MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN THE PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH AMONG IBIBIO STUDENTS IN UYO URBAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract
Ibibio Language is a dominant language spoken by most Ibibio native speakers in Akwa Ibom State. This study sought to identify the areas in spoken English where the influence of Ibibio language occurs. In order to achieve the desired goals, production and recognition tests were administered to sixty senior secondary three students from three schools in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. The performances of all the sixty students were used for the analysis. The result reveals that the greatest problem area for the students was in the area of rhythm. For the segments, the vowel: /iː ʊ,əː,iə/ which are absent in the Ibibio sound system were difficult for the students to produce. The vowel sounds: /iːʊː,/ə/ /which are present in both languages were difficult for the students. The English consonant sounds:/ θ, g, ʒ,/ which do not exist in Ibibio but which are present in English were also difficult for the students. On the other hand, the English consonant sounds: /v, dʒ, ð , θ / which are not present in Ibibio sound system were easy for the student informants. The sound /æ/ which occurs in English but absent in Ibibio was easy for the students too. And, the consonants sounds /f,k,s/ common to both English and Ibibio were easy for the students too. It was concluded that the interference from the mother tongue can result in student's inability to pronounce the English sounds. This affects their understanding of these sounds when pronounced by other people and therefore may impede their effective comprehension. The paper recommends the teaching and learning of English sounds in secondary schools as a way of controlling problems associated with interference in their use of English.

Language is one of the most important attributes of mankind because it is the medium of communication. There is no country without a language. We all live in a world of many languages.

Language is so important to man that one can equate it with the air we breathe. To emphasize the place of language in man's existence, (Awoniyi 1980) enumerates the use of language to include:

1. To modify and direct the behaviour of other people.

2. To influence the ideas of other people. Hence we can persuade another person to change his action, depending on the choice and style of the language we employ.
3. To communicate to others our ideas or information.
4. We also use language as an instrument of thinking because language and thought are like body and soul, each influencing the other, among others.

If language is so important, then the mother tongue of any child is an important factor in the growth and development of that child.

The mother tongue (MT) refers to the language which a group of people, considered to be the inhabitants of an area acquire in their early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication (Awoniyi:1974). In essence, each particular language in the world (i.e. Ibibio, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, English, French, and German etc.) is a mother tongue of a particular place and time.

Despite the fact that the mother tongue is said to form a natural and easy means for a child's further intellectual, emotional, social, and linguistic development, it (the mother tongue) interferes in the efforts of students to learn a second language.

Linguistic / language interference occurs whenever an individual uses features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another. Such an individual is known as a bilingual.

(Bilingualism refers to a situation whereby one person uses two languages alternatively). As bilingual, the patterns of his language, the first (L1) and the target (L2) would not be the same. This would cause him to introduce errors into the target language as a result of the contact between the two languages. Hall (1959) points this out thus:

The new comer never gets beyond this first step. For example, he many learn a great many words (or sets) of a foreign language but still use the Linguistic isolates of his mother tongue… which gives him an accent. Moreover, he may without knowing it, fit the foreign words into the constructions or patterns of his native tongue which can render his thoughts unintelligible.

This phenomenon often gives rise to the theory of linguistic interference and is often tagged a negative feature in language study.

Background to the Problem

The problem of Nigerian Children not being able to perform well in English Language has continued for some time now. Despite the fact that the Government has emphasized that a child must have a credit pass in English language before being admitted into the University, most Nigerian students in secondary schools still perform below expectation in the subject.

Some Ibibio speakers learning English have this problem of inability to communicate intelligibly. Their oral English cannot be internationally intelligible. This is so because some English sounds and some segmental features of English pose problems for them. For example the dental fricatives /ɵ/ and / ð/ are sometimes realized as */ t /* and */d/*. The voiced labio-dental fricative (v) is often produced as (f). The voiced alveolar fricative */z/* tends to be realized as *(s)*.

My interaction with Ibibio speakers learning English as a second language has revealed that the following English sounds may be said to be the most problematic for Ibibio learners and users of English.

Pure Vowels

/æ/ as in tank /tæ ŋk/
/Λ/ as in cup /kΛp/
/□:/ as in girl /g ʒ:I/
/I:/ as in keen /ki:n/

Diphthongs

/ ∂/ʊ/ as in go, /g∂ʊ/
/ʊI/ as in gate, /geit/
/ʊ∂/ as in poor, /pʊ∂/

Consonants

/θ/ as in thing, /θiŋ/
/ ð / as in they, / ðeI/
/z/ as in busy, /bi:zi/
/v/ as in vim, /vIm/
/d□/ as in judge, /dzΛd ʒ/
/g/ as in goat, /g∂ʊt/
/□/ as in vision, /vi ʒn/
/+ʃ/ as in church,/+ʃ ʒI+ʃ/

The phonological problems of an Ibibio learner and user of English extend to such non-segmental features as accentuation, rhythm and intonation. It has been observed that an average Ibibio learner or user of English tends to place accentuation on most syllables in English utterances. Hence instead of saying: Do you´ like rice? He tends to say: “Do `you´ like rice?

Prominence is sometimes given to the wrong syllables. A good example is where Ibibio speakers, the very educated ones inclusive, wish their friends “`success” instead of suc´cess. Here instead of stressing the second syllable, the Ibibio speakers stress the first. `Success and suc′cess not an interference problem rather it is inherited from wrong models, lack of training and exposure, national and indeed African problem.

As for intonation, Ibibio speakers tend to use the falling tune for almost every utterance. Tragido (1987: 188-189) explain thus:

West African languages are typically tonal. (i.e each lexical item even of a single syllable will have a fixed tone or sequence of tones irrespective of its context…).

In spite of individual attempts and the emphasis now placed on oral English, the above problems have persisted. One of the aims of this study is to find out whether these information and generalizations from contrastive analysis are true for Ibibio secondary school students who have been exposed to some measure of instruction in spoken English.

Consequently, teachers, textbook writers and school administrators would gain some insight into the skills requiring emphasis in the teaching and learning of spoken English among Ibibio secondary school students and thus be able to minimize the high incidence of phonological interference among them.

The Aim and Scope of the Research

This paper will be of immense assistance to English teachers because it will enable them to anticipate errors, plan remedial programme for the learners and particularly pay more attention to Ibibio speakers learning English as a second language.

It is also believed that this work will act as a catalyst for people who might wish to embark on similar studies in their own area as well as make invaluable contributions in the area of Ibibio phonology.

For an effective treatment of the topic under reference, the study was restricted to three secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. They are:

1. Cornelia Conelly College, Afaha Oku, Uyo.
2. Adiaha Obong Secondary Commercial School, Eniong Offot, Uyo
3. Community Secondary School, Aka Offot, Uyo.

The location of these schools implies that students attending them will come from different parts of Uyo Local Government Area.
This will make the sample drawn from these schools fairly representative of the entire Local Government Area.

Again, because of the limited time available for the research and other factors, this study is restricted to the phenomenon of interference at the level of phonology. It is hoped that future research may include more schools and examine other levels of interference such as: grammatical, lexical, cultural etc.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What consonants of English present difficulty to Ibibio learners of English
2. What vowels of English present difficulty to Ibibio learners of English?
3. What features of English supra-segmentals present difficulty to Ibibio learners of English?
4. What are the possible causes of the problems identified in research questions 1, 2 and 3 above?

Date Analysis/Results

In analysing the data, tables were used and the instrument used was the simple percentages so that references to the tables would be easy. The results from the production and recognition test show that some students were able to produce and recognise some of the English vowels and consonant sounds while most of them could not.

Tables 1 and 2 below summarize the findings with the vowels:-

Table1: Result of Production Test: Vowels

Sound	Number Right	% Right	Number Wrong	% Wrong
æ	56	93	4	7
i:	26	43	34	57
ʊ	48	80	12	20
ʊ	14	23	46	77
	54	90	6	10
E	60	100	-	-
I	52	87	8	13
ʊ	8	13	52	87
Λ	8	13	52	87
∂:	8	13	52	87
I∂	20	33	40	67
e∂	28	53	32	47
aʊ	54	90	6	10
aI	58	87	2	2
∂ʊ	8	13	52	87
eI	10	17	50	83

Table 2: Result of production Test: Vowels

Sound	Number Right	% Right	Number Wrong	% Wrong
æ	46	76	14	24
u:	34	77	26	43
	54	90	6	10
Λ	8	13	52	87
ʒ:	18	30	42	70
eI	50	83	10	17
eʊ	32	53	28	47
cə	26	43	34	57
Iə	56	93	4	7
əə	46	76	14	24

Before discussing the results as shown in the tables above, it is necessary at this juncture to take a brief look at the English and Ibibio vowels so that we can where necessary attribute some of the findings to their similarities or differences. The English language has twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs. The pure vowels are: (i:, I, e, æ, a:, ʒ, ʒ:, ʊ, u:, Λ, ʒ:ə). The diphthongs are: (eI; ʒ I, ʒ I, əʊ, aʊ, Iθ, eə, ∂,) This shows that the language has a total of twenty vowels.

On the contrary ten pure vowels and five diphthongs have been identified in Ibibio language. The ten pure vowels are: (i, t, e, ∂, Λ, oi, ui). From these it is evident that the following English pure vowels are absent in Ibibio: /æ, ʒ, i:, I, u, ʊ, d:/. Their absence may constitute a source of interference in the efforts of Ibibio speakers to realize the English sounds properly.

The English diphthongs /aI, ʒ I, eI/ are similar to the Ibibio closing diphthongs /ai, ʒ I, eI/ Ibibio speakers of English generally do not find the diphthongs dI, ʒ I, eI/ problematic because of their closeness to Ibibio diphthongs.

In summary, the English vowel sounds /æ.∂:, i:, I, u:, ʊ , d, eə, iə, that do not exist in Ibibio could in varying degrees be difficult for Ibibio learners and users of English, thus the resulting interference can constitute an obstacle to the proper learning of English Language. On the other hand, some Ibibio learners and users of English have difficulties with the production and recognition of the English sounds /e, ə, Λ, ai, eI, ʒ I , əʊ, ʒ ʊ /. This is in spite of the presence of these sounds or their equivalents in both languages.

Discussion of Findings as Regards the Vowels

As the result in table 1 shows the student informants could not easily reproduce the monophthongs / Λ, ə ,ə, ʊ/ and diphthongs /ʊe, iə, əʊ, eI /. On the contrary, more than 50% of the informants were able to reproduce the single vowels / ʒ, u:/ and the diphthongs /dI, au/. All of them were able to produce the vowel /e/ contrary to my assumption, majority of the informants were able to produce the sounds /æ, I/. This was

attributed to the good model and quality of teaching since the teachers were graduates of English with a teaching qualification.

Table II illustrates that performance was better in the recognition test. Most of the informants were able to identify the words containing the sounds tested. The sounds / ʒ:/ in 'wars'/w ʒ:z/, /Λ/ in 'gun' /gΛn/ eə/ in 'hare' /heə/ are the only ones with less than half the number of informants were able to recongnise. It is interesting to observe that the subjects (forty-two out of sixty who could not identify the word containing the sound / ʒ:/ selected the word 'was' /w ə z/ instead of 'wars' /w ʒ:z/. Fifty-two out of sixty informants were unable to identify the word containing the sound /Λ/. They selected the words 'gone' /g ʒ n/ instead of 'gun' /gΛn/. Lack of familiarity with the sound /Λ/ could be responsible for the substitution of / ʒ /for /Λ/ in the word 'gun'. It should be noted that the sound /Λ/ exist in Ibibio language inventory, e.g., /usΛŋ/ meaning door or road. For the sound /eə/ only twenty-six students were able to recognize it in the word 'hare' /heə/, the rest selected the word 'hear' /hɪə/. It would be observed that /eə/ is not present in the Ibibio sound system. As such, those informants that selected the word 'hear' might have done so because /iə/ is present in Ibibio.

We had earlier pointed out in this work that the following vowels sounds are likely to be problematic for Ibibio speakers / æ, ə , ʊ, I, e, ʒ u,, Iə/. This has not been exactly the case, the vowels /u:/ eə and /ɛə,/ have not proved to be as problematic as was expected because more than half of the number of subjects tested were able to produce them. On the other hand, the vowels: / əΛ, eI/ which occur both in English and Ibibio and therefore should not pose any pronunciation problem for Ibibio speakers of English have proved most problematic. Only eight out of the sixty students tested were able to reproduce / ə ,^/ and only ten out of sixty were able to produce /eI./. The vowel / ə / in 'was' /wəz/ was realized as / ʒ / by those informants who could not produce the sound.
Likewise the vowel /Λ/ in 'love' /ΛV/ was realized as / ʒ /and / ʒ:/ by all except eight students. It might not be the interference of the mother tongue that was responsible for the substitution of / ʒ:/ for /Λ/ in the word 'love' because Ibibio the L_1 of the informants has /Λ/. The difficulty perhaps arises from lack of training, exposure and poor quality of the model. The vowel (ei) in 'play' was realized as /e/ by fifty informants. Their inability to produce the sound correctly may be caused by the quality of learning because this diphthong also exists in the Ibibio sound systems.

It is also worth noting that the long English vowel: */i:/* was produced as /I/ by thirty-four out of sixty subjects of this study. The long vowel / ʒ:/ was heard as / ʒ /. This is caused by the vowel process called lengthening, a process whereby the length or the direction of a vowel is indicated.

Whereas Ibibio indicates length by doubling the letters of sounds concerned, in most cases to change the word from singular to plural English does not adopt this method.

Therefore, the absence of doubling of letter in the word 'these' /ði:z/, and 'wars' /w ɜ:z/ is probably responsible for the production of /i/ and hearing of / ɜ:/ as short vowels.

Tables 3: Result of Production Test:
Consonants

Sound	Number	% Right	No. Wrong	% Wrong
ð	26	43	34	57
G	28	47	32	53
V	42	70	18	30
O	44	73	16	27
Z	32	53	28	47
d ʒ	40	67	20	33
ʒ	14	23	46	77
+ ʒ	56	93	4	7
S	60	120	-	-
H	56	93	4	7
F	60	100	-	-
K	38	63	22	37

Tables 4: Result of Production Test:
Consonants

Sound	Number Right	% Right	No. Wrong	% Wrong
V	52	87	8	13
Z	54	90	6	10
ʒ	54	90	6	10
d ʒ	48	80	12	20
ð	42	70	18	30
F	56	93	4	7
+ʃ	54	90	6	10
θ	52	87	8	13
ʃ	50	83	10	17
g	48	80	12	20

The English and Ibibio consonant sounds will be discussed here before analyzing the data. The chart below shows the number and types of consonant sounds in the English and Ibibio languages.

Table 5:English Phonetic Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	**Labio-dental**	**Dental**	**Alveolar**	**Palato-Alveolar**	**Palatal**	**Velar**	**Glotal**
V/plosive	p			T			K	
Vd [ll]	b			D			g	
Vi Friction		f	θ	S	ʃ			h
Vd/..fricative		v	Đ	Z	□			
Vd/..Affricative					+ʃ			
Vd/..Affricative								
Nasal	n			N	d□			
Lateral				ℓ				
Approximant								
Semi-vowels	v					j		

(cf. Udofot,1. 1993:2)

Tables 6: Ibibio Consonant Chart

	Bilabial VI Vd	**Labio-dental VI vd**	**Alveolar dental VI vd**	**Palatal VI vd**	**Labiovelar VI Vd**	**Velar VI Vd**	**Uvular VI Vd**
Stops	p b		+ d			k	
Implosive fricative		F	S			kp	
Nassab	m		N	ʊ		ŋ	
Approximants				y		w	ʒ

(cf. Essien, 1990)

The English and Ibibio consonant charts have illustrated that English consonant system has twenty-four distinctive sounds while Ibibio has only fifteen. This being the case, the Ibibios have problems in pronouncing those sounds that do not exist in their native language sound system; while those that exist may not pose pronunciation problem. For instance, the voiced velar plosive */g /* which exists only in its voiceless version as */k/* in the Ibibio consonant sound system is likely to be difficult for the Ibibios, the same applies to the voiced /ð/ and the voiceless /ɵ/ dental fricatives.

The voiced alvelar fricative /z/ does not exist in the Ibibio consonant system, a fact which may pose a pronunciation problem for the Ibibios.

Also, neither the voiced nor the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative / ʒ/ occur in the Ibibio sound system. Therefore, there is likely to be interference in the efforts of Ibibio speakers to produce those sounds. Similarly, the English voiced and voiceless

palato- alveolar affricate /dʒ+ʃ/ which do not exist in Ibibio, may constitute interference problem for Ibibio speakers learning English language. The study also reveals that the lateral /ℓ/ which is absent in Ibibio may cause pronunciation problems for Ibibio speakers.

On the contrary, all the plosive /p,b,t,d/ except the voiced velar plosive /g/ cannot be problematic for Ibibio speakers of English. The same applies to the bilabial nasal/m/, the alveolar nasal /n/ and the velar nasal /ŋ/.

Discussion of Findings with the Consonants

Tables 3 and 4 have clearly shown that some of the predictions resulting from differences between English and Ibibio consonants sound systems have been proved right and some wrong. The following sounds have not been proved difficult for Ibibio speakers /ɵdʒ+ʃ,v/ after all.

Consequently, the predictions concerning these sounds have been proved wrong. On the contrary, the sounds /ə, ʒ,g/ have been proved to be problematic for Ibibio speakers.

The similarities between the consonants of Ibibio and English have some degree of facilitation in the case of /f, k,s,/. It is evident from the production test as shown on table 4 above that the Ibibio speakers tested, found it difficult to produce the consonant sounds /ð, ʒ,g/. However, more than half of the sixty informants were able to produce the consonants /ɵ z, dʒ+ʃ/. Forty –two of the informants were able to articulate the /v/ in 'very' /verI/ correctly. Forty of them were able to produce the sound /dʒ/ in the word 'John'/ dʒɔn/.

The recognition test as recorded in Table 4 is better. More than half of the numbers of students tested were able to identify the word 'read' among a group of three words or a group of three sentences. The sound /z/as seen in Table 4 did not pose much problems to the informants in medial positions.

The word 'lazy' /leIzI/ which contains /z/ in a medial position was identified by fifty four out of the sixty informants. The sound /v/ did not pose much problems for the informants either. Fifty –two were able to recognize it in an initial position in the word, 'very' /verɪ/. For the sound /ð /, forty –two informants were able to recognize it in the word 'brother' /brʌðəʒ/, others selected 'broader' /brʒ:dəʒ/. It is interesting to note that although the sound /ð/ does not occur in the Ibibio consonant system, more than half of the informants were able to realize it.

This of course could be attributable to the quality of teaching, the students receives. Other variables like the background of the students could, be responsible for the fact that some could, while some could not realize the sound.

Non-Segmental Features/Discussion

The English and Ibibio non-segmental features include rhythm in languages, Ibibio tone, English intonation.

The English and Ibibio rhythm are not the same. In Ibibio, every syllable is strongly accented. The accentual patterning in English on the other hand is quite complex and tends to follow specific phonological rules.

For example, in an unmarked utterance, every noun, adjective, verb, adverb and relative pronoun tends to be accented. Other words are not normally accented.

In a marked utterance however, practically every word in English can be accented. This is because of the syllable timed nature of Ibibio as contrasted with the stress timed nature of English.

It is therefore predicted that an Ibibio speaker of English will tend to employ syllable timed rhythm in rendering English utterances. In other words, Ibibio speakers of English will tend to place accentuation or at least make prominent almost every syllable in an English utterance. This is best captured by Tregido (1987:188) thus:

West African languages are typically syllable- timed, which strongly affects the rhythm of West African English, stress-timed speech is totally unfamiliar.

The results show that differences exist between the syllable timing in Ibibio and stress timing in English.
It was also observed that most of the informants realized correctly utterances requiring uni-directional intonation patterns: the fall and rise and rise while the bi-directional fall rise and relevant combinations was somehow difficult for the subjects.

Because of the usual nature of tone languages, Ibibio tone operates on words. A change in tone can and often does lead to a change in meaning of the word. Again, tones in Ibibio have grammatical functions in those words in association tend to compel changes in meaning.

On the contrary, English, is intonational. Like others in this class, intonation operates on the sentence and signals not a change in meaning as such but a change in a shade of meaning.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to identify the areas in spoken English where an average Ibibio speaker normally has problems taking cognizance of some speakers from selected Secondary Schools in Uyo urban.

From our findings we were able to deduce that interference from the mother tongue can result in students' inability to pronounce some of the English sounds which do not exist in Ibibio sound system.

This therefore, tends to affect their understanding of these sounds when pronounced by other people and hence may impede their comprehension.

However, interference among students could be controlled or brought to its barest minimum through effective teaching and learning of English sounds. It is not the intention of this work to propose an outright or 100% received pronunciation (RP)standard of the English language for Ibibio learners of English, but it is necessary for them to be equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge of the English language with a view to availing themselves of the communicative potentials of the language.

As a way of addressing some of the problems discovered in this work, it is the view of the researcher that students should be introduced to English language in their formative years, while the government should create enabling environment for studies vis avis providing language laboratory centres in many communities in aid of the students for higher productivity.

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APPENDIX

PRODUCTION TEST QUESTION

Candidate's Name:…….

School:……..

Age:……

Class:…….

Mother Tongue:……

TEST 1

Listen carefully and write the letter of the sentence 1 read in each of the following groups of sentences.

1. A) We have a new pan.
   B) We have a new van.
   C) We have a new fan.
2. A) I want that glass
   B) I want that class.
   C) I want that grass
3. A) She saw the road.
   B) We saw the code.
   C) We saw the load.
4. A) Her hut was strong enough
   B) His hat was strong enough
   C) His heart was strong enough
5. A) I took the wrong part.
   B) I took the wrong path
   C) I took the wrong pad

TEST II

Listen carefully and write the letter of the word I read in each of the following sentences.

1. A) was
   B) wars
   C) worse

2. A) gone
   B) gun
   C) gum
3. A) hear
   B) hare
   C) air
4. A) brother
   B) broader
   C) bladder
5. A) got
   B) cot
   C) caught