

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE (A CASE STUDY OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN THE RURAL AREA IN ILLELA LOCAL GOVERNMENT)**

BY

**AMIRU IDRIS ABDULLAHI**

**ENGLISH UNIT.**

**COLLEGE OF GENERAL STUDIES**

**UMARU ALI SHINKAFI POLYTECHNIC**

**SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA**

AND

**RABPU ALMUSTAPHA**

**UMARU ALI SHINKAFI POLYTECHNIC**

**SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

English language learning in Nigeria is being faced with myriad of problems ranging from lack of qualified teachers, lack of motivation from both teachers and learners, in adequate language learning materials and of course the mother tongue influence on the spoken English of the learners 'of the language in Nigeria. To learn English language means not its grammatical structures but also its phonological rules. Mother tongue interference as been a major problem affecting learners of English as second language in Nigeria. This paper therefore investigate the level of the mother tongue interference in the spoken English of selected primary school pupils of Hausa native in a remote boarder village called Araba in Illela local government area of Sokoto state. Specifically the paper examines how this problem affects the use of vowels and consonant sounds by the sampled population. Tape recorder was used and recorded twenty (20) pupils of primary five (5) and six (6) of the school while speaking in English language within the school premises. Errors detected were analyzed as substitution using a tabular form and a simple percentage procedure. The aim is to find out the problem, its courses and suggest possible way forward. The paper found that pupils in the rural areas are having serious pronunciation problems as most of the vowels and consonants sounds of English language are being substituted by the sounds available in their mother tongue. For instance, the plosive, bilabial and voiceless /p/ sound is being substituted with the fricative, labio-dental and voiceless /f/sound. The vowel sound /ʌ/ is also being substituted by the learners to /ɔ/ or /a/ sound. This explained why the sampled population mispronounce words like 'people' as /fi:ful/ and 'love' as /lɔv/. the paper therefore recommend that only qualified and interested persons should be employed to teach English language in the rural areas, pupils should also redouble effort in learning the language especially its spoken aspect.

**KEY WORDS: MOTHER TONGUE M.T INTERFERENCE. LANGUGE LEARNING.**

## INTRODUCTION

Being the second language to the learners in Nigeria, its learning is being faced with many challenges ranging from the lack of qualified teachers especially in the rural areas, lack of interest from the pupils, inadequate instructional materials and above all the M.T interference that is usually distorting the meaning of what is intended by the speaker. Jowitt (1991)

Mother Tongue according to Nordquist (2019) refers to a person's native language that is a language learned from birth. Chomsky (1951) Said, M.T is the language that a child acquires at first in a natural setting can be termed as Mother tongue. Ofara (2005) is the language in which children obtain their first experiences, and one which they dream and think, and in which they can mostly, easily and conveniently express their feelings and emotions. This scholarly view suggests that a language is said to be the Mother tongue of a person which he or she is born into, meaning the language of the parents that children are acquiring.

The importance of English language learning in Nigeria becomes necessary owing to its status as an implied official language, a lingua franca and a language of instruction in all learning institutions especially at the Primary, Secondary and tertiary levels.

The term 'interference' itself according to Okpara (2005) and Rahmatu (2013) is when a child or an adult tends to think in his Mother tongue and tries to express him/herself in the second language. Ringbom (2007) says language interference is the situation when the habit of M T stands in the way of proper pronunciation and grammar of the target language.

These views seem to suggest that a Nigerian is at risk of transferring the structure of the M T into the use of English language.

It is however undisputed statement of the fact that, the complexity and multiplicity of languages in Nigeria have to a great extent influence the English language being spoken by Nigerians.

Alabi (2011), says that no matter how people tried to speak English language in Nigeria, it could not be the same as the native speakers, because, the variety of English used in Nigeria has been indigenized to suit Nigerian environment.

Onwubiko (2011), observed that Mother Tongue influence can come as a result of the difference between English sounds system and that of the M. T, particularly those that are absent in one of the languages which will leaves a learner to either approximate the features of such sounds to the closest of his M. T, or literally pronounce a word as represented by its letters.

Crystal (1985) said to learn a second language, the problems are varied, these according to him include the linguistics property of the target language, physical characteristics of the learner psychological and even his social characteristics.

Bamgbose (1971) observes that the major difference English language in Nigeria and that of native speakers have, is mainly found in the spoken form as most of the Phonetic characteristics of English language cannot be found in the Nigerian languages.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (2005:39) phonemic interference (phonological) is predominant and which is brought about because of the difference between the sound pattern of M T and that of the target language. For instance, the interchanging of /p/ phoneme for /f/ by Hausa users of English language distort the actual pronunciation of words like /pi:pl/ for /fi:ful/.

Obiamalu (2002) states that most mother tongue languages (non-English) lack consonant clusters, as a result, vowels are inserted immediately after a consonant sound as in words like castle /kasl/ became /kastil/ with the insertion of /i/ sound between /t/ and /l/. Cotton /kɔtn/ pronounced as /kɔtɔn/ with the insertion of /ɔ/ sound between /t/ and /n/ etc.

The above scholarly views showed that these mispronunciations of speech sounds are needless to say augmenting the message a learner is initially intended to send across.

Substitution according to Jowit (1991) is a kind of interference that is brought as a result of self-substitution for the phonemes of the target language to suit the M T structure, which occurs because of the second language's phoneme is absent in the M T, Little wonder the reporters of Hausa native tend to produce the word "very" /very/ as /beri/.

Orji (1997) asserts that, Nigerians have difficulties mostly in pronouncing the English dentals sounds such as /θ/, /ð/, and the alveola /ŋ/ and some consonants clusters. Which as a result he said many Nigerians approximate them to the closest available phoneme in their M T or drop them entirely.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are some researches related to this research among them are:

Igwebuikwe ,(2022). conducted a research on the topic ' Mother tongue Interference in Learning of English language in Primary Schools Among Efik Communities in Cross River State' The paper revealed that, there is a significant interference of MT in learning of English language in primary schools among Efik Communities in River state.' The researcher revealed that, pupils in the efik speaking communities are substituting many English speech sounds to their native efik due to the in availability of those sounds in efik language or when proved to be difficult in pronunciation such as /l/ is being substituted to /r/ which led to be mispronunciation of word like 'love' /lʌv/ to 'robe' /rɒv/.

Likewise Sadiya (2011). Conducted a similar research on the topic titled: 'influence of mother tongue on the spoken English of some selected Senior Secondary School students and selected Hausa television correspondents in Kaduna', The study specifically laid its weight on the stress, intonation and substitution of some English speech sounds being done by both the students and the correspondents while speaking English language. Her research found out that there are lots of errors committed by television correspondent as well the SS Students regarding proper application of stress and intonation on words and on the sentences, but the study restricted itself on the Senior Secondary Students and the television correspondents.

Adebayo Adebileye of the department of English, Redeemed University, Nigeria. Conducted a research on the topic 'teaching and learning English as a second language in Nigeria: Examining Evolving Approaches and Method' the research which focused on how to attain effective method of teaching and learning English as second language found out that the Principled and Eclectic Approach as the best approach for teaching and learning English as second language.

Therefore, the researchers of this work focus on the gap created by those researches as it discusses the problems militating against the effective pronunciation of vowels and consonant sound of English language by the native Hausa pupils in selected primary school as a result of M.T Influence.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Having English language in Nigeria as a lingua franca, an official and a medium of instruction in schools, many Nigerians including the Hausa language speaking community are still swimming in problems in its grammatical and phonological rules. Pupils of primary schools in Hausa land to be precise are still very much into problems associated to proper pronunciation of English speech sounds due to problems ranging from lack of interest and M.T Influence. This study therefore will find out the problems and recommends solutions.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the influence of mother tongue in spoken English of the selected primary school pupils in the rural area of illela Local Government.
2. To identify the causes the problems
3. To come up with the possible solution to the identified problems

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will be used in this study:

1. Does mother tongue influence the spoken English of the pupils?
2. What are the problems that cause mother tongue interference on spoken English to the pupils?
3. What are the possible solution to the problems?

### METHODOLOGY

According to Churchill (1977) research method is the system of gathering and recording of data about a problem in order to find a way of solving the problem.

To effectively address this issue at hand, this research therefore adopted a descriptive design since its concern is on the mother tongue interference which is a general problem to almost all learners of English language.

The study was conducted in Araba township model primary school, a remote boarder village in Illela Local Government Area Sokoto state. A tape recorder was used and recorded twenty pupils who are all Hausa native speakers across primary five and six to ascertain the level of M.T Interference in their spoken English with special attention to vowel consonant sounds.

The findings were analyzed to whether or not there is M.T Interference in the spoken English of the sampled pupils.

Errors detected were grouped to ascertain if there is substitution or not of some sounds of English language to that of the M.T of the population of the study and the analyzed in a tabular form showing the English standard form, transcription, pupils pronunciation, number of defaulting pupils and the errors committed.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The tables below presents the summary of the raw data collected from the pupils for the use of vowel sounds

#### ENGLISH VOWEL SOUNDS THAT ARE BEING REPLACED DUE TO MT INTERFERENCE

English phonemic symbols	Replaced with	Hausa Phonemic symbols	Remarks
/ɜ:/	Changed to	/e/	Substitution
/ə/	” ”	/a/	” ”
/ʌ/	” ”	/a/ /ɔ/	” ”
/ɔ:/	” ”	/ɔ/	” ”
/ai/	” ”	/a/	” ”
/əu/	” ”	/ɔ/	” ”

English consonant sounds being replaced by the Hausa consonant sounds

English phonemic symbols	Replaced with	Hausa Phonemic symbols	Remarks
/p/	Changed to	/f/	Substitution
/v/	” ”	/b/	” ”
/θ/	” ”	/t/	” ”
/ð/	” ”	/z/ /d/	” ”

The table below will show the errors committed by the pupils on vowel sounds as a result of Mother tongue interference.

Standard form	Transcription	Pupils' Pronunciation	Number of defaulting pupils	Errors Committed
Doctor	/dɒktə/	/dɒkta/	20 out of 20	/ə/ replaced with /a/
Love	/lʌv/	/lɒv/	20 out of 20	/ʌ/ replaced with /ɔ/
talk	/tɔ:k/	/tɒk/	19 out of 20	/ɔ:/ replaced with /ɔ/
go	/gəʊ/	/gɔ/	20 out of 20	/əʊ/ replaced with /ɔ/
girl	/gɜ:l/	/gel/	19 out of 20	/ɜ:/ replaced with /e/
Nigeria	/naɪdʒɪriə/	/nadʒiriə/	19 out of 20	/ai/ replaced with /a/

The table below will show the errors committed by the pupils on consonant sounds as a result of Mother tongue interference.

Standard form	Transcription	Pupils' Pronunciation	Number of defaulting pupils	Errors Committed
People	/pi:p/	/fi:fl/ /fi:ful/	20 out of 20	/p/ replaced with /f/
Voice	/vɔiz/	/bɔis/	20 out of 20	/v/ replace with /b/
Thank	/θæŋk/	/tank/	20 out of 20	/θ/ replaced with /t/
The	/ði:/	/d/ /z/	20 out of 20	/ð/ replaced with /d/ or /z/

### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

This research work focused on how Mother Tongue influence affects the spoken English of some selected pupils of primary five and six in Araba model primary school of Illela local government area.

The research founds out that, the sampled pupils are seriously committing errors on their pronunciation of words at the level of both vowels and consonant sounds by substituting lots of vowels and consonants sounds to the sounds of their native language (Hausa language) which brought about the following:

1. substitution of some vowel sound (changing of a sound) to ease pronunciation as in the pronunciation of the word 'doctor' /dɒktə/ where the 'shwa' /ə/ is being substituted to /æ/ or /ɔ/ and therefore pronounced as /dɒktɔ/ or /dɒktæ/. Also /ʌ/ as in the word 'love' or 'bus' is being substituted with /ɔ/ and therefore pronounced as /lɒv/ or /bɒs/ among others
2. The research also found out that, the bilabial, plosive and voiceless consonant sound /p/ is being substituted with the labio-dental, fricative and voiceless consonant /f/ in word like 'people' /pi:p/ being pronounced as 'feofle' /fi:fl/, the dentals /θ/ and /ð/ are being substituted to /d/ and /z/ respectively, among others.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research is principally concerned with the influence of mother tongue among primary school pupils purposely to assess how this influence is affecting their articulation of English vowels and consonant sounds.

The research has found out that all the sampled pupils are committing costly errors while speaking in English language at the vowel and consonant sounds, this they do by substituting some sounds of English language to that of their M.T to ease pronunciation which is quite a mistake.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the problems observed, the paper therefore recommends the followings:

1. Pupils in the rural areas should develop interest in learning not only the grammatical rules of English language but also its phonological structure
2. Employment of qualified, hardworking and competent hands to teach English language in the rural areas.
3. Teachers of the English language need to devise a means through which the pupils will be motivated towards learning of spoken English.

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