

# **A Contrastive Analysis of the Pronunciation of Vowel Sounds among Yoruba-English Bilingual Students in Southwest Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Contrastive analysis compares and contrasts two or more languages with a view to pinpointing areas of difficulty or learning facilitation. Many studies have been carried out on contrastive analysis, but much attention has not been given to the articulation of vowel sound of Yoruba-English bilinguals which is the concern of this study. 100 students were randomly selected through participatory observation from five secondary schools (20 from each school) in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria, using frequency counts and percentages. The findings show that there are differences between the vowel sounds of English and Yoruba languages. While English Vowel sounds are characterised by short, long and diphthong sounds, Yoruba vowel sounds are characterised by long, nasal and tonal sounds. The results show that there are significant differences between the vowels of English and Yoruba which often lead to phonological interferences in the spoken utterances of students. Majority of the students simply substituted English vowel sounds that were absent with Yoruba equivalent. This often negates standard pronunciation and localizes their realization of English sounds as they often pronounce silent letters in words, realize diphthongs as pure vowel, and substituting central vowels of English which are non-existent in Yoruba with Yoruba equivalents. The paper concludes that early exposure, constant practice and adherence to the rules of English vowel sounds will help students speak like near native speakers and give them the required competence in the target language.

**Key Words:** Contrastive analysis, English Vowel sounds, Yoruba-English bilinguals

## **Introduction**

Language contact occurs when speakers of two or more languages interact and influence each other. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for their languages to influence one another. The native language interference on English plays an important role in Nigerian English especially in the pronunciation of some words; the interference is rather phonetic than phonemic. As stated by (Tsojon and Aji, 2014) pronunciation is a vital aspect of language learning as poor pronunciation distorts or mars the communication process. In the opinion of Chitulu and Njemanze (2015), this is because of the fact that learners have to grapple with a lot of factors- his mother tongue, teacher-induced errors, apathy to language learning, peer group pressure, and many other factors. These phenomena have not placed the Nigerian student on a good pedestal to communicate in the English language.

Pronunciation is by far one of the several problems affecting most people learning English as a second Language (L2) in Nigeria (Tsojon and Aji, 2014). Students are not able to

produce correct forms of sound in the target language which hinders effective communication. This could be that the knowledge of their first languages generally interferes with their usage of the English language or the differences that exist between the mother tongue and the second target language pose a barrier to their English pronunciations. Ogbuehi (2013) asserts that every normal child acquires the sound system and the speech patterns of his mother tongue in a normal way through imitation of sounds from adult groups. On the other hand, learning to speak a second language or foreign language usually involves some rigours and challenges because the learner has to learn the sound systems and the prosodic features of the second language against the already firmly consolidated first language in the mind of the learner. The adjustment to these differences may lead to a mismatch and therefore, the learner may produce sounds that cannot be understood by other users of the same language. Since each language has its own unique peculiarities and any learner learning the language must be able to master the peculiarities of the language learnt, it is unfortunate that many Nigerian second language learners are unable to adjust successfully to the speech habit of the English language because the knowledge of the mother tongues often interference in the phonological realization of English sounds (Awa and Nwani-Grace, 2018).

The difference in the phonology of English and that of most Nigerian languages is wide. Take for example, the Yoruba language which is one of the Nigerian languages estimated to be spoken by between 40 to 50 million people (Wikipedia, 2020), most of whom live in Nigeria. When the comparison between the sound system of the English and Yoruba languages are examined, there are unique differences between the two languages. Yoruba has some speech sounds that are unfamiliar to English and vice versa. It then predicts that the differences between the two languages phonemes may lead to pronunciation difficulty for Yoruba learners of English (Patrick, Sui, Didam and Gyang, 2013). Dairo (2018) maintains that some sounds (phonemes) in the English language which are not in the inventory of learners' mother tongue are often pronounced as perceived to them, substituting it with the most similar sounds existing in their first language. This substitution of phonemes from mother tongue to second language creates many problems for the learners of English as a second language.

Phonology deals with how sounds are organised and structured in a particular language. It tries to explain the behavioural pattern of sounds, and how these sounds are patterned and organised to function in a particular language. This research focuses on the phonological units of the spoken English and Yoruba vowel sounds bilinguals; it identifies what sounds in English present difficulty to Yoruba speakers of English, how these sounds are realised and how the realisation of these sounds will help in solving the pedagogical problems faced by Yoruba-English bilinguals. The concept of bilingualism is generally viewed as a situation whereby a speaker knows, understands or speaks two languages. Weinreich (2013) and Halliday et.al (2004) in Fatokun (2010, p.137) affirm that "it refers to the use of two languages by a speaker. The factors of competence (minimal or native-like) play a key role in determining who is called a bilingual. This led to the grading of multi-bilingualism into two types, from the psycholinguistic point of view as advanced by Ahukanna (2010, p.175). These are: co-ordinate and compound bilinguals. The later acquires two languages in the same environment, but unable to operate in either of them without recourse to the system of the other language in the same situation. (Weinreich, 2013). In the former, one of the two languages becomes the "dominant one, with the other in a subordinate role" (Yule, 2013).

Both English and Yoruba vowels can occur at word-initial, word-medial and word-final positions. But in Yoruba, words usually end, if not in all cases, in vowel sound unlike English

where words can either end in vowels or consonants. This can be seen in words like *ile* (house) *oko* (farm) *eegun* (masquerade), *igbadun* (enjoyment); even English words that are either borrowed or loaned into Yoruba do ends in vowels. Vowels /u/ and /i/ are at the end of words like /kobodu/ for “cupboard”, /koopu/ for “cup”, /flaski/ or /filaski/ for flask, /girini/ for “green”, /pinki/ for pink, *ayoonu* for Iron, *hosipitu* for Hospital. “Class” is spelt and pronounced as /kilasi/. The vowel /i/ is inserted between the consonant clusters /k/, ditto the consonant /l/ is dropped in the pronunciations of “school” /sukulu/ and “principal” /prinsipa/, etc. This is because Yoruba words hardly ever end in consonants but vowels (Tijani, 2015). Free variation is allowed in English sounds where the vowel /i/ can be substituted for /e/ without necessarily changing the meaning of the words. This can be seen in words like *neither* (naið.ə /ni:ð.ə), *direct* (də'rekt/di'rekt/dai'rekt), *economy* (I'kɒn.ə.mi/e'kɒn.ə.mi), *finance* (fai.næns/fi:næns), *examinations* (ig.zæmi' neɪʃən/eks.zæmi'neɪʃən) and many more but in Yoruba, substituting any of the vowels leads to a change in meaning as seen in *Ile* (house) and *Ile* (land), *oko* (hoe) and *okò* (husband). There is distinction in the sounds and it cannot be substituted for one another, else, the meaning is either changed or distorted. They are therefore called vowel phonemes (Bankole, 2019). Due to the phonological differences that occur between English and Yoruba sounds, the Yoruba native learners of English will have to learn the habit of pronouncing these somewhat strange sounds which pose some difficulties to Yoruba speakers of English language. The Nigerian English bilingual obliterates the distinction in vowel quality between the long and short ones As the phonological system of Yoruba is contrasted with that of English, there is a need to compare and contrast the vowel sound structures of both languages in order to establish how the similarities and differences interfere in spoken English of Yoruba-English bilingual students in Senior Secondary Schools in Abeokuta, Ogun State. Hence, this study examines the contrastive phonological analysis of the pronunciation of English and Yoruba Vowel Sounds among the Bilingual Students in Senior Secondary Schools in Abeokuta.

The central aim of the study is a contrastive phonological analysis of the pronunciation of English and Yoruba vowel sounds among Yoruba-bilingual students in senior secondary schools in Abeokuta, Ogun State. Specifically, the work examines the pronunciation of English vowel sounds, investigates the Yoruba-English bilingual students knowledge of Yoruba vowel sounds as it interferes with the pronunciation of English vowel sounds, and discuss the similarities and differences in the pronunciation of Yoruba and English vowel sounds among Yoruba-English bilingual students in Senior Secondary Schools in Abeokuta.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Conceptual Review**

Language is one of the greatest gifts of God to mankind. It is a means by which man expresses his ideas and gives meaning to his existence. Little wonder, Bloomfield and New mark (2016) define language as fundamentally the means by which men communicate with each other and with themselves. Oyedokun-Alli (2019) describes language as an effective tool in socialization and social intercourse. He argues that the manifest use of language distinguishes man from other animals. In a similar vein, Babatunde (2021) explicates that language is the expression of culture, the depository of culture and crucial mode of culture transmission. Like Oyedokun-Alli, Olutayo (2017) describes language as one of the basic characteristics of human beings. It is a useful feature that differentiates him from other creatures. Ojetunde (2019) observe that language performs transactional, interactional and educational functions. Learning a second language after first acquiring one has always been a difficult task, especially when the two

languages are in competition and the target language is used less. Lennon (2019) also affirms that only young children can learn to speak a foreign language without any trace of interference because they are still within the age range linguists call the critical age, where the acquisition of two languages is possible. It is also believed that children within this age bracket are capable of learning any language, irrespective of the background, as long as they are brought up surrounded by that language (O'Connor, 2019) because the habits of a first language and those of the second language can compete favourably. Therefore, while it is easy for a young child to learn all the intricacies of a second language system, the same cannot be guaranteed of an adult.

### Origin of Yoruba Language

Yoruba is a language spoken in West Africa, primarily in Southwestern and Central Nigeria. It is spoken by the ethnic Yoruba people. The number of Yoruba speakers is roughly 50 million, plus about 5 million second-language speakers. As a pluricentric language, it is primarily spoken in a dialectal area spanning Nigeria, Benin, and Togo with smaller migrated communities in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Yoruba vocabulary is also used in the Afro-Brazilian religion known as Candomblé, in the Caribbean religion of Santería in the form of the liturgical Lucumí language and various Afro-American religions of North America. Practitioners of these religions in the Americas no longer speak or understand the Yorùbá language, rather they use remnants of Yorùbá language for singing songs that for them are shrouded in mystery. Usage of a lexicon of Yorùbá words and short phrases during ritual is also common, but they have gone through changes due to the fact that Yorùbá is no longer a vernacular for them and fluency is not required (Tijani, 2021).

As the principal Yoruboid language, Yoruba is most closely related to the languages Itsekiri (spoken in the Niger Delta), and Igala (spoken in central Nigeria). Yoruba is classified among the Edekiri languages, which is together with the Itsekiri and isolate Igala from the Yoruboid group of languages within the Volta–Niger branch of the Niger–Congo family. The linguistic unity of the Niger–Congo family dates to deep pre-history, estimates ranging around 11,000 years ago (the end of the Upper Paleolithic). In present-day Nigeria, it is estimated that there are around 50 million Yoruba primary and secondary language speakers, as well as several other millions of speakers outside Nigeria, making it the most widely spoken African language outside of the continent (Tijani, 2021).

### Letters of the Yoruba Alphabet

The Yoruba alphabet (*Álífàbẹ̀tì Yorùbá*) is used to write the Yoruba language, one in Nigeria and one in neighboring Benin Sound (Dairo, 2018). The Nigerian Yoruba alphabet is made up of 25 letters, without C Q V X Z but with the additions of Ẹ, Ọ, Ɔ and Gb. However, many of the excluded consonants are present in several dialectal forms of Yoruba, including V, Z, and other digraphs (like ch, gh, and gw). Central Yoruba dialects also have 2 extra vowels that are allophones of I and U. It is somewhat unusual in that the letter P usually transcribes [kp], being [p] only in restricted situations like onomatopoeia. The Beninese alphabet has the letters Ɛ and Ɔ, and previously had C Sound (Dairo, 2018)

### Yoruba alphabet (Nigeria)

Upper Case	A	B	D	E	Ẹ	F	G	Gb	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	Ọ	P	R	S	Ɔ	T	U	W	Y
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Lower case	a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	h	I	J	k	l	m	N	o	o	p	r	s	ṣ	t	u	w	Y
IPA	a	b	d	e	ɛ	F	g	ḡb	h	I	ḡ	k	l	m	n̩	o	ɔ	k	r	s	ʃ	t	u	w	J

The nasal vowels are written with digraphs: ⟨in⟩, ⟨en⟩, ⟨an⟩, ⟨on⟩, ⟨un⟩, unless they come after ⟨n⟩. Long vowels are written double, as in *dáádáá* (transl. fine, okay). The high and low tones are written with acute and grave accents (á, à), while mid tone is unmarked (a), except for disambiguation on a nasal (ṅ, etc.) (Bankole, 2019). Combinations of these tones produce falling and rising tones, written e.g. â, ã when they are combined on a single vowel letter. These may appear on nasal consonants as well, as in *ńkọ́* (how...?), *ǹn̩kan* (things). An apostrophe may be used to mark an elided sound, at the choice of the writer, as in *ń'lé* (transl. at home), from *ní ilé*, but *sódò* (transl. to a place), from *sí òdò*. When *n* is a syllable of its own before a vowel, as in *n ò ló* (transl. I didn't go), it is pronounced [ŋ] (plus tone) (Bankole, 2019).

### English Sound System

At the segmental levels, the English sound system consists of 44 sound segments made up of 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds thus:

**Consonant sound Symbols:** /t/ /b/ /d/ /p/ /f/ /v/ /m/ /n/ /s/ /ʃ/ /l/ /r/ /j/ /tʃ/ /k/ /dʒ/ /w/ /h/ /g/ /ʒ/ /ŋ/ /θ/ Vowel sounds:

**Pure vowel Sound Symbols** /ɪ/ /e/ /æ/ /ɒ/ /ʌ/ /ʊ/ /i:/ /u:/ /ɑ:/ /ɔ:/ /ɜ:/ /ə/

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

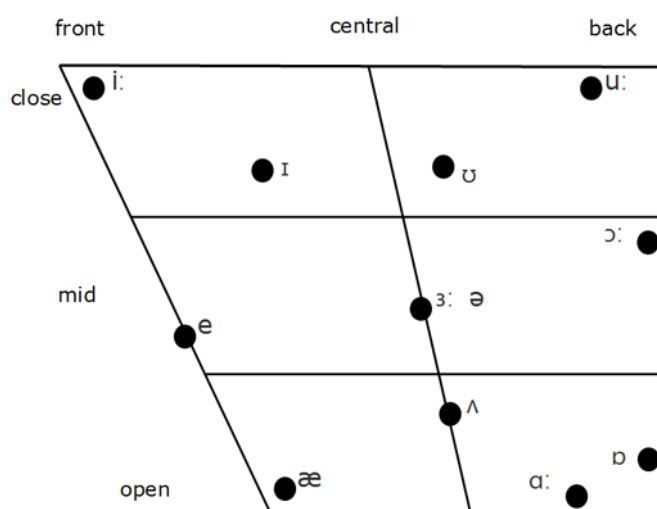
The Yoruba sound systems however has 30 sound segments made up of 18 consonant sound and 12 vowel sounds. The vowel sounds in Yoruba are made up of 7 oral sounds and 5 nasal vowels this

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

As the phonological system of Yoruba is contrasted with that of English, there is a need to compare and contrast the sound structure of both languages in order to establish how the similarities and differences interfere in spoken English of Yoruba-English bilingual students.

### English vowel sounds

A vowel is a syllabic speech sound pronounced without any stricture in the vocal tract. Vowels are one of the two principal classes of speech sounds, the other being the consonant. Vowels vary in quality, in loudness and also in quantity (length). They are usually voiced and are closely involved in prosodic variation such as tone, intonation and stress (Bankole, 2019).



The word *vowel* comes from the Latin word *vocalis*, meaning "vocal" (i.e. relating to the voice). In English, the word *vowel* is commonly used to refer both to vowel sounds and to the written symbols that represent them (a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes w and y). (Nwani-Grace, 2019). In the phonetic definition, a vowel is a sound, such as the English "ah" /ɑ:/ or "oh" /oʊ/, produced with an open vocal tract; it is median (the air escapes along the middle of the tongue), oral (at least some of the airflow must escape through the mouth), frictionless and continuant. There is no significant build-up of air pressure at any point above the glottis. This contrasts with consonants, such as the English "sh" [ʃ], which have a constriction or closure at some point along the vocal tract. In the phonological definition, a vowel is defined as syllabic, the sound that forms the peak of a syllable. A phonetically equivalent but non-syllabic sound is a semivowel. In oral languages, phonetic vowels normally form the peak (nucleus) of many or all syllables, whereas consonants form the onset and (in languages that have them) coda. Some languages allow other sounds to form the nucleus of a syllable, such as the syllabic (i.e., vocalic) *l* in the English word *table* ['tʰeɪ.bəl] (when not considered to have a weak vowel sound: ['tʰeɪ.bəl]) or the syllabic *r* in the Serbo-Croatian word *vrt* [vřt] "garden".

## Language Contact

The study of language contact investigates the ways that language communities interact and the impact of that contact on the languages. Language contact can occur between a few individuals from one language community and a more dominant language community. These individuals may become multilingual to some degree, but this kind of contact will have very little, if any, impact on the heritage language of the individuals. Contact will be more significant when a large portion of a language community is having interaction with people from another language community. The kind of interaction will also affect the linguistic impact of the contact. For example, if people from a remote community visit the market where all the people speak another language, the visitors will learn vocabulary necessary for commerce, but possibly little more. If people from a more dominant language community move into the same location as the members of a less dominant culture, there will be interaction in a wider variety of social



situations. In such a case, people from both languages may begin adopting phrases and vocabulary from the other language. In some cases, the languages merge and become a new language.

Although language exists in the minds of individual speakers, it is also very much a social phenomenon, involving more than one speaker engaged with another in acts of communication. Thus, speakers of a language, any language, (except, of course, those with a small number of speakers who are not in a position to talk with one another) are always interacting with other speakers (Winford, 2017). Generally, the interaction takes place between speakers of the same language, but what does ‘same language’ mean here? It is known that no two speakers of what is ostensibly the same language speak exactly identically, and that, moreover, the line between different languages and different dialects of the same language is often very hard to draw and is generally open both to interpretation and to external manipulation, for example, for political or nationalistic purposes (Thomason, 2019)

Thus in the normal course of language use, contact between speakers of no identical language systems takes place again and again. Contact between speakers of different dialects is at one end of a continuum of degree of identity in such situations; at the other end is contact between speakers of different languages. Moreover, even pairs of different languages may show different degrees of similarity, when one is set in opposition to another, so that Russian and Ukrainian are in many ways more similar to each other than either is to Hindi or to Thai. Linguists usually refers to such contact situations as ‘language contact’ or ‘dialect contact,’ as the case may be, even though it must be emphasized that the contact is between speakers in concrete communicative situations and not between languages or dialects as systems in the abstract. Moreover, even where one might recognize a construct such as a ‘macrolanguage’ to subsume all varieties of a given speech form or in cases where there is a standard language that is the default that one thinks of when referring to ‘language X,’ the speaker-to-speaker contact that is generally characterized as ‘language contact’ actually involves a dialect, that is, the particular variety of the language, the specific dialect, that each speaker is using in that communicative encounter (Thomason, 2017; Siemund and Kintana, 2015).

### **Contrastive phonology**

In phonology, two sounds of a language are said to be in contrastive distribution if replacing one with the other in the same phonological environment results in a change in meaning. If a sound is in contrastive distribution, it is considered a phoneme in that language. For example, in English, the sounds [p] and [b] can both occur word-initially, as in the words *pat* and *bat* (minimal pairs), which are distinct morphemes. Therefore, [p] and [b] are in contrastive distribution and so are phonemes of English. Note that two sounds that are in contrastive distribution in one language can be in complementary distribution or free variation in another. These sounds occur in English, as in the word *team* [t<sup>h</sup>i:m] and *steam* [sti:m], but their occurrence is purely dependent upon phonological context. Therefore, in English, [t<sup>h</sup>] and [t] are not in contrastive distribution but in complementary distribution. Contrastive distribution in linguistics, as opposed to complementary distribution or free variation, is the relationship between two different elements in which both elements are found in the same environment with a change in meaning (*Abramson and Arthur 2018*)

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### **Production of English Vowel Sound by Yoruba-English Bilingual**

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Words	Yoruba Pronunciation	RP
Vowel	/vowəl/	/vaʊəl/
Corps	/cɔ:pz/	/cɔ:/
Odour	/odɔ/	/əʊdə/
Depot	/depɔ:/	/dɛpəʊ/
Data	/dætæ/	/'deɪ.tə/

### Morphology

In morphology, two morphemes are in contrastive distribution if they occur in the same environment, but have different meanings. For example, in Korean, noun phrases are followed by one of the various markers that indicate syntactic role: /-ka/, /-i/, /-(l)ul/, etc. /-ka/ and /-i/ are in complementary distribution. They are both used to indicate nominative case, and their occurrence is conditioned by the final sound of the preceding noun. If the noun ends in a consonant, /-i/ occurs; otherwise, /-ka/. /-(l)ul/, on the other hand, occurs in the same position as /-i/ or /-ka/ and is also conditioned by the immediately previous sound, but it indicates the accusative case. Therefore, /-(l)ul/ and the set {/-i/, /-ka/} are in contrastive distribution. (Eimas, and Peter, 2018)

### Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Historically it has been used to establish language genealogies/ Contrastive analysis is an area of comparative linguistics which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes external to the analysis itself (Crystal and David 2019).

Contrastive analysis involves the comparison or contrast of two or more languages with a view to pinpointing where a learner will have a problem or difficulties or where learners will be facilitated. C. A. is based on theory of transfer.

### Methods of Contrastive analysis

- i. Description: Name all the structural and formal properties of language level to be described.
- ii. Selection: Identify the specific items in the system to be compared and contrasted that will be isolated for specific attention.
- iii. Contrast and Comparison: Systematically, specific item from the language should be juxtaposed with items or features from another. Differences and similarities should be identified.
- iv. Prediction: Systematic statement of types of problems that may occur. E.g borrow – lend (Adegbija 1995).

Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and early 1970s, as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be



reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn. The theoretical foundations for what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis were formulated in Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* (2015). In this book, Lado 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" (Connor, 2016). While it was not a novel suggestion, Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. That involved describing the languages (using structuralist linguistics), comparing them and predicting learning difficulties. During the 1960s, there was a widespread enthusiasm with this technique, manifested in the contrastive descriptions of several European languages, many of which were sponsored by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. It was expected that once the areas of potential difficulty had been mapped out through contrastive analysis, it would be possible to design language courses more efficiently.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprises of Senior Secondary School Students in Abeokuta metropolis, Ogun State. A sample is a subset of a population, selected to meet specific objectives. Therefore the study focused only on five (5) randomly selected schools in Abeokuta South Ogun State: Abeokuta Grammar School, Idi Aba and Baptist Girls College, Idi Aba, Ijemo Titun high school, Lantoro high school, Oke lantoro and Agunbiade Victory high school, Magbon Abeokuta. Purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) respondents from each school due to the fact that the researcher cannot cover all the senior secondary schools in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The data for this study was sourced through participatory observation, recording of sounds production by the students with the use of a recorder. Also data was sourced from textbooks, Journals, articles and the internet. Section A sought the demographic data of respondents such as age, gender and class while section B, consist of items designed to elicit information from the respondents on contrastive phonological analysis of the pronunciation of English and Yoruba vowel sounds among the bilingual students in senior secondary schools in Abeokuta South, Ogun state. English words were studied, therefore, the researcher explore and analyse the instances of phonological interference especially on the vowel sound using qualitative contrastive phonological analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

This chapter analysed the data collected for this research work and interpreted the data based on the research questions stated in chapter one. The data consisted of 100 respondents from Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State. This being a descriptive research, English words were studied and analysed on phonological interference especially on the vowel sounds using qualitative contrastive phonological analysis. The purpose of this analysis having been stated clearly in the objectives can be summarized as an effort to find out the differences and similarities of the pronunciation of English and Yoruba vowels among bilingual students in senior secondary schools in Abeokuta South, Local Government Area Ogun State.

### **Contrastive Analysis**

In this section, the data collected were analyzed using contrastive analysis  
The listed words to be analyzed by the respondents

English Words	RP
1. Word	wɜ:d
2. Love	lʌv
3. Money	mʌnɪ
4. Country	kʌntri
5. Vowel	vauəl
6. Such	sʌts
7. Scarce	skeəs
8. About	ə'baʊt
9. Sachet	sæseɪ
10. Beret	beret
11. Nature	neɪtʃə
12. Wire	waɪə
13. Purse	pɜ:s
14. Blood	blʌd
15. Circle	sɜ:kəl
16. Work	wɜ:k
17. Airtel	eətel
18. Police	pəlis
19. Depot	depəʊ
20. Plumber	plʌmə
21. Search	sɜ:tʃ
22. Higher	haɪə
23. Say	sei
24. Age	eɪdʒ
25. Odour	əʊdə
26. Shirt	ʃɜ:t
27. Around	əraʊnd
28. Teacher	ti:tʃə
29. Church	tʃɜ:tʃ
30. Chair	tʃeə
31. Cut	/kʌt/

**Research question one: How does the Yoruba-English Bilingual Pronounce the English vowel sounds?**

/ɪ/ – fit /fi:t/, pick /pi:k/  
 /e/ – pet /pet/, sent /sent/  
 /æ/ – pat /pæt/, flat /flæt/  
 /ʌ/ – cut /kʌt/ jump /dʒʌmp/  
 /ʊ/ – put /pʊt/, book /bʊk/  
 /ɒ/ – pot /pɒt/, dog /dɒg/  
 /ə/ – about /ə'baʊt/, system /'sɪs.təm/

/i:/ – week /wi:k/, feet /fi:t/  
 /ɑ:/ – hard /hɑ:/, park /pɑ:k/  
 /ɔ:/ – fork /fɔ:k/, walk /wɔ:k/  
 /ɜ:/ – heard /hɜ:d/, word /wɜ:d/  
 /u:/ – boot /bu:t/, group /gru:p/  
 eɪ – place /pleɪs/, late /leɪt/  
 /oʊ/ – home /hoʊm/, phone /foʊn/  
 /aʊ/ – mouse /maʊs/, brown /braʊn/  
 /ɪə/ – clear /kɪə/, fear /fiə/  
 /eə/ – care /keə/, wear /weə/  
 /ɔɪ/ – boy /bɔɪ/, toy /tɔɪ/  
 /aɪ/ – find /faɪnd/, bite /baɪt/  
 /ʊə/ – nature /nei'tʃʊə/

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. Nature	neɪtʃə	neɪtʃə
2. Wire	waɪə	waɪə
3. Blood	blɔ:d	blʌd
4. Circle	seku:	sɜ:kəl
5. Work	wɜ:k	wɜ:k
6. Airtel	etel	/eətel/
7. Police	pəʊlɪs	pəlɪs
8. Depot	depəʊ	depəʊ
9. Plumber	plɔ:mbə	plʌmə
10. cut	kɒt	kʌt

The respondents have a close pronunciation to RP in the following words: nature, purse, work, and depot however, the respondents showed some levels of phonological interference in the pronunciation of “wire” (waɪə). The respondents realised the weak sound /ə/ as /a/. The respondents almost have a close pronunciation to RP in the word ‘circle’. The respondents replaced the initial central vowel /ɜ:/ with the front vowel /e/ all because it seems similar to the central vowel of the respondent’s mother tongue. In the word “airtel”, the initial diphthong of RP /eə/ has the final glide reduced to /e/ in the pronunciation of the word. The respondents like most Nigerian users and classmate mispronounced the word “police”. The initial vowel which is a schwa sound /ə/ is realised and pronounced as /əʊ/. In the word “plumber”, the respondents replaced the central vowel /ʌ/ in the RP with /ɜ:/ This happened because of retroactive interference. The voiced bilabial stop /b/ in the RP is silent but the respondents realised the /b/ sound.

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. Nature	neɪtʃə:	neɪtʃə
2. Wire	waɪər	waɪə
3. Purse	pɜ:s	pɜ:s
4. Blood	blə:d	blʌd
5. Circle	saiku:	sɜ:kəl
6. Work	wɜ:k	wɜ:k

7. Airtel	eatel	ʒetel
8. Police	pəulis	pəlis
9. Depot	dɛpət	dɛpəu
10. Plumber	plɔ:mba:	plʌmə

The respondents has a close pronunciation to RP in the pronunciation of the word “nature” and “wire”. The only deviation is in the realisation of the schwa sound /ə/ as a tensed vowel /ɔ:/ in nature; but the “wire” was perfectly pronounced. The respondents also substituted the central vowel /ɜ:/ for /ɔ:/ in the word “purse” The respondent over generalised the vowel in “blood” as /a:/ and not as /ʌ/ in the RP. The respondents' pronunciation corresponds to the RP in “work” and “airtel”.

In “circle”, the respondent replaced the vowel /ɜ:/ with a diphthong /ai/. This is due to the effect of mother tongue interferences on the part of the students. Also, there is a subsequent change of schwa sound /ə/ to monophthongised /əu/ in the word police. Like other respondents, the respondents realised the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ at the end of the word “depot”; meanwhile the consonant /t/ is silent in that word. The pronunciation of the word “plumber” has both consonant and vowel errors. The voiced bilabial plosive /b/ is silent in the word, also, the last vowel supposed to be a schwa sound /ə/ not a front vowel /a:/.

### Research question two:

How does the knowledge of Yoruba vowel sounds affect the pronunciation of English vowel sounds amongst the Yoruba-English Students in Abeokuta?

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. Hope	/hɒp/	/həʊp/
2. Depot	/dɛpɔ:/	/dɛpəu/
3. Data	/daetae/	/dei.tə/
4. Nature	/netʃɔ:/	/neɪtʃə/
5. Goal	/gol/	/gəʊl/
6. Gave	/gev/	/geɪv/
7. Shake	/sek/	/seɪk/
8. Say	/se/	/sei/
9. corps	/cɔ:pz/	/cɔ:/
10. sachet	/’saetʃet/	/’saɛf.ei/
11. Plumber	/plɔ:mba/	/plʌmə/
12. Higher	/haeyae/	/haɪə/

### (a) Substitution of Diphthongs for Pure Vowel and Yoruba Equivalent

As seen in the realization of vowel sounds above, the diphthongs in English weren’t effectively realised by Yoruba bilingual students. Majority pronounced the English diphthongs wrongly. The respondents pronounced diphthongs as a single vowel and replaced some sounds with their equivalent in Yoruba which is most noticeable in the realization of /əu/ as /o and ɔ/, /ɛə/ as /ia, and iə/ and /ei/ as /e/

### (b) Problem with silent letters

Words in the Yoruba language are often pronounced the way they are spelt unlike English that has some silent letters. Because the Yoruba phonemes are always pronounced, the Yoruba bilingual students have difficulty leaving a letter(s) unpronounced.

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. vowel	/vowəl/	/vauəl/
2. corps	/cɔ:pz/	/cɔ:/
3. sachet	/ˈsaetʃet/	/ˈsaɛʃ.ei/
4. Plumber	/plɔ:mba/	/plʌmə/
5. Higher	/haeyae/	/haia/

These words were mispronounced due to the silence of some letters in words. As seen in the pronunciation of ‘vowel’, respondents pronounced the silent /w/ in their realization; also ‘corps’ and ‘sachet’ when the consonant cluster ‘-ps’ and ‘-t’ respectively are silent. Plumber was also pronounced as written; unconscious that “b” is not voiced, distorting the meaning

### (c) Incorrect pronunciation of /ʌ, ə, ɜ:/ which are absent in Yoruba Language

The Yoruba language has fewer vowel sounds than the English language. Since some vowels of English are lacking in the Yoruba language, the Yoruba bilingual respondents replace the absent sounds with the nearest sound to it or Yoruba phonemes based on the similarity of the sounds. The three vowels: /ʌ, ə, ɜ:/ which are absent in Yoruba were realized and replaced with /ɒ and æ/ respectively. Respondents take the sound nearest to the given sound from the Yoruba sound inventory and replace it with what they have on paper and then pronounce it.

#### Replacing /ʌ/ with /ɔ/

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
11. Money	/mɒni/	/mʌni/
12. Country	/kɒntri/	/kʌntri/
13. Journey	/dʒɒni/	/dʒʌni/
14. Such	/sɒtʃ/	/sʌtʃ/

#### Replacing /ɜ:/ with /ɔ/

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. Burn	/bɒn/	/bɜ:n/
2. Purse	/pɒs/	/pɜ:s/
3. Purpose	/pɒpos/	/pɜ:pəs/
4. Further	/fɒda/	/fɜ:ðə/
5. Scarce	/skas/	/skɜ:s/
6. Search	/satʃ/	/sɜ:tʃ/

#### Replacing /ə/ with /a/

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
1. Easter	/ista/	/i:stə/
2. Ever	/eva/	/evə/

3. Under	/ʌn.da/	/ʌn.də/
4. Around	/aerand/	/ə'raund/
5. Odour	/odə/	/əudə/
6. Members	/membə/	/membə/
7. Barrier	/baria/	/bariə/

### **The similarities and differences in the pronunciations of Yoruba and English vowels**

However, Yoruba alphabet also has some vowel sounds which are similar to English vowel sound. These are: /a/, /i/, /e/, /u/, /ɔ/

English word	Respondents' pronunciation	R.P
/i/ Police	pəuli:s	pəlis
/a/ pan	pan	pan
/e/ bed	bed	bed
/ɔ/ mop	mɒp	mɒp

### **Findings**

The study revealed that early exposure, constant practicing and adherence to the sounds rules of English Language would help students speak like a near native speaker and have the required competence proficiency in the language use. It also identified the importance of the use of sounds for correct pronunciation. This study carried out a contrastive phonological analysis of the pronunciation of English and Yoruba vowels among bilingual students in senior secondary schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State. The similarities and differences of the vowels shows that there was a significant differences between the vowels of English and Yoruba which often lead to phonological interferences in the spoken utterances of students. The majority of the students simply substituted English sounds that are absent with Yoruba equivalent. This often negates standard pronunciation and localizes their realization of English sounds as they often pronounce silent letters in words, realize diphthongs as pure vowel, and substitute central vowels of English which are non-existent in Yoruba for Yoruba equivalents. This interference at the secondary school level could be said to be due to inadequate mastery of English phonemes. If at the secondary school level, they make these mistakes, then, correction of these errors from childhood education is the only lasting solution. It is expedient for students to be taught the sound system of English and Yoruba and their correct pronunciation right from the primary school level. This is because at the primary level, it is much easier to learn pronunciation effectively and often difficult to learn after this time. When students are exposed to the sound system of the two languages at the early stage, they will be able to distinguish the phonemes of the two languages. With the teaching of English and Yoruba sounds intensified at the early level of education, the students will certainly have some knowledge of the two languages by the time they get to the university. Consequently, differences in the two languages will not present a problem. Also, teachers in primary and secondary schools even teachers in tertiary institutions need to be models for correct pronunciation. If students listen to correct pronunciation from all their teachers, unconsciously, they will internalize the correct sound patterns and this problem of pronunciation would be reduced to the barest minimum

### **Conclusion**



The work concluded that, there was a significant difference between the vowels of English and Yoruba which often lead to phonological interferences in the spoken utterances of students. Pronunciation is by far one of the several problems affecting most people learning English as a second Language (L2) in Nigeria. Students are not able to pronounce correct forms of sound in the target language which hinders effective communication. This is because the knowledge of their first languages generally interferes with their usage of the English language or the differences that exist between the mother tongue language and the second (target) language pose a barrier to their English pronunciations. Hence, students should be well- trained in using correct pronunciation in real communication and taking cognisance of the rules and guides to effective knowledge of this phonological aspect in learning of English language. Moreover, students of English should be exposed to cassettes, CDS and videos recorded by English native speakers which are needed for practicing sounds. Teachers need to provide students with an environment to cultivate their reading skills and spoken English. Also, using English as the language of interaction through debates and discussions in class would be of good advantage.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made. Teachers need to devote more time and attention to the teaching of English sound as an important aspect of the English Language teaching. Teachers should raise students' consciousness about the importance of sounds. Teaching implies that the teacher must be a master of his/her subject. Consequently, English language teachers should be those who are specialists in both content and methodology. Teachers of ESL should use correct sound when communicating in real communication. It is very important to teach English sounds naturally, especially through dialogue. Since the English Language teachers in Nigeria much on textbooks for pedagogy and subject matter, English textbooks writers should employ teaching methods and techniques which are not only intelligible to teachers but also make drilling of English sounds a pleasurable exercise in the hand of a good language teacher.

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