

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO PROBLEMATIC SEGMENTALS IN THE ACQUISITION OF RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION OF ESL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The prevalence of poor English pronunciation among Nigerian ESL students is an awkward phenomenon. In an attempt to approximate Received Pronunciation, ESL learners are faced with plenitude of challenges. Previous research has largely investigated factors militating against ESL learners' pronunciation. However, limited number of research has addressed the specific problematic segmentals constituting deviance to Standard British English acquisition. Therefore, this study aimed to: analyze some pronunciation problems, explore problematic consonants and vowels of English that present difficulty, investigate areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence that constitute problems, and causes of these problems. This study adopted survey method of descriptive research design. The sample for the empirical study comprised 30 Undergraduate ESL learners who did not major in English language. They were purposively selected as the participants of this study from Continuing Education Centre, Sandwich Unit, run in the State University. Two instruments, a questionnaire and a pronunciation test were used for collecting data. The findings revealed that: *English consonants [ŋ] /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /z/, /v/, /ð/, /ʌ/ and /θ/* were difficult for the participants, *problem of insertion of vowels between preceding consonant, problem of substitution of short vowels with long vowels sounds, substitution of long vowels with short vowels sounds and the use of syllabic consonant constituted problem.* Also, the areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence which constituted problems were the */th/ sequence, ph-sequence, ch-sequence, silent sounds and manifestations of c-letter.* It was concluded that there are problems in the acquisition of RP in ESL classroom, especially the segmental aspect of phonetics which could translate to communication breakdown and speaking incompetence, if not nipped in the bud.

**KEYWORDS:** Received Pronunciation (RP), English as a second language (ESL), Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), problematic segmentals, Yoruba language

## INTRODUCTION

English language is a colonial language and an official language employed by Nigerians for various purposes; communication, politics, transactions, education, legislation, administration, and religion. It is a language of national unity, cohesion, elitism, and solidarity (Omotoyinbo, 2016). Most Nigerians see it as prestigious as it is evident in the way English language is taught and used as a medium of instruction in schools (Jibril, 2018). Its neutrality as non-indigenous language also shields it for any negative bias.

There are over five hundred spoken languages in Nigeria: Fulani, Edo, Ibibio, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Kaniru, Fulfulde, Efik, and many other hundreds of indigenous languages (Obiegbu, 2016). Constitutionally, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are recognized as the major languages. These major languages perform official functions side by side with English language (Ayeomoni, 2012; Morakinyo, 2015; Dada, 2010). However, the subjects of this study are Yoruba and English languages.

According to the ethnology of World Languages, the genetic classification of Yoruba language is in the Niger Congo family, Atlantic-Congo sub-family, followed by the Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Defoid 17, Yoruboid, and Edekiri group of Languages (Bamidele, 2019, p.3). Yoruba people are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, Africa. The Yoruba are a race among the over 250 ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian nation and they number several millions. Yoruba people are located primarily in Southwest Nigeria in the states of Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, and Ekiti. Also, parts of South East Edo and Delta States and the North Central States of Kwara and Kogi have a sizeable number of

speakers. There are also substantial indigenous Yoruba in the Republic of Benin, Togo, Jamaica, Brazil, Bahamas, Ghana, USA, United Kingdom, Cuba, and Guyana to mention a few (Owolabi, 2014; Patrick, Sui, Didam, & Gyang, 2013; Kaitlin, 2011).

Ogundepo (2015) expounds that one of the disparities between English and Yoruba languages could be found in the alphabets and sound system of the two languages. The English alphabet is made up of 26 letters: a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z while the Yoruba alphabet is made up of 25 letters: a b d e e f g gb h i j k l m n o o p r s s t u w y. Besides, the difference in the number of English and Yoruba letters, some English letters 'c' 'q' 'v' 'x' 'z' are apparently missing in Yoruba letters while some Yoruba letters 's' 'e' 'o' 'gb' have no equivalence in English language letters.

The segmental levels of the English sound system are made up of 44 sound segments (20 vowel and 24 consonant sounds):

Vowel sounds: Pure vowels: (short vowels): /ɪ/ /e/ /æ/ /ɒ/ /ʌ/ /ʊ/ /ə/,

Pure vowels: (long vowels): /i:/ /u:/ /ɑ:/ /ɔ:/ /ɜ:/,

Diphthongs: /eɪ/ /aɪ/ /ɔɪ/ /əʊ/ /aʊ/ /ɪə/ /eə/ /ʊə/

Consonant sounds: /b/ /d/ /p/ /f/ /v/ /m/ /n/ /s/ /ʃ/ /t/ /l/ /r/ /j/ /ð/ /tʃ/ /k/ /dʒ/ /w/ /h/ /g/ /ʒ/ /ŋ/ /θ/ /z/.

The segmental levels of the Yoruba sound system is made up of 30 sound segments (18 consonant sounds and 12 vowel sounds; 7 oral sounds and 5 nasal vowels):

Consonant sounds: /b/, /t/, /d/, /g/, /k/, /kp/, /gb/, /f/, /s/, /ʃ/, /h/, /dz/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /l/, /j/, /w/.

7 Vowel sounds: /a/ /e/ /e/ /i/ /o/ /o/ /u/,

5 Nasal vowels: /ã/ /ẽ/ /ĩ/ /ũ/ /õ/.

There are some significant differences between the English sound system and the Yoruba sound system. Some sound segments are peculiar to English; they are /v/ /tʃ/ /dʒ/ /ʒ/ /ŋ/ /θ/ /ð/ /æ/ /ʌ/ /ʊ/ and /ə/ while /gb/ /kp/ /dz/ /o/ and all the nasal vowels; /ã/ /ẽ/ /ĩ/ /ũ/ /õ/ are peculiar to Yoruba language (Odudigbo, 2014; ). On sound parlance, Yoruba sounds ‘s’ and ‘e’ have equivalence in English sounds but the Yoruba letters and sounds /gb/ and /o/ have no identified English equivalents either as letters or as sounds (Ogundepo, 2015). Though, the Yoruba language is tonal, yet it has certain similar sounds to English sounds. In Yoruba language, there is one-to-one mapping between the letters and sounds in Yoruba language; the way a word is pronounced is the same way it is spelt because the sounds of the language are depicted by the letters of its alphabets unlike English language (Olofin, 2013; Okeke & Obasi, 2014).

English language is stressed-bound and characterized by inconsistency between its alphabets and sounds; a letter can be used to represent different sounds. The disparities between the phonetics of these languages constitute problems to Yoruba language speakers who are L<sub>2</sub> learners of English language. Yoruba language does not establish the list of certain English consonant and vowel sounds in their inventories, in an attempt for ESL learners to pronounce and reproduce these alien sounds, they substitute the strange sounds of English for the close sounds in their mother tongue (Owolabi, 2012).

Using language in communication is often with two intentions: transactional (to

carry information) and interactional (to react to social mandate) (Afolayan, 2009). For the actualization of these intentions, mutual intelligibility of the interlocutors is essential. Cognizance must be given to all the levels of linguistic analysis; phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse, else, mutual intelligibility between speakers will be severed. It is noteworthy that all aspects of language are indispensable. Nonetheless, the spoken rendition where the sounds of language will be verbally applied to elicit ‘the correct lexical items and consequently form appropriate and grammatically acceptable syntactic structures is very important’ as well. Spoken form is “the final part of the language use where communication between hearer and speaker takes place” (Chitulu & Njemanze, 2015, p. 169; Omale, 2019, p. 1).

It is observed that teaching and learning of English sounds in ESL classroom is faced with several challenges while students’ international mutual intelligibility is hampered because of the phonological structural differences of the indigenous languages that interfere with the phonological structure of the English language (Bamisaye, 2006; Owolabi, 2014; Al-Zayed, 2017; Ogbuehi, 2001; Ibrahim, Anka, & Yabo, 2017). Making English sounds, at times, could be a difficult task for some Nigerian ESL students especially when they are unable to produce RP which is as result of their mother tongue influence and in exposure to the native speakers of English language.

More so, the native speaker perfection seems unrealistic to Nigerian ESL learners because they are taught by ESL teachers “whose own pronunciation is generally inaccurate together with well-

established local pronunciations of varying degrees of 'correctness'" (Tiffen, 1974, p.20). Hence, the need for this study to investigate problematic segmentals where pronunciation errors are evident in the acquisition of correct pronunciation in ESL setting.

The theoretical foundations for this study lies in the Contrastive Analysis (CA) theory which was first founded by the Structural Linguists and Behaviourists, Charles Fries in 1945 (Al-khresheh, 2016) and subsequently developed by Lado in 1950's respectively. In Lado's book, *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957) the theoretical foundations for the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) were formulated (Rustipa, 2011; Malah & Rashid, 2015). CAH is an area of comparative linguistics which lends itself to the juxtaposition of "two or more languages to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes external to the analysis itself" Mahboobeh (2015, p.1106).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In language learning, pronunciation "is the practice and meaningful use of the target language phonological features in speaking, supported by practice in interpreting those phonological features in a target language speech that one hears" (Burgess & Spencer, 2000, p.192). Phonetics studies language at the level of sounds; how sounds are articulated by the human speech mechanism, how sounds can be distinguished and characterized by the manner in which they are produced (Syal and Jindal, 2010). Keshavarz & Abubakar (2017) state that among the various practical applications of phonetics, the one that comes to minds of

CA, a fundamental component of the methodology of foreign language teaching, is targeted to: facilitate effective learning of foreign language teaching by bringing out the similarities between the L1 and the target language (positive transfer) and find out the problems caused by the differences between the L1 and the target language (negative transfer/Interference) (Atoye, 1980). Lado (1957:2) claimed that "those elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult". Through CA, predicted problems relevant to curriculum, syllabus, materials design, methodology and testing can be considered for language teaching and learning (Rustipa, 2011; Olalere, 2012). CA is founded on the theoretical assumption that "L2 learners will tend to transfer the formal features of their L1 to their L2 utterances. Learners start learning L<sub>2</sub>/FL by transferring some sounds and meanings (semantic transfer)" (Al-khresheh, 2016, p.332).

most readers is that of teaching and learning the pronunciation of a foreign language.

English language Curriculum specifies different areas to be learnt and taught which develop students' all-round linguistic and communicative competence but it is discovered instead of giving equal attention to all the topics in English language Curriculum, emphasis is laid on certain areas such as teaching and learning of grammar, vocabulary, essay writing, reading and writing with less attention given to pronunciation in spite of its complexities (Mousavinia, Shooshtari & Mehrabi, 2013; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Ikhsan, 2017;

Lai-Mei & Seyedeh, 2017). What begs the question is how many of these ESL teachers actually have the mastery of these pronunciations?

A reason for this neglect is traced to English language teachers' inability to assess students' pronunciation (Darcy, 2018, p.19). Egwuogu (2012) explains that as a matter of fact, larger percentage of English teachers has fossilized wrong pronunciations and cannot pronounce the English sounds accurately, some *teachers assume that with more input on the L<sub>2</sub>, students will learn pronunciation, or it will be acquired sometime later* (Mbah, Mbah, Iloene, & Iloene, 2013 p.185). Exceptional teachers who teach pronunciation, *do not provide instruction at all and those few that do generally adopt a hit or miss approach, relying on materials that lack grounding and the desired results* (Fraser, 2002 in Mousavinia, Shooshtari & Mehrabi, 2013, p.455). It is observed that some teachers who teach pronunciation only introduce the language's sound system in the early stages of instruction in classroom, but do not teach beyond that. Concentrating on the teaching and learning of essay writing, vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing to the detriment of speaking skills would only solidify students' linguistic competence at the expense of communicative competence.

Wong (1987) explained that irrespective of how excellent is the non-native speakers' vocabulary and grammar, if their pronunciation is poor, they might be unable to communicate effectively. Hence, non-native speakers' lack of knowledge of pronunciation could even affect their listening, spelling, reading and writing skills. Therefore, for a learner to speak acceptable and intelligible English

proficiently, it is expedient that he is exposed to sounds of English at a tender age when their organs of speech for the production of sounds of the target language can still be manipulated.

Poor mastery of the rules governing the sound system of any language could lead to poor verbal expression and unintelligible message transfer. By implication, the very essence of communication can be stalled and hampered when mispronunciation occurs (Keshavarz & Abubakar, 2017). Whoever wants to gain communicative competence in English has to study pronunciation, possesses a good grasp of the phonetics and phonological features of English sounds as well as the distributions and realizations of the different phonemes (Malah & Rashid, 2015).

Different researchers have investigated factors that contribute to the problem of mispronunciation of English words. Some of the problems identified are graphological irregularities prevalent in the English language, the sociolinguistic factors; culture, interference of mother tongue with L<sub>2</sub>, educational level of speakers, social status, linguistic background, insufficient time for communicative activities, boring and insipid teaching methodologies, unsuitable course books and materials that could improve teaching and learning of oral English, lapses of direct sound-spelling correspondence, lack of certified/qualified and competent teachers, lack of modern educational technology, lack of constant electricity supply, lack of internet facilities in schools and ICT illiteracy, dearth of instructional materials, and lack of relevant, functional and accessible language laboratory (Josiah, Bodunde & Robert, 2012; Keshavarz & Abubakar, 2017; Okeke

& Obasi, 2014; Egwuogu, 2012; Nguyen, Warren & Fehring, 2014; Latha & Ramesh, 2012; Dansieh, 2018).

Several studies have been carried out on the pronunciation problems of ESL/EFL learners with different language backgrounds. Akinjobi (2009) investigated the duration and quantity in the realization of the unstressed syllables that have syllabic consonants as peaks in Educated Yoruba English. The results confirmed that hardly were syllabic consonants used as peaks of syllables by Educated Yoruba English speakers as it is the norm in Standard English. Instead, strong vowels were often inserted between the preceding consonant and the supposed syllabic consonant and at times substituted for them. Josiah, Bodunde & Robert (2012) investigated patterns of English pronunciation among Nigerian University Undergraduates. It was discovered that in the majority of cases, teachers themselves did not speak British English. Instead, they spoke British oriented English with Nigerian accent. It was observed that some respondents reflected the linguistic background in their pronunciations as a result of mother-tongue interference; some were influenced by family background; while others were influenced by social exposure.

Keshavarz and Abubakar (2017) conducted an investigation into pronunciation problems of Hausa speaking learners of English. The results showed that native speakers of Hausa face problems in pronouncing some specific English vowels (i.e., /ʌ/, /ɔ:/ and /ɜ:/) and consonants (/f/, /v/, /θ/ and /ð/). This is attributed to the notion of negative transfer as all of the errors were the result of mother tongue interference. Okeke & Obasi (2014)

examined spelling pronunciation errors among students in the University of Nigeria. It was shown from the findings of the study that a larger percentage of the spelling-pronunciation errors discovered in students' speech were not based on mother-tongue interference, but they were based on the lack of one-to-one correspondence between the English letters of the alphabet and the phonetic symbols.

Egwuogu (2012) investigated the challenges and techniques in the teaching of English pronunciation in junior secondary school in Nigeria. These challenges were as a result of factors inexperienced teachers, adoption of inappropriate techniques and unavailability of education media such as audio-visual materials. He asserted that teaching techniques such as oral drills and repetitions, modeling, pronunciation games, debates and impromptu speeches, role-playing /dramatization, matching sounds to form words and identifying the missing sounds can be combined or used in isolation depending on the number of learners in class.

The aforementioned studies are a few of the plenteous literature that have focused on English pronunciation in Nigeria. It was discovered that none of these studies explored the problematic segmentals in the acquisition of RP by Yoruba-bilingual learners. To fill this gap, this present study sought to investigate the brewing challenges of pronunciation faced by Yoruba-English learners; especially the English problematic segmentals (vowels and consonants) where pronunciation errors are evident in the process of appropriate acquisition of correct pronunciation, spelling-pronunciation correspondence that constitute problems and the possible causes of the problems. Based

on the foregoing discussion, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- (1) What consonants of English present difficulty to ESL learners?
- (2) What vowels of English present difficulty to ESL learners?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

This study adopted survey method of descriptive research design. The study population was made up of all the Sandwich Students of Continuing Education Centre, Sandwich Unit, in Ekiti State University, Nigeria. The sample for the empirical study comprised 30 Undergraduate students (Yoruba-English speakers). Participants were purposively selected from 6 programs excluding English language. Simple random technique was employed to select 5 participants each from the 6 programs. Through the demographic data, information was gathered that the participants were born and bred in Yoruba-speaking environment (Southwest) in Nigeria, they had not lived in any English-speaking country nor had much interaction with native speakers of English. Their age ranged from 18 to 48 years old. Female participants were 17(56.7%) and male were 13(43.3%). Emphatically, individuals who indicated their interests were scrutinized to ensure that they were not majoring in English language so as to get genuine data. This was done because students majoring in English language have been exposed to phonetics, phonology and other linguistic aspects, hence they might have fewer pronunciation problems.

### ***Instruments***

Two instruments, a questionnaire and a pronunciation test were used for collecting

- (3) What areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence constitute problems?
- (4) What are the possible causes of the problems identified in research questions 1, 2 and 3?

data. The self-constructed questionnaire was tagged “Questionnaire on the Problems Associated with English Sounds” (QPAES). The questionnaire had two parts. Part A gave demographic information about the age, sex, ethnic group, native language background, residency and the degree of exposure to English as a second language of the participants were retrieved. Part B focused on the possible causes of the problems associated with English consonants, vowels and spelling-pronunciation correspondence faced by Yoruba bilingual students. 4-point-Likert type scale (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with 8 statements was employed. The participants were required to indicate the extent of their agreement or otherwise on each of the statement.

The pronunciation test; a scale of flash cards and list of words that showed problematic consonants and vowel sounds, and spelling-pronunciation correspondence, was given to the participants. The pronunciation test was conducted so as to elicit probable pronunciation errors committed by Yoruba-English bilinguals. Before using the two instruments, they were given to experienced lecturers who taught English, and research methodology courses who evaluated and reformed the instruments to establish the face and content validity.

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Their corrections and comments were used to modify the instruments before the two instruments were tried out on 20 Continuous Education Undergraduate Students who were not part of the present study to ascertain reliability of the instruments. A test-retest method was used for the instruments, using *Pearson's Product Moment Correlation*, a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained for the questionnaire and using the *Alpha Cronbach* formula, the value of alpha of 0.81 was obtained for the pronunciation test.

## FINDINGS

The results of data analyses for English consonants, English vowels and areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence that constitute problems are presented as follows:

### **What consonants of English present difficulty to ESL learners?**

The problematic English consonants are [ŋ] /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /z/, /v/, /ð/, /ʌ/ and /θ/. They are problematic because they do not exist in Yoruba. Table 1 reveals that most of the participants 21(70%) could not pronounce voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ rather, they pronounced it as /ng/. The reason is that in Yoruba language, /n/ and /g/ sounds are/ available but pronounced separately unlike English where /ŋ/ is just a sound. Some of the participants 20(66.7%) could not pronounce voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/. The participants perceived /tʃ/ sound as two separate sounds /t/ and /ʃ/. The nearest similar sound to /tʃ/ in their mother tongue is

### ***Analysis Procedures and Data Collection***

While they were being audio recorded, the participants were told to pronounce the words and sounds written on the flash cards, and read aloud the list of words that contained problematic sounds 3 times. Each participant was given 5minutes. The recordings were transcribed and analysed. A simple descriptive statistics was used to record the number of correct and wrong pronunciations of the pronunciation tests.

/ʃ/ hence voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ was pronounced as /ʃ/. Voiced palatal fricative /ʒ/ is conspicuously missing in Yoruba hence, 25(83.3%) of the participants could not pronounce it but replaced the sound /ʃ/which is found in Yoruba. Some of the participants 15(50%) replaced voiced alveolar fricative /z/ with voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. Voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is missing in Yoruba hence, 13(43.3%) of the participants could not pronounce it but replaced it with voiceless labiodental fricative /f/. Majority of the participants 23(76.7%) and 18 (60%) could not pronounce voiced dental fricative /ð/ and voiceless dental fricative /θ/ respectively. These sounds seemed strange to them. Therefore they resorted to substitution of /d/ and /t/ which exist in both languages for /ð/ and /θ/ sounds respectively.



**Table 1. Consonants constituting problems to EFL learners**

Word	Problematic Consonant	Received Pronunciation	Participants' Mispronunciation	Correct Pronunciation Freq. %	Wrong Pronunciation Freq. %
Bring	/ŋ/	/brɪŋ/	/ng/ /bring/	9(30%)	21(70%)
Match	/ʃ/	/mætʃ/	/s/ /ma: s/	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)
Seizure	/z/	/si:zə/	/s/ /si: sɔ:/	5(16.7%)	25(83.3%)
Zip	/z/	/zɪp/	/s/ /si:p/	15(50%)	15(50%)
Vomit	/v/	/vɒmɪt/	/f/ /fɒmɪt/	17(56.7%)	13(43.3%)
Then	/ð/	/ðen/	/d/ /den/	7(23.3%)	23(76.7%)
Three	/θ/	/θri:/	/t/ /tri/	12(40%)	18(60%)

In Table 2, the participants 20 (66.7%) had problem with syllabic consonants /ŋ/ while 22(73.3%) had problem with syllabic consonants /l/. Participants

inserted vowel between preceding consonant and syllabic consonant /ŋ/ and even totally removed syllabic consonant /l/.

**Table 2. Problematic syllabic consonants**

Word	Problematic Syllabic Consonant	Received Pronunciation	Participants' Mispronunciation	Correct Pronunciation Freq. %	Wrong Pronunciation Freq. %
Student	/ŋ/	/stju:dnt/	/studɛnt/ or /studɒnt/	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)
Grumble	/l/	/grʌmbl/	grɒmbul/ or /grɒmbu/	8(26.7%)	22(73.3%)

**What vowels of English present difficulty to ESL learners?**

Participants 14(46.7%) were not able to give appropriate pronunciation to /æ/, 17(56.7%) could not pronounce /ʌ/, 21(70%) were not able to pronounce /ɒ/ while 20(66.7%) wrongly pronounced /u/. From Table 3, it could be inferred that participants had the problem of substitution of short vowel sounds /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɒ/ and /u/ with long vowel sounds /a:/, /ɔ:/, /ɔ:/ and /u:/ respectively. By implication, short vowels are lengthened. Also, participants 18 (60%) mispronounced

/u:/, 19(63.3%) mispronounced /i:/ while 21(70%) mispronounced /a:/. It could be deduced that participants had the problem of substitution of sounds long vowels /u:/, /i:/ and /a:/ with short vowel sounds /u/, /i/ and /a:/. Invariably, long vowels are shortened. Furthermore, majority of the participants had problem with central vowels /ɜ:/, /ə/ and /ʌ/. 27(90%) of the participants mispronounced /ɜ:θ/ as /et/, 25(83.3%) of the participants mispronounced /ʃɜ:ʃ/ as /ʃɔʃ/, 24 (80%) of the participants mispronounced /θɜ:sti/ as /tasti/, 21 (70%)

of the participants mispronounced /ma:stə/ as /masta/ while 23 (76.7%) of the participants mispronounced /k^m/ as /kɔm/. In addition, participants had problem with diphthongs /uə/, /eɪ/ and /əu/. 18(60%) of

the participants mispronounced /juə/ as /juɔ/, 22 (73.3%) of the participants mispronounced /reɪn/ as /re:n/ while 23 (76.7%) of the participants pronounced /məʊst/ as /mo:st/.

**Table 3 Vowels constituting problems to EFL learners**

Word	Problematic Vowels	Received Pronunciation	Participants' Mispronunciation	Correct Pronunciation Freq. %	Wrong Pronunciation Freq. %
<b>A. Short vowels are lengthened</b>					
Flag	/æ/	/flæg/	becomes /a:/ /fla:g/	16(53.3%)	14(46.7%)
Sun	/ʌ/	/sʌn/	becomes /ɔ:/ /sɔ:n/	13(43.3%)	17(56.7%)
Pot	/ɔ/	/pɔt/	becomes /ɔ:/ /pɔ:t/	9(30%)	21(70%)
Full	/u/	/ful/	becomes /u:/ /fu:l/	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)
<b>B. Long vowels are shortened</b>					
Fool	/u:/	/fu:l/	becomes /u/ /ful/	12(40%)	18(60%)
Lean	/i:/	/li:n/	becomes /ɪ/ /lin/	11(36.7%)	19(63.3%)
Park	/a:/	/pa:k/	becomes /a/ /pak/	9(30%)	21(70%)
<b>C. Problems with central vowels</b>					
Earth	/ɜ:/	/ɜ:θ/	becomes /e/ /et/	3(10%)	27(90%)
Church	/ɜ:/	/tʃɜ:tʃ/	becomes /ɔ/ /tʃɔ/	5(16.7%)	25(83.3%)
Thirsty	/ɜ:/	/θɜ:sti/	becomes /a/ /tasti/	6(20%)	24(80%)
Master	/ə/	/ma:stə/	becomes /a/ /masta/	9(30%)	21(70%)
Come	/ʌ/	/k^m/	becomes /ɔ/ /kɔm/	7(23.3%)	23(76.7%)
<b>D. Conversion of diphthong to a simple vowel</b>					
Sure	/uə/	/juə/	becomes /ɔ/ /juɔ/	12(40%)	18(60%)
Reign	eɪ/	/reɪn/	becomes /e:/ /re:n/	8(26.7%)	22(73.3%)
Most	/əu/	/məʊst/	becomes /o:/ /mo:st/	7(23.3%)	23(76.7%)

### What areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence constitute problems?

The areas of spelling-pronunciation correspondence which constituted problems are:

- (i) /th/ sequence which manifests in:
  - /θ/ thirst, think
  - /ð/ though, thine
- (ii) /ph/-sequence which appears in:
  - /f/ phrase, rough, phylum
- (iii) /ch/-sequence which occurs as:
  - /tʃ/ cher, chaste;
  - /k/ cholera, stomach

### What are the possible causes of the problems identified in research questions 1, 2 and 3 above?

Larger percentage of the respondents 26(86.7%) responded that neglect of the aspects of phonetics and phonology constituted problems. Consequently, this flaw gives room for students to inculcate self-induced, environment-induced and teachers-induced errors. Participants 28(93.3%) attested that inability of teachers to link up with the native speakers through relevant media for ESL learners to acquire correct pronunciation during General Studies 111<sup>1</sup> posed threat to their pronunciations; mother tongue interference was identified by 27(90%) respondents as a major problematic factor. Inability to make use of audio visual aids during oral English lessons when taught General Studies 111 was raised by 26(86.7%) of the respondents as a problem. Inaccessible language laboratory was shown by 24(80%) of the respondents as a cause for difficulty in pronouncing English sounds. Respondents 25(83.3%) affirmed that they did not have

- /ʃ/ machine, brochure
- (iv) silent sounds such as:
  - /h/ through, hour, honour;
  - /p/ empty, psyche, coup;
  - /k/ knee, knife, knob;
  - /t/ rapport, pestle;
  - /b/ tomb, plumber;
  - /g/ sigh, nigh, night;
  - /l/ balm, yolk
- (v) manifestations of c-letter as:
  - /k/ cock, cream
  - /s/ cedar, ceiling.

sufficient knowledge of the differences between the phonetics and phonology of target language and their mother tongue. Late exposure of the respondents 28(93.3%) to the phonetics and phonology of the target language was revealed as a problem. Late exposure and inability of the participants to differentiate between sounds and alphabets of their mother tongue and the target language was attested to by the respondents 23(76.7%) to have constituted hindrance to acquisition of correct pronunciation.

### Discussion

The findings showed that [ŋ] /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /z/, /v/, /ð/, /ʌ/ and /θ/ are the problematic English consonants difficult for Yoruba-English speakers. The absence of these sounds in their mother tongue necessitated the insertion of near-like sounds in the English sounds. This finding is in line with the submission of Owolabi (2012) who explained that Yoruba speaker of English substitutes the non-existing sounds / ə / and

/ð/ with /t/ and /d/ respectively with the closest in his language.

It was shown from the study that syllabic consonants /ŋ/ and /l/ constituted problems to Yoruba-English bilinguals. This supported by Akinjobi (2009) who explained that some syllables with syllabic consonants such as /ŋ/ and /l/ should serve as peaks, always occur word final and are often unstressed. But it has been observed that rather than use syllabic consonants as the peak of such syllables, participants in his study inserted vowels between the preceding consonant and the syllabic consonant. Also, Patrick, Sui, Didam & Gyang (2013) buttressed that Yoruba-English bilinguals generally nasalize English vowels, which are preceded by nasal consonants.

Participants were not able to give appropriate pronunciation to /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/ and /u/ because they had the problem of substitution of short vowel sounds /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/ and /u/ with long vowel sounds /a:/, /ɔ:/, /ɔ:/ and /u:/. By implication, short vowels were lengthened. Also, participants mispronounced /u:/, /i:/ and /a:/. It could be deduced that participants had the problem of substitution of sounds long vowels /u:/, /i:/ and /a:/ with short vowel sounds /u/, /i/ and /a/. Invariably, long vowels were shortened. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Patrick, Sui, Didam & Gyang (2013) who affirmed that the lack of long vowels in Yoruba hinders the acquisition of long vowels in English by Yoruba English bilingual.

Furthermore, majority of the participants had problem with central vowels /ɜ:/, /ə/ and /ʌ/. In addition, participants had problem with diphthongs /uə/, /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ because most of the participants converted diphthongs to simple

vowels. This finding corroborates Bamisaye (2006) who affirms that the problem associated with diphthongs is that they are usually monophthongized. Ogundepo (2015) affirmed that Yoruba learners of English encounter difficulties in distinguish the long and short vowels /æ/ and /a:/ /ʊ/ and /u:/ /ɪ/ and /i:/ in their vowel length and quality, and articulating the closing and the centering diphthongs.

Spelling-pronunciation correspondence which constituted problems to Yoruba-English bilinguals are /th/, /ph/, /ch/ sequence, manifestations of c-letter, and silent sounds such as /h/, /p/, /k/, /t/, /b/, /g/, and /l/. These findings corroborate Olofin (2013) who posited that the spelling of English is regarded by both native English speakers and non-native speakers as one of the most difficult characteristics of English language. English spelling system is not based on a phonetic correspondence between sounds and letters.

Neglect of the aspects of phonetics and phonology, inability of students to link up with the native speakers through relevant media to acquire correct pronunciation during General Studies 111, mother tongue interference, inability to make use of audio visual aids during oral English lessons, inaccessible language laboratory, insufficient knowledge of the differences between the phonetics and phonology of target language and their mother tongue, late exposure to the phonetics and phonology of the target language, late exposure and inability to differentiate between sounds and alphabets of their mother tongue and the target language were the problems raised as constraints to their acquisition of correct RP.

These findings are supported by Chitulu & Njemanze (2015) who assert that

one of the reasons of poor pronunciation among Nigerian students is the environmental factor; the environment in which the students find themselves is usually linguistically illiterate. In spite of their lack of knowledge in these areas, yet they neither listen to the BBC, CNN and other relevant media to get abreast of the most recent information on correct

## Conclusion

In the area of pronunciation, this present study upholds prior related literature in support of negative transfer caused by the differences between the L1 and the target language. From the various findings of this study, it can be inferred that in order for ESL learners and teachers to be proficient and eloquent in pronunciation, consideration and attention should be given to phonetics and phonology. The various observed difficulties highlighted above interfered with ESL learners' pronunciation of RP.

The first issue addressed is the problematic English consonants for Yoruba-English speakers. They are problematic because they do not exist in Yoruba. Also, the insertion of vowels between preceding consonant and syllabic consonant, and even total removal of the syllabic consonants constituted problem. More so, the problems of substitution of short vowel sounds with long vowel sounds, substitution of sounds long vowels with short vowel sounds and conversion of diphthongs to simple vowels were encountered. Yoruba-English bilinguals attest to the claim of lack of one-to-one equivalence between letters and sounds in English as problematic. It is imperative that these shortcomings are addressed else, they might have negative

pronunciation from the native speakers nor use audio visual aids during oral English lessons. Also, Tilde (2015) explains that mother tongue interferes with English sounds among junior secondary school students in Bauchi State which is as result of the differences between the sound system of the mother tongue of the students and sounds system of English language.

impact on the acquisition of RP and intelligibility among interlocutors.

Finally, it could be recommended that to overcome the problem of intelligibility in communication, it is vital that ESL teachers and learners pinpoint early enough the precise problematic areas in pronunciation and correct them, and employ effective and learner-centered techniques in teaching/learning of pronunciation. Government and institutions should create enabling environment by providing equipped, functional and accessible language laboratory with teaching/learning aids, while ESL learners could improvise with tape recorder and e-copy of the pronunciation dictionary.

However, this study is limited by some factors. Descriptive research of the survey type was employed with a small sample size which would not give room for generalizability of the conclusion. For future study, a quazi experimental research design could be employed. Due to the nature and calendar of the participants' program; a holiday program, the study duration was short and there were limited number of participants. Therefore, to generate a reliable and accurate result with a large number of participants, a longer duration for the research could be undertaken on the

traditional on-campus or regular education undergraduate students in the university.

The research investigated problematic segmentals in the acquisition of RP by Yoruba-English bilinguals. A further study could assess the various teaching strategies that can ameliorate various problematic issues in the acquisition of RP in ESL classroom. Lastly, participants hesitated when they were accosted. They claimed that such research was meant for

language students. After they were intimated the purpose of the study, and assured confidentiality of their identities and information supplied, some participants willingly signified their intentions to participate in the study. Notwithstanding, this study has contributed to knowledge by revealing problematic areas in the acquisition of RP in ESL classroom by Yoruba - English bilinguals.

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