

RELEVANCE OF PHONOLOGY TOWARDS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

(A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOKOTO METROPOLIS)

BY

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ABSTRACT

English language in Nigeria as a language of instruction in schools, government and a lingua franca makes it learning compulsory to every Nigerian. It is also considers as the great melting pot as it swallows many languages in the world thereby making millions of non-native English adopting it as second or foreign language thus hundreds of languages losing their identity. Phonology as the study of how speech sound patterns and function in a particular language, therefore remains an integral part of English language learning toward proper articulation of its sounds thereby having a meaningful communication. As verbal communication is an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols used to share meaning. phonological studies equips one with the knowledge on how speech sounds patterns or arrange in English language which as a result afford one all the technical know-how on the use of the sound in a connected utterances. It is against this background that, this study sets to examine the relevance of phonology towards proper and understandable communication in English language with particular reference to some selected senior secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis. Ten (10) students from the sampled schools were randomly selected through observation method while speaking English language in their school premises to ascertain the level at which they understand the phonology in their spoken English. In specific terms this research work will focus on the students' articulatory skills on some consonants in connected speech. The aim is to know whether or not the students are substituting some of the consonants sounds and suggest way forward. Errors detected were grouped as substitution and analyzed in tabular form using error analysis theory. This paper finds out that the students of the sampled schools are having serious pronunciation problem as most of the consonants sounds of English language are being substituted by the sounds available in the mother tongue of the students. For example /v/ in the word "voice" is being substituted with /b/ and pronounce as "boice" among others. This paper therefore

suggest that teachers and students should redouble effort in learning the English language phonology to ensure a better and understandable communication.

INTRODUCTION

The status of English language in Nigeria remains an implied official language, a lingua franca and the medium of instruction at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Thus, the language is being taught as a compulsory subject across the Nigerian schools which are as a result of the colonization of the country by the British and indeed the diversity of the Nigerian languages. Many countries in the world also have English language as an official language, foreign or second language apart from the native country languages.

The ability to use effective English language becomes paramount to the Nigerian students for them to perform wonderfully well academically and to the other field of human endeavor. History of English language in Nigeria shows that there have been several efforts to encourage the learning of the language through recruitment of teachers, importation of books and organization of seminars and workshops among others.

However, students need not only to learn the grammatical rules of English language but also its Phonological rules as this will afford the students with the knowledge on proper pronunciation of English speech sounds and patterns.

Despite these efforts and indeed the continuous use of the language in the country, Students' performance reveals that the standard is still not encouraging. Regrettably, however, despite being it the medium of instruction and expression in Nigeria for many years, research studies have shown the extremely low comprehensible in-put and out-put of the learners across the Nigerian learning institutions. Students' performance in senior secondary school examinations is far away from standard.

According to Clark *et al.* (2007), it means the systematic use of [sound](#) to encode meaning in any spoken [human language](#), or the field of linguistics studying that use.

Yule (2006) states that phonology is essentially the description of the system of patterns of speech sound in a language.

Kelly (2000) said phonology is primarily concerned with how we interpret and systemize sounds.

'phonology is distinguish with phonetics as the latter is concern with the production, perception and physical properties of speech sound, while the former attempts to account for how they are combined, organized and convey meaning in particular language'. O'Connor (1991)

Lass (1998) writes that phonology refers broadly to the subdiscipline of linguistics concerned with the sounds of language, and in more narrow terms, "phonology proper is concerned with the function, behavior and organization of sounds as linguistic items.

Phonology has its biggest effect on language teaching and learning both in second and foreign language learning in the era of 1950's to 1960's. Bray (1997: 112) comments that during 1950's to 1960's, proponents of Audiolingualism developed in US and Situational Language Teaching developed in Britain viewed linguistic competence as the primary goal of language instruction. Phonological accuracy was seen as a component of linguistic competence and was mainly viewed as the accurate production or reception of segmental features (individual sounds) and words. The emergence of the communicative approach in 1970's gradually makes teachers' and language users' awareness of the importance of phonology decrease. This approach proposes that the goal or main focus of mastering or learning language is not only linguistics competence such as phonology but also all supporting aspects that support the communication such as discourse competence, strategic competence, etc.

According to Allivian in his article published in (2022) the first importance of learning phonology for ESL teachers is building an awareness of being a consistent language user in this case of course English. As we know that there are two major accents of English, British and American accent. Those two accents in some cases have different

vocabulary and pronunciation of some English words. Most British English accents will pronounce certain sounds as silent sounds while American English accents will pronounce them. For example, words that are ended by /r/ sound like **car** British will pronounce /k ɑ:(r)/ while the US will pronounce /k ɑ: r/. Moreover, dealing with its pronunciation, British and US English accents also have differences in putting stress on some words. For example, the word **ballet** will get its stress in the beginning syllable for the British English accent while in US English accent will stress it on the second syllable. The point from some examples mentioned is that this knowledge related to silent sound, and stressing in both accents, British and US English will only be mastered if an EFL teacher studies phonology. Then this knowledge dealing with the differences between two accents will raise the teachers' awareness as English users to decide which one of the accents they will choose. As we know to learn a foreign language is to learn how the native speaks the language and in this case, Americans and British are English native speakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are other researches that investigated "the role of phonology in English language learning and teaching" with an aim to identify how phonology helps in improving learners pronunciation of English language speech sounds.

Shuongi G. investigated the phonological awareness instruction and phonics instruction among young children in the countries where English is spoken as foreign language (EFL). His research found out that phonological – based instruction were effective among primary schools pupils in the EFL Countries.

Sarah V. and Hazel I. conducted a research on "the changing role of phonology in reading development". The researcher focus on the processing of both a word's orthography (its printed form) and phonology (its associated speech sound) as critical for lexical identification during reading for both the beginners and skilled readers, he found out that child's reading skill increases there lexical identification base on direct orthographic – semantic links.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

Being English language as the official language and second language to every Nigerian, learning its phonology becomes inevitable towards proper articulation of the language's speech sounds. As a compulsory subject and the language of instruction in the secondary schools, students must learn not only its structure but also its phonological rules. Students of Hausa native in the sampled schools were found to be having serious pronunciation problems arising from problems such as imperfect learning, mother tongue influence, lack of interest from the students and lack of qualified teachers. This study therefore will find out the problems and recommends solutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.

This study has the following objectives:

- a, To find out the role of phonology towards proper articulation of some English consonant sounds by the student of secondary schools who are using English as a second language.
- b, To identify the areas where there are problems arising from imperfect learning of phonology by the students.
- c, To come up with the possible solutions to the problems identified.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a, What are the roles of phonology in enhancing the speech sounds' articulation of English language in words by the ESL students
- b, What are the problems encountered by the sampled students in pronouncing the consonant sounds of English language while speaking
- c, What are the possible solutions to the problems.

METHODOLOGY

This work has sampled a total of twenty students, ten each from the two sampled secondary schools namely Sultan Bello Secondary school and Sultan Atiku Secondary school in the metropolis who were randomly selected through observation method while speaking English language in their school premises to ascertain the level at which they understand the phonology in their spoken English. In specific terms this research work will focus on the students' articulatory skills on some consonants in connected speech. The aim is to know whether or not the students are substituting some of the consonants sounds and suggest way forward. Errors detected were grouped as substitution and analyzed in tabular form using error analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The table below present the English consonant sounds that are posing difficulties to the sampled students.

English Sounds	Consonant	words	Students Pronunciation	Errors committed
/p/		People	/fiful/	/f/ for /p/
/v/		voice	/bois/	/b/ for /v/
/θ/		think	/tink/	/t/ for /θ/
/ð/		the	/za/	/z/ for /ð/

The table below present the English consonant sounds that are mispronounced in words

English Expression	Students Expression	Errors Committed
I love my parent	I love my farent	/p/ changed to /f/
I like her voice	I like her bois	/v/ changed to /b/
Thank you	Tank you	/θ/changed to /t/
He is the man	He is za man	/ð/changed to /z/

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This research work focused on how phonology is inevitable Towards Effective Communication in English Language among the selected secondary school students who are Hausa native speakers. The research fund out that the sampled students are committing serious errors on their pronunciation of some consonant sounds in sentences there by substituting some English consonant sounds to the sounds of their native language (Hausa Language) which brought about the substitution of some English consonant sounds to that of their mother tongue while using them both in sentence and in isolation as in the word “thank” /θæŋk/ pronounced as /tank/, “people” /pi:pl/ pronounced as /fifful/, among others.

CONCLUSION

This research is principal concerned with knowing the level of knowledge secondary school student have on phonology and its role or significance in boosting their pronunciation of English consonant sounds as well as the problems the sampled students are encountering during the articulation of English consonant sounds as a result of problems they have in learning the phonology of English language.

The study found out that, the sampled students are committing serious mistakes during the articulation of some consonant sounds such as the plosive, voiceless and bilabial sound /p/ in word like /pi:pl/being pronounced as /fiful/, the dental, voiceless and fricative /θ/ in word like /θæŋk/ being pronounced as /tank/.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the problems identified, this work therefore recommend the following:

- a, Teachers in the sampled schools should device a way through which the students would be motivated toward the learning the English phonology.
- b, Employment of teachers with good command of spoken English.
- c, students should redouble efforts in learning the phonological aspect of English language as doing so has every iota of improving their pronunciation of sounds of English language.

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