and 'rang' 'sin'; and 'sing Dental fricative are not in Hausa: a common error is to substitute [t] for [θ] and [d] for] thus confusing such word a tie, "thigh; "day" and "they' etc. in certain speaker the substitute of [s] for [θ] and [Z] for 1 may be observed. This is often the result of the speaker having been encouraged to lean to say the dental fricative by starting with the alveolar fricatives, and then to advance the tip of the tongue which they fail to do. A more successful method by saying interdental fricatives. /z/ is not present in Hausa, but speaker may be able to add voicing to /s/ and so achieved the sound"*

The sound identification confirmed that Hausa speakers of English sound system have difficulties in pronunciation of the sounds the difficulties in the pronunciation of English sounds by Kanuri native Speakers of English have been highlighted by (Grema 2004: 34) in the following words:

"On processing this analysis I was able to find out that students of English have problem of interface especially their MT (Mother tongue) whereby the students have to substitute their MT (Mother tongue) segment for those L2 substitution is not only problem there are others such as: inability of distinguishing two different sounds, substitution, reduction of vowel length and consonant insertion in-between diphthong.

First looking at the phonological system of the two language, one can see that there are certain sounds in English that are absent from other language system, likewise, the other language. Hence those are absent from the other language system tend to cause a problem to them since they do not exist in their own system. The student of English were unable to make a distinction between the sounds /p/ and /f/v/ and /b/. the sound /p/ in Kanuri can only be found in idiophones not in normal speech so the native Kanuri speakers of English are incapable of distinguishing it with /f/ Just like /p/ and /f/ and /f/ also use interchangeable by Kanuri speakers of English. Below are example of mispronunciation"

	/p/	/f/
"people"	/pi:pI/	/fi:fil/
"prevail"	/priveil/	/fribeil/

The Kanuri speakers of English substitute the sounds of his language of which he is familiar with, for the different sound of English which does not exist in his own phonology. The sound that are being substituted are /d/ is substituted for /ð/ as in /mƏdƏ/ for /mƏdƏ/ for /mΛðƏ/

/d/ is substitute for /θ/ as in /mƏnt/ for /mΛnθ/

/dg/ is substituted for /z/ as in /providzɪn/ for /providzƏn/

The reduction of sound (especially vowel) length. The Kanuri speaking of English usually reduce the length to short vowel for instance,

/ə/ is reduced to /Ə/ as in /kðnsƏn/

/u:/ is reduced to /u/ as in /studnt/ for /stju:dnt/

/iə/ is reduced to /e/as in /fe/ for /fiə/

/ei/ is reduced to /e/as in /tek/ for /teik/

"Most of the time, the Kanuri speaker of English insert consonant (usually approximants) in between diphthong sound e.g. the word " poor when pronounced, I find out that most of the (student) pronounced it as /puə/, From these findings, I will conclude that the problem faced by Kanuri speaker of English general is due to the inexistence of some of the English sounds in their language and the transfer of their MT into L2 by replacement of the sound. "(Grema 2004.)

The above explanation reveals that students' learners of English have certain problems in pronouncing sound system of English language.

Similarly, the researchers present the consonantal and vowel chart of Kanuri, the consonantal chart of English, the consonantal chart of Fulfulde; and consonantal charts of Hausa respectively.

(Bulakarima, 2001) States that; the Kanuri consonantal chart and vowel chart shows that there are certain sounds that are absent from English consonantal and vowel chart. On the other hand, (Dunstan, 1969) also identified the English, Fulfulde and Hausa consonantal and vowels sounds in a tabular form.

Based on the English consonants and vowels chart shows vividly that different sound does not exist in our indigenous chart, such as Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde and that is why student's learners of English encountered difficulties in pronunciation of such sounds. Also consonant and vowels shows that some the sounds of English are absent from the indigenous

consonant and vowel charts. Therefore, this contributed to inability to correct pronunciation.

The Hausa chart identified by (Dunstan, 1969) clearly shows that the sounds of English (such as /p/, /v/, /o/, /e/, etc.) are totally absent from the whole chart of Hausa consonant and vowel chart. Therefore, Hausa, speakers of English encountered difficulties.

Methods

The method of data collection used in this topic of research is quantitative analysis method which involved the students and learners. The researchers were visited the department of English within the college and embarked on this research work. The researchers were utilizing both students and teachers to collect the data and the way, in which we present our data and analyses it is that of percentage correctness and incorrectness of the pronunciations.

We used this method as the means of assessing the students' pronunciations of the English sound weather is being correct or incorrect. The source of data collection are primary and secondary data collection.

English words were selected in order to discovered the incorrectness pronunciation made by the students and categorized them into wards viz eight vowels, three diphthongs and six consonants. They grouped and presented in a tabular form as sound, the number of students who either pronounce the word correctly or incorrectly will be shown. The percentage of this pronunciation will be indicated. Various production of the word is recorded.

1. /æ/ gladden
2. /u:/ bruise

3. /u/ actual
4. /ɔ:/ fortress
5. /ɔ/ college
6. /i:/ beat
7. /i/ bit
8. /ʌ/ cut

DIPHTHONG: (/uə/, /ei/, /iə/)

1. /uə/ poor
2. /ei/ take
3. /iə/ near

CONSONANTS (/p/, /f/, /v/, /ð/, /θ/, /ʒ/)

1. /p/ people
2. /f/ fire
3. /v/ very
4. /ð/ mother
5. /θ/ think
6. /ʒ/ provision

We also presented an extract in order discover inappropriate pronunciation made by the students. A number of thirty students were involved and some of the student pronounced these words and their various pronunciation types were recorded down as correctly or incorrectly.

The sample is limited to Department of English Language College of Education and Legal Studies Nguru, Yobe State. Also selected two classes form fifteen (15) males and fifteen (15) females, with the help of their English Head of Department (HOD).

Results and Discussion

The table below indicate the different performance and result of the sound productions of the students. This is calculated through the use of percentage.

Table 1: Showing the percentage of the student's performance in pronunciation vowels sound (Monophthongs)

S/N	Sound	Number of students	Correct pronunciation	Percentage (%)	Incorrect pronunciation	Percentage (%)
1.	/æ/	30	13	40.34	17	50.66
2.	/u:/	30	14	40.67	16	50.33
3.	/u/	30	12	40	18	60
4.	/ɔ:/	30	11	30.67	19	60.33
5.	/ɔ/	30	15	50	15	50
6.	/i:/	30	15	50	15	60
7.	/i/	30	15	50	15	50
8.	/ʌ/	30	7	20.34	23	70.66

From table 1, we will clearly see that percentage of the sounds which are pronounced correctly and those that were pronounced incorrectly. For instance, the sound /æ/ as in “gladden”, 40.34%

of the student pronounced it correctly as (glæðɪn), while 50.66 percent of the students pronounced it incorrectly as (glæðɪn) etc. So also the sound /u:/ as in “bruise” 40.67%

pronounced it correctly as in (bru: z) while 50.33 pronounced it incorrectly as (bruis), (bruise), (bruizi), etc.

The sound /u/ as in “actual” 40% of the students pronounced it correctly as /æktʃuəl/ while 60% pronounced it incorrectly as (æktul), (æktual), etc. /ɔ:/ as in “fortress” was pronounced as (fɔ:trɒs) correct by 30.67% of the student but 60.33% pronounced it incorrectly as (fu:trɒs), (fu:trɒs), (pɔ:tres), etc. the long /i/ sound as in “greasy” 40% of the students pronounced it correctly as /gri:si/ while 60% pronounce it incorrectly as (grisi), (gri:zi), (gri:si) etc. the short vowel /ɔ/ as in “college” was pronounced by 50% pronounced it incorrectly as (kɒlidʒ), (kɒlidʒ), etc. the sound /ʌ/ as in “cut” 20.34% of the students pronounced it correctly as /kʌt/ while 70.66% pronounced it incorrectly as /kɒt/, etc.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the students should be trained properly on the phonological system of the two language it might stop them confusing one sound for the pother and they might be able to perceive the different sound very well so also staff should try as much as possible to sue vernacular because some course who are not competent of English should be provide to them, and what is responsible for their difficulties in rearing English language. Teacher should make effort to correct their own part are not very strict with their lessons. They should see to it that during the specified period for English lessons English alone and other language is spoken in the classroom similarly, teachers do not know the difficulties of the child in learning English (i.e. the child nature phonological properties) this is very important

because first impression are very difficult to erase. Adequate learning materials should also be available for the students to facilitated the teaching and learning of the language.

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