Errors of Segemental Phonemes in the Spoken English of Nigerian Television Newscasters

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Abstract: This study studies the errors related to segmental phonemes in the spoken English of television newscasters in Nigeria. It analyses the errors in terms of the newscasters' inadequate exposure to the rules of the English language. Sixty Nigerian television newscasters were selected from both the state and federal owned television stations and their newscasts were tape-recorded. The fact that oral English is now being examined in the senior secondary school, without the attendant necessity to find a local model to emulate, informs, the present study. The study submits that the newscasters commit errors such as substituting /s/ for /z/, /d/ for /t/, /ed/ for /id/, /e/ for /ʌ/, /ɔ:/ for /ɜ:/, /əʊ/for /ɒ/, / əʊ/for /ɔ:/, /ɒ/ for/ ɜ:/. These errors expose the inadequacies of the newscasters as they show a wide gap between Standard English and Nigerian English, a situation that makes it difficult to accept their performance as models.

Key words: Errors, segemental phonemes, spoken english, television newscasters

INTRODUCTION

Among many speakers of the English Language, the Nigerian Television Newscasters are rated highly. Odejide, Ekong state that due to training and the process of self-improvement on the job, newscasters present a highly intelligible form of English. Aladeyomi (2003) statistically confirmed that the level of spoken English of the Nigerian television newscasters most especially the Nigerian network newscasters is very high. Yet, there is no denying the fact that these newscasters are susceptible to errors in their spoken English. This naturally springs from the second language context in which they operate. Possible errors in this context, capable of being committed by any speaker irrespective of training or competence level, range from interference to inter-language errors. Thus, a newscaster is potential to be influenced by the environment of good-bad speakers around him/her and commits error of certain sorts.

Onuigbo (1984) rightly observes that in first language learning, the learner is highly motivated and is surrounded by a conductive linguistic environment, the kind that the second language user lacks. What is implied is that though language learning generally has some problems, second language learning has a greater problem than first language learning. This problem of course, results in a greater number of errors in the performance of the second language users. For this reason, theorists in language teaching, learning and use have therefore come up with 2 different approaches to the examination of these errors.

Contrastive analysis: The first approach is contrastive analysis which Olagoke (1984) describes as the field of study concerned with the linguistic comparison of 2 or more languages so as to show in a systematic way their differences and similarities. Olagoke (1984) listed the psychological learning theories of transfer and interference as they apply to second language learning as follows that:

- In learning a second language, the primary cause of difficulty and errors is interference or transfer of features from the learners' mother tongue to the language that is being learnt.
- A scientific and structural analysis of the mother tongue and the target language is necessary to predict the errors and difficulties a learner will encounter.
- Where there is similarity between the mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2), learning will not present any problem as there will be facilitation or positive transfer but where there are differences, learning will be difficult or impeded, that is, there will be negative transfer.
- The more different the languages are the more difficult learning the target language will be.

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- What the learner needs to learn and the teacher has to teach is the sum total of the differences between the 2 languages.
- To be effective, language teaching materials; syllabuses and texts should be based on the results of the linguistic comparison of the 2 languages.

Critics of this approach based their criticism on what they termed linguistic inadequacy and the limited predictive power of the approach. They emphasize that there are other difficulties, which are based on extra-linguistic factors. These extra-linguistic factors as Olagoke (1984) notes could be poor teaching by ill paid, discontented and mostly unqualified teachers, over-crowded classrooms, unsuitable course books, lack of teaching aids, restricted and limited use of the language, poor motivation and the strategies of learning which vary with individual learners. These extra-linguistic factors lie beyond the structural differences between the first language and the second language and cannot be predicted by contrastive analysis.

Also, it has been observed by Onuigbo (1984) that many errors that are predicted by contrastive analysis do not occur in the performance of the second language learners while countless others not predicted do occur. The approach is used in this study not to predict errors but to explain errors that might be observed in the newscasts of the subjects.

Error analysis: Olagoke (1984) describes errors as unwanted forms or deviation from the norms or the rules of a given language in phonology, lexis or usage. Error analysis approach is therefore predicated upon the assumption that second language learners/users meet with difficulties and to diagnose these difficulties, the learners' errors are collected and analyzed to show what is common among these errors (Onuigbo, 1984). Besides, the frequency of the error may be indicative of the degree of difficulty.

Olasehinde (2002) sees Error Analysis (EA) as the study of the language of learners with a view to identify the mistakes the learners make and to figure out the causes and significance of such errors. He posit, following the submissions of Corder (1973) that errors, though deviate from the standard norms have useful pedagogical values for the learners of language when studied. In other words, the collection and study of errors necessitate the formulation of rules for learners and stipulate what remains to be taught by the teacher. This idea is further reinforced by Helen Thomas. She opines:

- Error analysis can be used to help determine what a learner still needs to be taught-what he has not yet acquired: This can provide the necessary information about what is lacking. In his or her competence. The syllabus can then be based on the results of the analysis.

Chomsky (1965) is of the opinion that the native speaker even in the ideal atmosphere of a completely homogenous speech community can make slips, false starts or confusions of structure which Pit Corder calls lapses these lapses may be due to memory limitations, distractions or other logical causes. The native speakers know the formation of rulers of their mother tongue, can recognize deviant or ambiguous sentences and correct their own errors but learners cannot by any means always do so Corder (1973). The problem that arises with this theory is that it is not easy to determine accurately which errors are due to imperfect knowledge of the language and which are due to lapses.

In spite of the criticism of error analysis, the approach is being used today to find out the errors committed in speech or in the written form by second language learners/users of the English language. The approach is also used in this study to find out the extent to which the spoken English of Nigerian television newscasters deviates from the General British English particularly in the area of segmental phonemes. In view of the above, the present study would like to answer the following research questions:

- What kind of errors do the Nigerian television newscasters make in their pronunciation of sound segments and what are the sources of these errors?
- How can the Nigerian television newscasters rectify such errors?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The subjects for this study are 60 Nigerian television newscasters drawn from both the state and federal-owned Nigerian television stations. The researcher is aware that the private television stations are at present available in Nigeria but they are not being investigated in this study because those stations have limited coverage.

The study was based on recordings of newscasters made from various selected television stations in Nigeria. For easy scoring of the subject's performance, Oral English Assessment Sheet designed to measure learners language achievement and proficiency was used in the assessment of the spoken English performance of the subjects. The assessment sheet was designed in line with what Townson (1973), Obanya (1977) and Ayodele (1981) used as their language proficiency-marking guide.

Table 1: Selected stations from both federal and state television stations when the study was conducted

S/No.	Station	State
1	Zone A:	
2	N.T.A. Akure	Ondo State
3	OSRC Akure	Ondo State
4	BCOS Ibadan	Ondo State
5	N.T.A. Abeokuta	Ogun State
6	OGTV Abeokuta	Ogun State
7	N.T.A. Ilorin	Kwara State
8	KWTV, Ilorin	Kwara State
9	N.T.A. 2CH. 7 Ikeja	Lagos State
10	N.T.A. Ch 10 Lagos	Lagos State
11	LTV-B Ikeja	Lagos State
	Zone B	
12	Anambra State Television ABS-TV AWKA	Anambra State
	Zone C	
13	N.T.A. Kaduna,	Kaduna State
14	BATW, Bauchi	Bauchi State
15	N.T.A. Minna,	Niger State
16	N.T.A. Ladoke,	Niger State
17	N.T.A. Abuja	Federal Capital
	Zone D	
18	BC-TV Uyo	Akwa Ibom State
19	N.T.A. Benin,	Edo State
20	BBS-TV, Benin	Edo State
21	N.T.A. Calabar	Cross River State
22	N.T.A. Port-Harcourt	Rivers States
23	R.T.V. Port-Harcourt.	River State

The researcher and four other trained assistants were involved in the collection of the raw data. For the purpose of the study, television stations were grouped into four zones, each zone comprising the federal and state owned television stations. The zones are as follows:

Zone A - Television stations in Yoruba speaking areas
Zone B - Television stations in Igbo speaking areas
Zone C - Television stations in Hausa speaking areas
Zone D - Television stations in minority language speaking areas.

The study population comprised newscasters chosen from these zones.

The selection was based on convenient sampling technique. All available stations in zone A were used except NTA Channel 5 which was left out because NTA/Channel 7 has been used to represent NTA stations in Lagos. Selection of stations in Zone B, C and D were based on proximity of the researcher to the stations (Table 1).

RESULTS

The first stories of each newscast were selected for analysis. This was done to limit the length of the stories analyzed and to make the analysis more manageable. The marking guide was designed in such a way that the assessors were able to watch out for the problem areas in the spoken English performance of the Nigerian television newscasters. The researcher and four other English lecturers from the Department of General Studies (English Unit), Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, were involved in the assessment of the subjects. These lecturers were postgraduate students in the department of English at the University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, respectively. In spite of their proficiently in English phonology, they were also specially trained for the assignment. The making guide was full transcription of the newscast of each subject. The assessors had earlier been given a photocopy of the newscast of each of the subjects showing the correct transcriptions of their newscasts. It was the duty of each assessor to listen to and score the subjects right or wrong where the sound segments appeared.

All the assessors had to agree on any error before it was scored as incorrect. The marks agreed upon formed the basis for the final scores of each subject. In the present study, errors were not predicted before hand. Each sound produced by a subject was scored right or wrong as it appeared in the newscasts of the subject. To accomplish this task, the newscasts of each subject were played back, transcribed and compared with the General British English (GBE) model before marks were awarded. Each sound correctly produced was assigned 1 mark. The total number of correct rendition was based upon the maximum obtainable mark to find the percentage for each subject. Some of the errors identified and their sources are presented in Table 2-6.

Consonantal errors
Errors of substiting /s/ for /z/: This error occurred in the newscasts of subjects 1, 2, 6, 7, 33, 34, 35 and 38.

Table 2 shows the errors of substituting voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ for voiced alveolar fricative /z/. Out of the 60 subjects investigated, 8 subjects representing 13.33% of the subjects committed the error. The subjects involved in committing the error seems not to have voiced alveolar fricative in their first language. This probably could have influenced the substitution of /s/ for /z/.

Apart from this, it must be noted that the English language is full of numerous rules and exceptions. A speaker who did not grow up in the native language environment, may find it difficult to articulate some of the English sounds in certain environments correctly if he is not exposed to the rules of English phonology. For instance /s/ is always pronounced /s/ at the beginnings of word, but in other positions, it is very frequently

Table 2: Errors of substituting /s/ for /z/

Subject	Othograph	GBE pronunciation	Subject rendition
1	Lapses	ǀæpsiz	ǀæpsis
2	Charges	tʃaːdʒz	tʃaːdʒs
-	Sureties	ʃʊətiz	ʃʊətis
6	Details	diteɪlz	diteɪls
7	Was	wəz	wɔːs
33	Decrees	diˊkriːz	diˈkriːs
34	Has	həz	həs
34	Because	bˌkɔːz	bˌkɔːs
48	President	ˋprezidənt	prezidənt

Table 3: Errors of substituting /d/ for /t/

Subjects	Orthograph	GBE pronunciation	Subjects renditon
5	A nnounced	əˊnaunst	əˊnaunsd
11	Watched	wɒtʃt	wɒtʃd
17	Stressed	strest	stresd
18	Advised	ədˊvaist	ədˊvaisd
19	Equipped	ɪˊkwɪpt	ɪˊkwɪpd
20	Expressed	ɪˊksprest	ɪˊkspresd
21	Expressed	ɪˊksprest	ɪˊkspresd
22	Pleased	pleɪst	pleɪsd
-	Cherished	tʃerɪʃt	tʃerɪʃd
23	Refurbished	riːfɜːbiʃt	riːfɜːbiʃd
28	Stressed	strest	stresd
31	Released	rɪˊliːst	riˊliːsd
-	Blocked	blɒkt	blɒkd
36	Increased	ɪnˊkriːst	ɪnˊkriːsd
38	Remarked	rɪˊmaːkt	rɪˊmaːkd
-	Promised		
		prɒmist	prɒmisd
		aːskt	aːskd
40	Asked	beɪst	beɪsd
41	Based	strest	stresd
48	Stressed	truːpt	truːpd
50	Trooped	blakt	blakd
51	Blocked	aːskt	aːskd
52	Asked	diˊskʌst	diˊskʌsd
55	Discussed	əˊdrest	əˊdresd
59	Addressed		
60	Addressed		

Table 4: Errors of substituting /e/for/i/

Subject	Orthograph	GBE pronunciation	Subject rendition
1	Presented	priˊzentɪd	priˊzented
-	Noted	nəʊtid	nəʊoted
2	Correspondent	koriˊspandənt	koreˊspandənt
4	Headed	hedid	heded
7	Visited	visitd	visited
-	Executive	igˊzekjʊtiv	ekˊzekjʊtiv
10	Banquet	bæŋkwit	bæŋkwet
-	Slated	sleitid	sleited
11	Attended	əˊtendid	əˊtended
-	Eclipse	əkˊlips	ikˊlips
-	Sited	saitid	saited
12	Worthless	wɜːθlis	wɜːθles
-	Privelege	privilidʒ	priviledʒ
13	Entail	inˊtail	enˊtail
14	Enjoined	inˊdʒɔind	enˊdʒɔind
-	Examined	igˊzaemind	ekˊzaemind
15	Respected	risˊpedktid	risˊpeted
-	Enforcement	inˊfɔːsmənt	enˊfɔːsmənt
-	Explained	ikˊsleind	ekˊsplieind
16	Constituted	kɒnstitjuˊtid	kɒnstitjuːted
-	Ended	endid	ended
-	Evlin	iːvlin	eːvlin
18	Noted	nəʊtid	nəʊted
19	Especially	iˊspeʃəli	espeʃəli
20	Environment	inˊvaiərənment	enˊvaiərənment
-	Ensured	inˊʃʊed	enˊʃʊed
21	Enable	iˊneibl	eˊneibl
22	Neglect	niˊglekt	neˊglekt
23	Reciprocate	riˊsiprəkeit	reˊsiprəket
-	United	juːnaitid	juːnaited
24	Existence	igˊzistens	ekˊzistens
25	Business	biznis	biznes
26	Expenditure	ikˊspendItʃe	esˊspendItʃe
27	Eratic	iˊraetik	eˊraetik
29	Enlightened	inˊlaitnd	enˊlaitnd
33	Interest	intrist	intrest
34	Enjoined	inˊdzɔind	enˊdzɔind
36	Tragedy	traedʒidi	traedʒedi
37	Petroleum	piˊtreuljem	peˊtreuljem
51	Neighbourliness	neibelinis	neibelines
56	Endowed	inˊdaud	enˊdaud
-	Democracy	diˈmakresi	deˈmeukres

pronounced /z/. It must be pointed out here that most of the rules regarding the use of /s/ and /z/ are so complicated and subject to such numerous exceptions. It is therefore advisable that second and foreign learners of English should endeavour to learn the pronunciation of each word individually as he comes across it.

Errors of substituting /d/ for /t/: This error occurred in the newscasters of 21 subjects. They are subjects 5, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 28, 31, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 48, 49, 50, 51 and 52.

Table 3 shows the errors of substituting voiced alveolar plosive /d/ for voiceless alveolar plosive /t/. It is interesting to note that the 2 sounds /t/ and /d/ are available in the first languages of the speakers. This shows that the errors committed in Table 3 could not be attributed to the mother tongue influence on the target language. The source of this error probably emanated from the fact that the subjects were not properly exposed to the rules of English phonology. The rule which accounts for this error states that when the verb ends in /d/ or in /t/ the termination is pronounced /-d/; for

example: /aedid/, fitted /fitid/ but when the verb ends with a voiceless consonant other then /t/ the termination is pronounced /t/. This explains why such words as announced, watched are pronounced with the sound ending with /d/ and not /t/ by the subjects.

Errors relating to vowels and diphthongs
Errors of substituting /e/ for /i/: This error occurred in the newscasts of 28 subjects. They are subjects: 1,2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 33, 34, 36, 37, 51 and 56.

Table 4 shows errors of substituting /e/ sound for /i/ sound. Twenty-eight subjects representing 46.7% of the subjects realized the sound /i/ as /e/. This shows that majority of the subjects were not exposed to the correct model of the English language. This is because the 2 sounds /i/ and /e/ under consideration are available in Nigerian languages and are not supposed to pose any problem to the subjects.

Table 5: Errors of substituting /ɜ:/for/ɔ:/

Subject	Orthograph	GBE pronunciation	Subject rendition
10	Urged	ɜ:dʒd	ɔ:dʒd
11	Occurred	ə'kɜ:d	ə'kɔ:d
-	journalist	dʒɜ:nəlist	dʒɔ:nəlist
12	worship	wɜ:ʃip	wɔ:ʃip
-	worthless	wɜ:θlis	wɜ:θlis
25	disbursement	dls'bɜ:sment	dls'bɔ:sment
34	colonel	kɜ:nl	kɔ:nl

Table 6: Errors of substituting /ɒ:/for/əʊ/

Subject	Orthograph	GBE pronunciation	Subject rendition
11	Morocco	mə'rɒkəu	mə'rəukəu
14	Hostage	hɒstidʒ	həustidʒ
37	Product	prɒdʌkt	prəudʌkt
41	Project	'prɒdʒekt	'prəudʒekt
56	Democracy	dimɒkrəsi	diməukrəsi
60	Promulgated	prɒməlgeitid	prəuməlgeitid

Errors of substituting /ɜ:/ for /ɔ:/: This error in the newscasts of subjects 10, 11, 20, 25 and 34.

Table 5 shows errors of substituting /ɜ:/ for /ɔ:/. Six subject representing 10% of the subjects were not able to realize the sound correctly. This is partly because the sound /ɜ:/ does not exit in Nigerian languages and partly because the subjects are not adequately exposed to the right model of the English language.

Errors of substituting /əʊ/ for /ɒ/: This error occurred in the newscasts of subjects 11, 14, 37, 41, 56 and 60.

Table 6 shows errors of substituting /əʊ/for /ɒ/. Six subjects representing 10% of the subjects substituted /ɒ/ for /əʊ/. This strictly shows that these subjects were not adequately exposed to the right model of the English language.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that Nigerian television newscasters performed well in the articulation of sound segments, some of them were found lacking in this area. Majority of the errors identified in this study were not errors of mother tongue influence on the right model and inadequate knowledge of English phonology.

It is the observation of Ufomata (1990) that there is need to keep the different accents of English spoken all over the world mutually intelligible. To keep the mutual intelligibility, models must be kept adequately similar. So there is the need for Nigerian speakers of English to gear their efforts towards acquiring this model. Since the General British English seems to be the most standard of the English dialects today, it is recommended that the Nigerian televisions newscasters should strive hard to attain it.

To achieve that goal, that the Nigerian television newscasters should cultivate the habit of listening regularly to native speakers of English who will serve as models for them to emulate. The advantage of this is that it will help them to imbibe all the current nuances of the target language and at the same time help them to drop gradually, those linguistic habits which might impede their spoken English performance.

In addition, it is also suggested that the Nigerian television newscasters should strive for adequate knowledge of English phonology in order to be able to make proper use of the current English pronouncing dictionary to enhance better performance. It is also an advantage for the newscasters to acquire a good skill in phonetically transcribed text.

It must also be impressed on relevant government ministries to put in place a kind of staff development programme for the newscasters to travel abroad to attend workshops, seminars and other programme where they can be exposed to native speakers of English through both formal interactions.

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