

# MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON THE SPOKEN ENGLISH OF NEWS CORRESPONDENTS

(A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED CORRESPONDENTS OF RIMA RADIO SOKOTO)

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## ABSTRACT

*Mother tongue interference has been one of the major problems in sociolinguistics affecting people speaking English as second language in Nigeria and the world over. This Paper therefore examines the influence of Mother Tongue on the spoken English of selected native Hausa journalists reporting news in English Language in the news and current affairs department of Rima Radio Sokoto with a view to determining whether or not, the correspondents' use of English vowels and consonants sounds are influenced by their mother tongue interference. Tape recorder was used and recorded ten (10) reporters live on different occasions to ascertain the level of mother tongue interference in their use of spoken English. Errors detected were grouped according to whether they are Substitution or Epenthesis and analyzed in tabular form. The aim is to remind the media personnel on the importance of maintaining Standard English pronunciation in information dissemination so as to avoid misleading the public through wrong pronunciation. The paper finds out that there are lots of errors committed by the native Hausa reporters presenting reports in English at the Vowels and Consonants levels due to their mother tongue interference. It therefore recommends that media houses should be organizing in-house training on the proper use of spoken English language and ensures that only English language graduates with very good command of English language should be employed as reporters in order to avert errors that will mislead their teaming listeners.*

**KEY WORD:** *Mother Tongue, Spoken English, Correspondents, Radio*

## INTRODUCTION

Mother Tongue according to Nordquist (2019) refers to a person's native language that is a language learned from birth. Chomsky (1951) 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 Secondary and tertiary levels. For an effective journalism in Nigeria, journalists must not only read and write in English language but also know how to speak very close to the native speakers especially on its supra segmental aspect of the language to avoid MT interference on the course of utterances. According to Kovach (2001) Journalists are no doubt some of the people in Nigeria saddled with the responsibility of speaking good English considering the fact that they are the role models to many people especially those interested in speaking good English which is not only free from grammatical errors but also free from phonological lapses, they are also dealing with people of different educational backgrounds as well as students.

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.

There are generally two types of interference namely, I, Proactive and ii, Retroactive interference.

Proactive interference is an interference phenomenon that helps in the acquisition of the target language, for instance, sounds like /b/, /d/ and /t/ which occur in most Nigerian languages help in the acquisition of similar sounds in the English phonology. As such pronunciation of words like 'bed' 'bet' and 'take' and so on will not be difficult to articulate. (Richard et'al 1971)

Retroactive interference according to Adegbite (2005), is one that retards the process of acquisition of the target language, for instance, the absence of the voiced, dental and plosive /ð/ in Hausa language hampers the pronunciation of words like 'then' and 'that' to 'den' or 'zen' and 'dat' or 'zat' respectively

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 that 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 /kɒtn/ pronounced as /kɒtɒn/ with the insertion of /ɒ/ 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 reporter 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/.

Epenthesis according to Imoleoye (2011) is the superfluous insertion of vowel segment as a way of alleviating complexity of consonant clusters. Example /sukul/ for school /sku:l/, /sikirin/ for screen /skri:n/.

**THE MEDIA:** The media especially the Mass Media comprising Radio, Television and Newspaper remain an epitome for informing, educating, enlightening and entertaining people through its various items. Radio to be precise has emerged the most potable, affordable and widely being used by the sizeable number of people.

There is the need for a reporter to master the Phonetics and Phonology of a language he or she is using in sending across messages being him or her an individual trained to collect/gather information in form of text, audio or pictures, processes them to news -worthy form and disseminates it to the public.

Akinfeleye (2000) asserts that when you read many Nigerian Newspapers or magazines, listened to a Nigerian Radio or watch Television, you begin to wonder if the majority of the Nigerian journalists think of what they say, why they say it and to whom they say it to.

This view suggests that effective communication or act of reportage is more than having a report free from grammatical error, but having reports that stimulates listeners and make them to stay glue to their radios due to the reporters impeccable manipulation of spoken English.

Okpara (2001), said, reporters tend to unnecessarily bisect vowel sound in some words which contravenes the phonological structure of the target language as some reporters tend to pronounce the word "school" /sku:l/ as /sukul/, people /pi:pl/ as /pi:pul/. He also states that the absent of vowel reduction or weakening into the 'schwa' /ə/ made many reporters substituting it to /ɔ/ or /a:/ in words like 'doctor' /dɒktə/ pronounce as /dɒktɔ/ or /dɒkta:/

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.

Okpara (2005), Adegbite and Akindele (2005) pointed out that even those consonants sounds that are present in Nigerian languages and English languages, are being realized differently.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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

Igwebuike ,(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.’ 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 of research 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.

Ayodele, et'al (1984), investigated the spoken English in Nigerian Radio broadcasters in nine different Radio stations using oral assessment to measure their achievement. The study found out that, majority of the sampled broadcasters used a variety of English which is different from the standard British English. Also, Adeyemi, (2003) also evaluated the spoken English performance of Nigerian Television newscasters using error analysis. The study found out that, the performance of most of the Television newscasters on spoken English is very poor especially on their use of consonant sounds; he limited the research on the Television broadcasters only.

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 speakers presenting reports in English language in a Radio station, and to the fact that errors detected are judged as Epenthesis or Substitution

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

English language remains the general language of the Media which journalists used to communicate with the entire people of the world. Therefore, journalists are expected to speak the language very close to the native speakers, but, the system has took a different direction as most of the correspondents speak English language with their mother tongue interference especially at the sounds (vowels and consonants) levels.

This affects the journalists themselves and the entire public. This study will find out the problems and the solutions.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the studies are as follows:

1. To find out the influence of mother tongue in spoken English of the correspondents
2. To identify the problems that causes the phenomenon
3. To come up with the possible solution to the problems

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions will be use in this study:

1. Does mother tongue influence the spoken English of the Correspondents?
2. What are the problems that cause mother tongue interference on spoken English of the Correspondents?
3. What is 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.

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 the news and current affairs department of Rima Radio Sokoto. Tape recorder was used to collect the raw data from the spoken English of the sampled reporters who

are all native of Hausa language. The research recorded ten correspondents live at different occasion to ascertain the level of their M T influence while presenting reports at vowels and consonants levels. The findings were analyzed in tabular form based on the following:  
 English standards form  
 Transcription  
 Reporters pronunciation, Errors committed and Number of Defaulting Reporters

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The tables below presents the summary of the raw data collected from the reporters of the station on the use of vowel and consonant sound which affect the whole respondents during the study.

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

ENGLISH PHONEMIC SYMBOLS	REPLACED WITH	HAUSA PHONEMIC SYMBOLS	REMARKS
/ai/	CHANGED TO	/a/	NOT MARCHED WITH THE STANDARD ENGLISH
/ə/	„	/ɔ/	„
/ɔ:/	„	/ɔ/	„
/ʌ/	„	/a/ /ɔ/	„
/e/	„	/a/	„

### ENGLISH CONSONANTS BEING REPLACED WITH HAUSA CONSONANTS

ENGLISH PHONEMIC SYSBOLS	REPLACED WITH	HAUSA PHONEMIC SYMBOLS	REMARKS
/P/	CHANGED TO	/f/	NOT MARCHED WITH THE STANDARD ENGLISH
/v/	„	/b/	„
/θ/	„	/t/	„
/ð/	„	/z/ /d/	„



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

Standard form	Transcription	Reporters' pronunciation	Number of defaulting reporters	Errors committed
People	/pi:pl/	/fi:fl/ /fi:ful/	9 out of 10	/p/ replaced with /f/
Voice	/voiz/	/bois/	10 out of 10	/v/ replace with /b/
thank	/θæŋk/	/tæŋk/	10 out of 10	/θ/ replaced with /t/
the	/ði:/	/tæŋk/ /di/	10 out of 10	/ð/ replaced with /t/ or /z/

### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This research work focused on the Mother Tongue interference on the spoken English of news correspondents of Rima Radio Sokoto.

The research finds out that, the sampled reporters are seriously committing errors on their pronunciation of words at the level of both vowels and consonant sounds 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 been 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 /lɔv/ or /bɔs/ 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:pl/ 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 the news correspondents presenting reports in English language of the Rima Radio Sokoto 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 correspondents are committing costly errors while on the air presenting their reports, as they were found to be substituting some vowels and consonant sounds. The reporters are also found to be inserting vowels in word where there are no vowels at all.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the problems observed, we got to understand that, the sampled correspondents are committing injurious errors thereby distorting the semantics of their intended messages to the public and to effectively surmount this nagging problems, this paper therefore recommend the followings:

1. Rima Radio and other Media houses should know that their strength is always determine by the professionalism of its staff and therefore must ensure that, a routine in-house training is being organized to the staff on the proper use English vowels and consonant sounds.
2. People including students are seeing journalists as the custodian of correct pronunciation, thus, intensive workshops and seminars must be carried out frequently in order to upgrade the correspondents' knowledge on standard pronunciation in English language.
3. to make sure that, only well trained graduate of English language with the good command of spoken English should be employed as correspondents

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