

Grapho-Phonic Discrepancy in English and the Problem of Vowel Production by Yoruba Speakers of English as a Second Language

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Abstract

This study examined Yoruba speakers of English as a second language to discover their recognition of some vowels and their production as a result of the inconsistencies between spelling and sounds in the English language as opposed to what is obtainable in the Yoruba language. The study is an empirical one, designed to identify the problem of these learners of English as a second language after watching similar category of students commit the same errors over a period of time. Forty respondents, randomly selected, from a class of fifty seven students on a sandwich program, were used for this study. The exercise took place in a fairly furnished language laboratory, with a laboratory technician in attendance as a co-listener. Each of the forty students was made to read a specially prepared passage laced with specific words to discover how they pronounce some vowel sounds in different word environments in the English language. The speech production of each respondent was recorded by the researcher to discover how these sounds are pronounced in view of this grapheme/phoneme disparity in the English language. The results show that the subjects, who are teacher trainees and expected to be models cannot pronounce some of the sounds correctly, especially some words containing the letter 'i' in words like hide, ride and rid; in the words kite and kit and in the words bite and bit. The same problem was also noticed in the 'o' letter in woman and women. The study concludes that because there is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds in English as it is the case in the Yoruba language; there is a problem of production of some vowel sounds in English by Yoruba speakers of English as a second language. This is as a result of transfer of their native language pronunciation in Yoruba to the English language in some words, thus leading to inappropriate pronunciation. It is recommended that those employed to teach English are qualified and those already on the field should be made to undergo training to make them more efficient on the job, considering the place of the English language in the world.

Keywords: grapho-phonetic discrepancy, vowel sounds, pronunciation, performance, English as a second language

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Introduction

The global spread of the English language is responsible for the different varieties of the language now available. Platt, Weber & Ho (1984), for example, have given some factors required for any form of English to acquire the status of a variety of English in an ESL environment. These factors include the facts that the variety:

- i. is being taught and used as a medium of instruction in schools;
- ii. has developed independently of native variety model and used by a large population of English intelligibles;
- iii. is used for various functions and
- iv. has been localized.

This is exactly the nature of the English language in Nigeria. As noted by Jowitt (1991:22) "...English continues to perform many of the functions of a national language as well as those of an official language, and probably would continue for a long time to do so even if some other language were imposed on the country by Government policy...". This is also the position of Orisawayi (2007: 8) when he states that "...English will continue for the foreseeable future, to perform the utilitarian function assigned to it not only by official adoption but by the sheer necessities of the linguistic situation of the country". Various scholars have worked on the English language in Nigeria; identifying its forms and functions, leading to various classifications which Akande (2009:56) points out that "...have demonstrated that the differences between English in an MT environment and the one in an ESL environment are systematic rather than chaotic". In the words of David Ekah (2009: 9): "Put more directly, the Nigerian variety of English is "there" and dynamic enough to pool all of us together".

Current linguistic research in Nigeria, especially as far as the English language is concerned borders on the contact between the language and the various indigenous languages, which, according to Dada (2011), referring to the recent 2005 Ethnologic Data, number 521, out of which 510 are living languages two second languages without MT speakers, even as 9 have gone into extinction. The continued co-existence of these languages with English, which has since assumed a second language status and part of our linguistic ecology has been subjects of research among Nigerian scholars and linguists.

In the area of spoken English, interests have been shown in how Nigerians as users of English as a second language can communicate intelligibly in the English language medium irrespective of their ethnicity (Ekah, 2009; Diwa, 2009; Sukarat, 2009; Akande, 2009; Olaniyi, 2011 among others).

Speech is primary to every language (Ogunsiji, 2004) and “central to human communication” (Ekah, 2007: 49). Although the ability to read and write marks literacy, the primacy of speech in human communication remains sacrosanct. This is why linguistics is usually more concerned with the spoken, rather than the written word (Aitchison, 2003). Also, in the words of Clark, Yallop & Fletcher (2007) “...the study of phonetics and phonology is certainly relevant to questions of writing and spelling” (p.6).

Speech is a major means of human communication that is peculiar to man, and that is why every definition of language centers on vocalization. Although it is neither feasible nor desirable for non-native speakers to attain native-like competence in a second language, there are minimum standards that natives and non-natives should not fall below, to ensure mutual intelligibility. This is the case with English in Nigeria, where the language has come to stay as part of the nation’s linguistic family, notwithstanding that it is not indigenous. Nigeria is regarded as the second largest ESL country in the world, next only to India, with about 50 million speakers of English as a second language (Jowitt, 2009).

Spoken English has always been a problem to non-native speakers, most especially in a second language environment. The problem of native language interference continues to threaten proficiency in the spoken English of non-native speakers of the language. This study is particularly about Yoruba speakers of English as a second language.

The Yoruba, the subjects of this study, are a race among the over 250 ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian nation and they number several million. They are located primarily in southwest Nigeria in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. The North Central States of Kwara and Kogi and parts of South East Edo and Delta states have a sizeable number of speakers, while speakers are also thinly scattered across the country as traders, immigrants and civil servants, especially in the Federal Civil Service.

The Yoruba language has sounds that are similar to English sounds. But while there is a one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters in the Yoruba language, the same cannot be said of English. Aremo (2001) has rightly noted that no two languages have exactly the same sounds and have the sounds combined in exactly the same ways in all their spoken forms. In the Yoruba language, for instance, as in many other Nigerian languages, the sounds of the language are represented by the letters of its alphabets such that the way a word is spelt is the same way it is pronounced (Akeredolu-Ale, Azeez, Ayebola, Sotiloye, Bodunde & Adurodola, 2004). The following examples demonstrate this phenomenon in the Yoruba language:

a + d + e = ade – crown
 b + a + t + a = bata – shoe

In English, on the other hand, this is not the case (Ekundare, 1993). This is, therefore, a major problem, especially for Yoruba speakers of English who use the language as a second language. As Traugott and Pratt (1980: 41) have noted, “one of the greatest difficulties many people have in thinking about the sounds of a language is in separating sound from spelling”. Because of the inconsistency between English alphabets and sounds, there is a need for an alphabet system that allows for a one-to-one correspondence between sound and written symbol (Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

The lack of one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters in the English language, as found in the Yoruba language, creates a serious problem for speakers of Yoruba using English as a second language. Akande (2009:66), for example, claims that “most Nigerian learners of English, especially Yoruba speakers of English, tend to phonetically realize all the letters that a word is made up of, forgetting that English letters and sounds do not necessarily have direct link”. As noted by Aremo (2001), in English, a letter can be used to represent different sounds. Examples: *mat*, *mate*, *hall*, *many*. Similarly, different letters or a combination of letters may be used to represent the same sound.

Examples: *any*, *said*, *dead*, *pen*, etc.

Apart from the above, Yoruba is a tonal language with three tones: high (/), middle (-) and low (\) and, generally, variations arise from tone. For example:

- i. Ojo ti de (*The rains are here*)-Two low tones (\ \) on the first word, falling on the first and third letters, in the sentence.

- ii. Ojo ti de (Ojo [name of a person] has arrived)-Low (\) and high (/) tones on the first word, spelt the same way, falling on the first and third letters in the sentence.
- iii. Ojo e ti po ju (His cowardice is excessive)-Two middle tones (- -), falling on the first and last letters, on the first word with the same spelling as in the first two examples.

The word 'o-j-o' is realized as different words as modified by tone to indicate whether it is 'Ojo' (with low [\] and high [/] tones) on the two syllables, which is a proper name, of a person, or cowardice 'ojo'(with two middle [- -] tones) on the two syllables. One would expect that Yoruba speakers of English as a second language would bring their knowledge of this type of variation to bear in recognizing that sounds also vary depending on the occurrence in words .

Learning a second language has never been an easy task, especially if it is being learnt after the system of one language has been mastered in early childhood. This is because once the habits of the native language are fully ingrained; breaking the habits has always been a very remote possibility. This difficulty may not be pronounced in younger children under ten years of age who are capable of learning a second language perfectly, especially if brought up within the environment where the language is used often, irrespective of the children's background (O'Connor, 2003). This fact is a reinforcement of the theory of the critical age in language learning. Age has been known to play a very critical role in second language learning (Leather, 1985); that even the most gifted of human beings falter when it comes to second language learning, and the most stupid of younger children demonstrate a complete and exact command of the language as the native speaks it (Jespersen, 1922). Of all the language skills, the inexactitude with which a second language is learnt is most acute in the spoken aspect.

Lennon (1993) has noted that there are no age constraints in the learning of vocabulary, either as native speakers or as foreign or second language users. This is far from being the situation in the case of the spoken aspect. This study focuses on vowel sounds in English as they pose difficulty to Yoruba speakers of English as a second language, officially taught in schools and also used as a linguistic tool in multilingual Nigeria.

While there are substantial similarities between the consonant sounds of the two languages, there are wide disparities in their vowel sounds (Akande, 2009). These disparities confirm the view that one of the greatest difficulties many people have in thinking about the sounds of a language is the separation of sound from spelling (Traugott & Pratt, 1980). This is, however, not restricted only to second language users. If this phenomenon affects first language users, the predicament of second language users is better imagined.

Vowel sounds in English are pronounced depending on their association with other sounds in a word, and not necessarily on the nature of the spelling, such that a vowel sound in one word may sound differently in another. For example: 'ee' - /i:/ in beef, but /ɪə/ in beer. This is not the situation in the Yoruba language. Because of the one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds in Yoruba, there is difficulty on the part of Yoruba speakers using English as a second language. In a recent study, Akande (2009:62) confirms the difficulty of Yoruba speakers of English as a second language in pronouncing the central as well as the lax vowels in English such as /ɪ/, /æ/ and /ʊ/.

Statement of the Problem

Error Analysis predicts errors that learners of a second language are likely to make, but one of the major weaknesses in Error Analysis is that some of the errors predicted may never be committed by learners, while likely errors may be unpredicted. For example, phonological errors discovered in this study are not those predicted that learners of English as a second language are likely to make and so they are ignored in the teaching/learning process. In fact, current research in the teaching and learning of English as a second language in Nigeria is predominantly in the areas most commonly tested by public examination bodies which are composition, lexis, syntax, précis, etc (Ofulue, 2007, paraphrasing Amayo, 1986), believing that pronunciation is a task that need not be done since it hardly ever hampers effective communication. In fact, it may not be out of place to aver that communication breakdown can arise from mispronunciation.

Ofulue has noted that "in a second language (ESL) context, correct pronunciation skills are essential for intelligibility", noting further "a renewed emphasis on effective oral communication skills as major requirement in the workplace, regardless of the discipline" (p. 11).

Indeed, where oral communication is given consideration in research in Nigeria, the segmentals, suprasegmentals and other prosodic features form the bulk of the studies, with the belief that as second language users the problems of phonemes are either considered negligible or contribute little to effective communication, notwithstanding that the problems are "there" because "it has been observed that some Nigerian speakers have problems articulating certain English phonemes, especially those ones not found in their mother tongue" (Ekah, 2007: 51). Where the phoneme forms the basis of research, the emphasis is again on the consonant sound on the belief that it is only mispronunciation in consonant sounds that may lead to another word and possible breakdown in communication, whereas vowel sound mispronunciation may not. While this true, to a great extent, it is also true, to some extent, that some vowel sounds when they are mispronounced can lead to misconstruction and also possible breakdown in communication. For example confusion experienced by some people between /ai/ and /I/ in the words "write" and "writ" or "ride" may cause confusion in meaning.

This study was undertaken on the subjects having noted the persistent mispronunciation in learners in an advanced teacher training college. The participants were adult learners, practicing teachers and teacher-trainees who were not expected to continue to commit the errors identified in this study, because they are supposed to be role models as English language teachers in our schools and have been exposed to the English language from primary school, probably at the age of six.

Significance of the Study

It is expected that this study will open up new vistas for teachers and researchers in a second language teaching/learning process, especially, the teaching and learning of pronunciation in English as a second language, so that neglected areas or areas taken for granted will henceforth be given attention. This will help achieve, at least, minimum standard for both national and international intelligibility, "...because no matter how much competent mastery of the syntactic and semantic structures of a language a speaker may possess, he needs to be "heard" in order to be understood" (Amayo, 1986 316).

Theoretical Background

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 (1993) also confirms that only young children can learn to speak a foreign language without any trace of accent 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'Connon, 1980), 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. It has been observed that of all aspects of language, speech presents far more difficulty than others, as it has been noted that there are no biological age constraints to the acquisition or learning of vocabulary as new words, and expressions can be acquired or learnt and can be integrated into the already internally stored semantic systems irrespective of the language (Lennon, 1993).

There is no serious barrier to the acquisition of new vocabulary and other grammatical structures even in foreign language learning, but this cannot be guaranteed in the phonology of a second language especially for those who have already acquired a language earlier. Lennon (1993) says phonology is the strongest evidence that age is a constraint to foreign language learning with evidence in studies of immigrants to the USA which indicates age of arrival rather than years of residence in the US as a determinant of the extent the speaker would acquire near-native pronunciation. Not much has been controverted on the critical age hypothesis, especially when second language learners are in native speech environment and interact regularly in all domains in the language, and with another language exerting little or no pressure. Johnson and Newport's (1989) experiment on some Chinese and Korean people, children and adults in USA still comes to the same conclusion that age plays a major role in learning a second language as they aver that "those who arrived in the United States before the age of seven reached native performance", with performance declining with the age of the subjects and not the length of stay. Their conclusion was that "human beings appear to have a special capacity for acquiring language in childhood, regardless of whether the language is their first or second language" (p. 95).

In the same vein, Fromkin, Rodman & Hyam (2004) have observed that “it is more appropriate to say that L2 acquisition abilities gradually decline with age and that there are “sensitive periods” for the nativelylike mastery of certain aspects of the L2. The sensitive period for phonology is the shortest” (p.350).

This theory, however, seems to hold only for learners in a linguistic environment with little or no pressure from other languages. In most ESL environments, where bilingual language acquisition is the norm, the simultaneous acquisition of two languages right from infancy has not translated to a mastery of the target language. Although the subjects of this study have had a long exposure to the study of English, usually from the primary school, the constant contact with the indigenous language has continued to affect a mastery of the language, such that continuous and subsequent learning as adults hardly adds anything to their proficiency. In a study, for example, Flege, Freida & Takeshi (1997) report that Italians who interact less in their mother tongue, and interact more in English, spoke English better than those who spoke Italian more often.

In second language learning, researchers have discovered that learners eventually develop interlanguage as they try to master the target language. As the grammar of the interlanguage is different from that of the target language because of borrowing from the first language, so also is the phonology where sounds are substituted in the target language from the first language or even have the sound patterns of first language superimposed on the sound patterns of the target language. This has been noted to lead to fossilization, where learners of a second language slow down or even cease at some point, stabilizing the interlanguage, making further acquisition negligible (Finegan, 2004). This phenomenon is typical of our subjects whose ages range between 24 and 42 years. Finegan further notes that fossilization actually “underlies the non-native characteristics of someone who may have spoken the target language for some time but has stopped the process of learning. In other words, many second-language learners fossilize at a stage of acquisition...” (p. 561).

Participants and Procedures

This empirical study was conducted at a College of Education, an advanced teacher training tertiary institution in Nigeria, with forty Yoruba speakers (students) of English as a second language who were randomly selected to read a specially prepared passage laced with words where vowel variation in different words is expected. Before then, the researcher, who was a teaching staff in the institution, had noted a common pattern of mispronunciation among succeeding teacher-trainees on sandwich program. Students on the program were not very many and the number selected represents more than two third (2/3) of the entire sandwich student population for the year selected. A self-listening approach (SLA), in a medium-furnished language laboratory was employed to identify how the vowel sounds identified were pronounced in different words by the subjects as they read a specially prepared passage for the purpose (see appendix). This was the only readily available approach at the time, and similar approach had earlier been used by two other scholars: Akande, (2009), to investigate some aspects of pronunciation problems in the spoken English of some Nigerian undergraduates and Olaniyi (2010) to investigate social variations in Nigerian English phonology.

The passage contains 121 words and was given to subjects to find out how the respondents would pronounce the sounds as they occur in different words. The underlined words in the specially prepared passage were not underlined in the original one given out to be read by the subjects, but the researcher listened carefully and watched out for them. The choice of the method and the preparation of the passage was actually informed by Obanya's (1982) suggestion that overcoming the problems of sound in the target language can be achieved when learners come in contact with both the difficult sound and the one they usually confuse with it. Although the approach may appear simplistic, as the only other person present was the language laboratory technician, it was the best we could afford in our immediate environment. The readings were actually done and recorded in the language laboratory, and only few of the recordings were transcribed, for record purpose. This could be one of the weaknesses of the experiment, nonetheless, it served the researcher's purpose to identify errors that may never have been predicted by error analysts.

A simple descriptive statistics was used to record the number of correct and wrong pronunciations of some words in the passage, using a simple table.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Respondents' Pronunciation of Highlighted Words (Percentages in Brackets)

| Phoneme | Occurring In | Correctly Pronounced | Wrongly Pronounced As |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| /æ/ | M <u>a</u> n | 40 (100) | (0) |
| /ei/ | M <u>a</u> nger | 15 (37.5) | /æ/ 25 (62.5) /u:/ 07 (17.5) |
| /ʊ/ | W <u>o</u> man | 33 (82.5) | |
| /I/, /I/ | W <u>o</u> men | 03(7.5)/0 (0) | 37(92.5)/ 40(100) |
| /ai/ | H <u>i</u> de | 38 (95.0) | /i:/ 02 (5.0) |
| /ai/ | R <u>i</u> de | 33(82.5) | /i:/ 07(17.5) |
| /I/ | R <u>i</u> d | 13 (32.5) | /ai/ 27 (67.5) |
| /æ/ | r <u>a</u> t | 39 (97.5) | /e/ 01(2.5) |
| /ei/ | R <u>a</u> te | 33(82.5) | /e/ 07 (17.5) |
| /ai/ | K <u>i</u> te | 37 (92.5) | /i:/ 03(7.5) |
| /I/ | K <u>i</u> t | 13 (32.5) | /i:/ 27(67.5) |
| /Iə/ | B <u>e</u> r | 28(70.0) | /ea/12(30.0) |
| /i:/ | B <u>e</u> ef | 37(92.5) | /I/03(7.5) |
| /ai/ | B <u>i</u> te | 18 (45.0) | /i/ 22 (55.0) |
| /I/ | B <u>i</u> t | 13 (32.5) | /ai/ 27 (67.5) |

The letter 'a' occurring in 'man' and 'manger' was pronounced correctly in 'man' by all being a familiar word, but mispronounced in 'manger' by 62.5% of the respondents. It was pronounced as the 'a' /æ/ in 'man'.

The letter 'o' occurring in 'woman' and 'women' was pronounced correctly in 'woman' by 82.5% of the respondents, but mispronounced by 17.5%. The letter was pronounced correctly in 'women' by 7.5% while the remaining 92.5% pronounced the letter wrongly, as it was pronounced the way it is spelt and pronounced in 'men'. The same mispronunciation occurred in the letter 'e' of 'women' which was pronounced wrongly by all the respondents. The reason for this may not be unconnected with the pronunciation of 'men' which is [men].

The letter 'i' in 'hide', 'ride' and 'rid' was pronounced correctly by 38 or 95.5% and 82.5% and wrongly by 5.0% and 17.5% in the words 'hide' and 'ride' respectively. In the word 'rid', 67.5% of the subjects pronounced the vowel sound wrongly, pronouncing it as the vowel sound in "ride" while it was pronounced correctly by 32.5%. The high rate of mispronunciation of the letter 'i' in the word 'rid' may not be unconnected with the occurrence of the letter in the words hide and ride, and the fact that this particular word is not in common use. There was failure on the part of the respondents to recognize that the letter 'i' has a different vowel sound in the word "rid" to be realized as a monophthong /i/ and no more a diphthong /ai/ as in the other words.

The letter 'a' in 'rat' and 'rate' was correctly pronounced by 97.5% and 82.5% and wrongly pronounced by 2.5 and 17.5%. Since rat is a familiar word, the only reason that can be adduced for the mispronunciation of the word by only one of the respondents is slip of the tongue.

The letter 'i' was pronounced correctly by 92.5% and wrongly pronounced by 7.5% in the word 'kite', while in the word 'kit', it was pronounced wrongly by 67.5% and correctly pronounced by 32.5%. The high rate of mispronunciation of the letter "i" in the word 'kit' cannot be explained. The possible reasons are nervousness and slip of the tongue. Other possible reasons are the unfamiliar nature of the word and the fact that the passage used was specially prepared for the purpose. That the same number of respondents mispronounced words 'bit' and 'rid' that are supposed to be familiar could be due to the uncommonness of the word in routine usage, as they are not words that feature in everyday conversation. This shows that this category of users assume the same pronunciation for similar characters irrespective of the occurring environments.

70% of the subjects pronounced the letters 'ee' in beer and 92.5% pronounced it correctly in beef. The respondents seem to recognize different vowel sounds represented by the same letters in different words, possibly because the words in which they occur are familiar. The high rate of 30.0% who mispronounced the letters in 'beer' despite its being a familiar word is worrisome, although this could be attributed to the fact that the passage was specially prepared and so the error may not occur in real life situation.

Pronunciation varies relative to the status of the speaker, either as a first language or as a second language. While first language users may pronounce correctly, with innate capability, second language users are bound to falter as they cannot match native speakers' proficiency, which is neither feasible nor even desirable. Although there may be no need to match native speakers, those who are to serve as models (the category under which our subjects fall) should achieve certain standard that will help them impart, at least, minimum standard to other learners. The subjects, who are speakers of English as a second language, have demonstrated the inability of second language users of English to pronounce some vowel sounds occurring in different words as expected even of a second language user. Vowel sounds vary depending on where such sounds occur in words such that the way a particular vowel sound is pronounced in one word may not be the way it is pronounced in another. This is a fact that many of the subjects failed to grasp as many of them pronounced the same vowel sound the same way irrespective of where and how it occurs in words, thus leading to pronunciation problem.

Although Yoruba speakers of English as a second language recognize the fact that some vowel sounds vary in pronunciation, depending on where such vowel sounds occur, these are in words that are very familiar and are in common use. This fact was not noticeable in very unfamiliar words as shown in this study. For example, many of the subjects, (67.5%), could not recognize vowel variation in 'rid' [rɪd] and 'ride' [raɪd] which were pronounced the same way. The same problem became noticeable in 'bite' and 'bit'. The plausible explanation for this may be that while 'hide' and 'ride' are more familiar words heard in common usage, as we ride everyday in vehicles or ride bicycles and hide our belongings to protect them from being stolen, the words 'bite' and 'bit' are not as popular in use. These lapses may not seriously affect intelligibility since the co-context of the word provides enough cues for understanding. Nevertheless, these lapses show poor performance, especially on the part of this category of users of English as a second language, who are supposed to be role models as practising teachers as well as teacher trainees.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds in English as is the case in Yoruba and many other Nigerian languages. Apart from tone marks and accents that make words differ when pronounced, but substantially retaining the one-to-one correspondence of letters with sounds, the Yoruba language has no serious problem of vowel sound variation. This is transferred to the English language in some words, thus leading to mispronunciation. Such mispronunciation is unexpected from this category of users of English as a second language, because they have been exposed to the language for a long period of time, English being a second language in Nigeria. Other non-native speakers of English may experience similar problems in the pronunciation of some English words, not necessarily in the sounds discussed here which are peculiar to our subjects. Learners of any second language, especially those who have passed the critical age of language acquisition are most likely to exhibit the same lapses as seen in our subjects but not necessarily in the sounds and problems identified with them. For example, Mostafa and Jamila (2012) have observed that some English loan words veer near Bangla pronunciation, by way of nativization. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages should identify specific problem areas in pronunciation that are capable of hampering intelligibility and redress them.

To attain some level of intelligibility, locally and internationally in English, it is recommended that teachers of English as a second language emphasize the problem areas, such as variation in speech sounds depending on where certain speech sounds occur in words, as the peculiar examples identified in this study. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages should identify pronunciation problems that may veer too significantly away from local standards and redress them to help achieve both national and international intelligibility. This is particularly so in learners who have passed the linguistic critical age of language acquisition and in cases where fossilization appears to have occurred. Ekeh's (2007) suggestion is useful here; that there is the need for familiarity with the sounds of the target language by starting with the familiar sounds, progressing to the difficult and then move on to training on discriminating between difficult sounds. As for young learners of English as a second language, teachers at that level should find it interesting watching how these learners acquire the intricacies of a second language. But this is only possible if the teachers are not themselves deficient, but know what to watch out for. Government at various levels of our educational system should ensure that only qualified teachers of English as a second language are allowed to teach in schools.

Those already on the job should be made to undergo training and retraining to make them more efficient on the job because of the strategic position of English globally

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Appendix

Facsimile of Instrument Used for the Study

The man in the manger saw the woman wearing a hat. The man was told there were other women wearing hats around. He was also told to hide in the cart so as to ride home safely and rid himself of the pain of having to walk home. While relaxing in the cart, he saw a rat running at a fast rate. While watching, he saw a kite which he would have loved to keep as a kit. There was no ice cream to cool off and so he settled for beef and beer. The beef was neatly packed and put near the beer carton. He took a bite and a bit of beer and he discovered the meat was bitter.