

## Original Paper

# Phonological Perversion as Detriment to Effective Use of Spoken English among Secondary School English Teachers in Non-Native Context

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the effect of phonological perversion in the use of spoken English among secondary school English Teachers in Ogun State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all English Language teachers in the selected schools with the sample size of 120. The validated instruments used for collecting data were pronunciation test and questionnaire. A reliability index of 0.84 was achieved using Cronbach's alpha. The data collected were statistically analyzed using frequency, percentages and t-test at 0.05 level of significant. The findings revealed that the English Language teachers in Ogun State whose language background is Yoruba had problems in pronouncing some English sounds, e.g., /v/ and /f/, /z/ and /s/, /ei/ and /e/, /iə/ and /ea/, /i:/ and /i/ and h-dropping (hard as add). It is recommended that Nigerian teachers of English Language be professionally developed in the rudiments of English sounds for intelligent communication.*

### Keywords

*phonology, phonological perversion, spoken english, secondary school, english teachers, non-native context*

## 1. Introduction

Language is the major tool of communication in human society and speech occupies a major position in most discussions of language as a communicative medium. Speech is paramount to any language and knowledge of the English Language cannot be appreciably good without effective manipulation of the speech sounds, for linguistics competence. This means that the mastery of English is highly connected to the mastery of the spoken form of it. According to Bruce (2007), phonology does not deal directly with the physical nature of speech sounds, but rather with the largely unconscious rules for sound patterning that are found in the mind/brain of a person who speaks a particular language. Phonology concerns itself with the ways in which languages make use of sounds to distinguish words from one another. English Language teachers should be knowledgeable about the phonology of English because the sound system is primary and the basis for the spelling system, more so, as they may have to teach English pronunciation to students who are not native speakers of English for the purpose of providing systematic and well-founded understandings of the sound patterns of English Language.

One might think that English Language teachers would not have difficulties with the Target Language (TL). However, English still presents formidable challenges, especially in the realm of pronunciation. Most of the world's English language teachers speak English as a second/third language user rather than as first language users. For many, their level of proficiency in English may not reach benchmarks established by their employers, raising the issue which is the focus of this article. The importance of pronunciation cannot be overemphasised in human speech because good pronunciation is the key to intelligibility. If the goal of language learning is to communicate in the TL, then learners of English as a second language (ESL) should strive for intelligibility (sound patterns recognized as English), comprehensibility (listener understands meaning of utterance) and interpretability (listener understands purpose of utterance). English pronunciation is very important in teaching and learning. This means that teachers should spend time in improving their pronunciation competence. Good quality pronunciation enhances learning while bad pronunciation promotes great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein, 2012). The goal of pronunciation instruction is not to ask learners to pronounce like native speakers but rather intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of oral communication. If learners want to change the way they pronounce some English words, they have to change their thinking about the pronunciation of some words. This is true for both segmental features (individual sounds) and for suprasegmental/prosodic features (syllables, stress patterns, tone and rhythm). Unfortunately, pronunciation instruction is sometimes ignored in English language teaching (Pourhosein, 2011; Pourhosein, 2016).

Pronunciation according to Pourhosein (2016), is the production of a sound system which doesn't interfere with communication either from the speakers' or the listeners' viewpoint. Pronunciation is learned by repeating sounds and correcting them when produced inaccurately. When learners start learning pronunciation, they make new habits and overcome the interference issues emanating from the first language. Yates (2002) sees pronunciation as the production of sounds that is used for making

meaning. James (2010) noted that the aim of learning pronunciation for some learners is the native-like accent. This can probably be a primary objective but it cannot be the ideal goal of teachers who intend to improve their learners' pronunciation for purpose of effective communication. If a speaker has a heavy English accent, this may cause negative judgments about his/her personality and competence. As a result, learners need not to pronounce like native speakers of English but they need to have an accent that is close to a known standard, therefore, English teachers can use different kinds of models for teaching and learning pronunciation in English language. James (2010) suggested that one can turn on his/her TV and find channels such as CNN International, BBC, or Sky News. These channels help one to hear different people from Germany, France, and the other non-English-speaking countries. All of these channels have acceptable English language pronunciation and this will facilitate the process of persons' understanding of the language. According to Yates and Zielinski (2009), much attention to English pronunciation indicates that pronunciation has a key role in learning English. If teachers do not present the general rules and principles toward comprehensible pronunciation to their EFL learners, nobody will certainly do it. It is the responsibility of EFL teachers to do this by teaching the new sounds, words, sentences, and phrases and arranging appropriate materials for understandable pronunciation in their EFL classes. EFL teachers should explore new ways of indicating, practicing, and giving feedback on English pronunciation that are actually appropriate for learners to learn English pronunciation easily and effectively.

Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) declared that many teachers try to teach grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills to their learners without incorporating English pronunciation into their curriculum. Also, Thompson (1995) observed that recent teaching materials reflect absence of intonation. According to Ghorbani (2011), since pronunciation does not appear or is not tested in the formal education exams, it is neglected by many Iranian EFL teachers. He argues that lack of English phonemes in Persian, unpredictability of the orthographic system of the English language, and sacrificing teaching of pronunciation on the altar of other language skills by teachers account for Iranian learners' problem in learning English language pronunciation. He suggests that the relation and correspondence between each symbol and sound can be more clarified by using phonetic transcription. Language remains the bedrock of classroom teaching; this implies that, teachers are expected to properly manipulate the segmental and suprasegmental features of English to effectively pass across instructions or messages without distortion that may hamper semantic expression through mother tongue interference. However, errors as a result of mother tongue interference, affect the effective communication of reports by some English teachers. This affects school students and particularly those who look up to such teachers as role models. In the light of this, the study is set to investigate whether the errors of the English teachers under study are as a result of the influence of their Mother Tongue and identify implications for the teaching of spoken English in senior secondary schools.

Phonological perversion is defined as (in the speech of a second or foreign language learner) the use of a linguistic item, (e.g., a word, a speech) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language

regards as showing faulty or incomplete. Phonological perversion can also be called pronunciation error. Error is a systematic deviation made by learners who are yet to grasp the use of the target language rules. Jong, Xiaodong and Yu (2016) defined an error as a systematic deviation made by learners who lack knowledge of the correct rule of the target language. It shows a lack of language competence and it reflects in a learner's current stage of L2 development. Moreover, the incompetence of a vast majority of teachers teaching the English language in error, out rightly ignoring the rules of the language is bound to lead Nigerian students towards the wrong path of understanding the language. However, Mohammed (2015) examined the influence of mother tongue on the spoken English of television correspondent reporters. Live report of two correspondent reporters from Desmims International Television (DITV) and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna were recorded and played back. Errors detected were grouped according to whether they are Substitution, Epenthesis, Under-differential or Reinterpretation errors. The study revealed that the television correspondent reporters committed errors when they pronounced vowel sounds, consonant sounds in some English words and also they stress every syllable of bisyllabic and polysyllabic words of English language. Onwubiko (2011) sees the influence of mother tongue on English language as a result of some ethnic groups over indulgence in their primitive cultures in addition to a misguided passion to create impression that they cherish their supposedly "rich cultural heritage". The sad thing is that children grow to have their mindset conditioned in such manner. He warns that it is high time the irrational pasturing mindset and perception be checked to enable children key into the norms of the language of instruction and communication around the world.

Okoye (2012), in line with Onwubiko (2011), stressed that mother tongue constraint has, in every possible assessment, endangered a staggering and persistent decline in the quality of English spoken in Africa. This may make one to wonder why, in all levels of schools in Nigeria, many learners have so much difficulty with their communication skills in English such that they cannot function effectively in the academic use of English. Recent researches churned out by the West African Examination Council indicate that the performance in the English Language dropped from 52.24 per cent in 2017 to 46.79 per cent in 2018. Angwah (2019) investigated the correlation between Cameroonian ESL teachers' linguistic perceptions and the phonological aspects of their English. A total of 75 Secondary School teachers of English, from five regions of the country, constituted the sampled population of the study. A questionnaire, with close and open-ended questions, was constructed to gain an understanding of their linguistic perceptions. A test of 10 sentences, with targeted phonological variables /dʒ, tʃ, ð, θ, ə, ɜ, əʊ, əʊə, and əʊə/, was conceived and the participants were asked to read them aloud while the investigators tape-recorded their phonological renditions. The data was then transcribed and compared to their linguistic perceptual claims. The results revealed a significant gap between the respondents' linguistic perceptions and the phonological aspects of their English.

Rehman, Khan and Bukhari (2012) looked into the problems faced by Pashto speakers, while learning English. The study identifies that five English consonants namely, the labio-dental voiceless fricative

/f/, the labiodentals voiced fricative /v/, the dental voiceless fricative /θ/, the dental voiced fricative /ð/ and the post-alveolar voiced fricative /ʒ/ are problematic for Pashto speakers. The study further shows that these consonants are replaced by L1 sounds: 1) English labio dental fricative /f, v/ are pronounced as bilabial voiceless stop /p/ and bilabial approximant /w/; 2) English dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are replaced by dental stops /t, d/; 3) palatal voiced fricative /ʒ/ is replaced by palato-alveolar voiced affricate /dʒ/. Wheelock (2016) used the data from the Speech Accent Archives and conducted an error analysis of 27 Italian learners reading aloud an English passage. The study found that the most common vowel error was a misformation of /ɑ/ as [ə], which was retained by the seven advanced speakers. Being that /ə/ is the most common reduced vowel in English and /ɑ/ is not an Italian phoneme, this vowel error is explicable. The study also found that the most common consonant error was a misformation of /z/ as [s], also retained by the advanced speakers. Devoicing of /z/ to [s] also becomes explicable once the speaking passage words were examined for /z/ placement. The investigation of Lapusza, Yunita and Syatroh (2019) on the phonological errors in tongue twister activity of Javanese and Sudanese people, the study proved the assumption about Javanese people who are famous with medok sounds and for Sudanese people having difficulties to pronounce /f/ and /v/ sounds. The result of the study showed that Javanese people have 57% phonological errors of bilabial sounds and for Sudanese people have 59% phonological errors of labio-dental sounds. We can see a lot of inconsistencies in the literature which leads to this.

### *1.1 Problem of the Study*

Yoruba language sounds 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. Owolabi (2014) rightly noted that no two languages exhibit exactly the same sounds and have the sounds combined in exactly the same ways in all their spoken forms. This, therefore, is a major problem, especially for Yoruba speakers of English as a second language. Spoken English has always been a problem to non-native speakers, most especially in a second language situation. The problem of native language interference continues to threaten proficiency in the spoken English of non-native speakers of the language. A close observation of secondary schools' English teachers in Western part of Nigeria indicates problems in the pronunciation of some English sounds. Elkhair (2014) noted that the errors of pronunciation made by learners of English from different language backgrounds are systematic and not accidental. So they concluded that the main problem of the speakers of English as a second language, is substitution of sounds, that is, they substitute the sounds that they do not have in their native language, with other sounds which are close to them in the place of articulation. Though, it is generally agreed that, it is difficult for a second language learner to speak with native-like pronunciation but there is need for them to communicate effectively using the accurate pronunciation. Therefore, this study attempts to identify the problematic areas of pronunciation and to identify the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English teachers.

### *1.2 Research Question*

To guide the study, the following questions were posed:

- 1) What are the problematic phonological patterns that the secondary school English Language teachers encounter?
- 2) What are the perceptions of secondary school English Language teachers regarding the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English Language teachers?
- 3) Is there difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in pronunciation?

### *1.3 Hypothesis*

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 significance level:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in pronunciation.

## **2. Methodology**

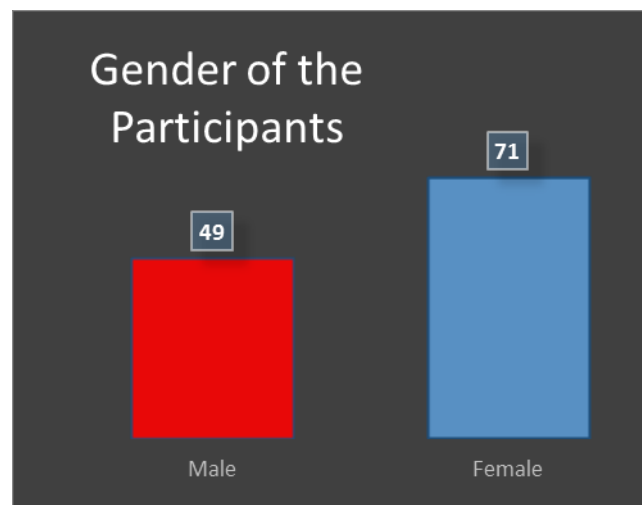
The population for the study comprised all Junior and Senior Secondary School English Language teachers in Ogun State, South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to get the sample of 120 English teachers used in the study. Firstly, Ogun State was selected from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria; secondly, six Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the 20 Local Government Areas in Ogun State. Ten secondary schools (one from Junior Secondary and one from Senior Secondary Schools) were selected from the six randomly selected Local Government Areas resulting to 60 schools. Two English teachers were randomly selected from the 60 selected schools; therefore, the sample of the English teachers is 120. A pronunciation test and questionnaire were used as the instruments for collecting data. The test consisted of a word list and a set of sentences all containing problematic phonemes for Yoruba speakers of English and the questionnaire consists of English teachers' perceptions towards the factors that are responsible for the phonological errors committed by English teachers. The participants were asked to read aloud English words while the researcher audio recorded the responses. The recorded data were then transcribed and analyzed after listening to each participant's pronunciation. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in Linguistics and Educational Measurement and Evaluation and from their comments and recommendations; some of the items were modified and re-worded. A reliability index of 0.84 was achieved using Cronbach's alpha. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive (frequency and percentages) and statistically (independent sampled t-test) which was tested at 0.05 level of significant.

### 3. Results

**Table 1. The Sample Distribution of the Participants**

Variable	Frequency
Male	49 (40.8%)
Female	71 (59.2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>120 (100%)</b>

The participants of the study were (N=120) English Language teachers at the selected secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. Among the participants, there was (N=71) female English teachers and (N=49) male English teachers. The data is represented below:



**Figure 1. The Gender of the Participants**

Research Question One: What are the problematic phonological patterns that the secondary school English teachers encounter?

**Table 2. Problematic Phonological Patterns That the Secondary School English Teachers Encounter**

Sound	Word	Wrong Pronunciation	Number of participants pronounced correctly	of that participants pronounced incorrectly	Number of Total
/v/	<u>V</u> ery	<u>F</u> ery	56 (46.67%)	64 (53.33%)	120
/z/	<u>Z</u> ip	<u>S</u> ip	30 (25%)	90 (75%)	120
/h/	<u>h</u> appy	<u>A</u> ppy	12 (10%)	108 (90%)	120
/ei/	<u>K</u> ate	<u>K</u> et	27 (22.5%)	93 (77.5%)	120
/ia/	<u>B</u> eer	<u>B</u> ea	38 (31.67%)	82 (68.33%)	120
/i:/	<u>B</u> ee <u>f</u>	<u>B</u> i <u>f</u>	50 (41.67%)	150 (58.33%)	120

Table 2 shows the phonological perversion that affect the use of spoken English among secondary school English teachers in Ogun State. The table shows that the English Language teachers in Ogun State whose language background is Yoruba had problems with the pronunciation of some English consonants and vowels such as: /v/ is wrongly pronounced as /f/; /z/ is wrongly pronounced as /s/; /ei/ is wrongly pronounced as /e/, /ia/ is wrongly pronounced as /ea/, /i:/ is wrongly pronounced as /i/ and h-dropping (happy as appy).

Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of secondary school English teachers regarding the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English teachers?

**Table 3. The Perceptions of Secondary School English Teachers Regarding the Factors Responsible for the Phonological Errors Committed by English Language Teachers**

S/N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Motivation and exposure	3.1	1.75
2	Attitude	2.97	1.42
3	Age	2.7	1.28
4	Personality	3.04	1.71
5	Mother tongue	3.12	1.73
6	Inadequate instructional materials	3.11	1.81
7	Stress, intonation and rhythm	2.97	1.42
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.00</b>	<b>1.59</b>

Table 2 shows the participants' perception on the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English Language teachers. All the items in Table 2 has mean values greater than the



criterion mean of 2.5 and the grand mean is also greater than the criterion mean of 2.5. Therefore, the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English Language teachers are: mother tongue interference; inadequate instructional materials; motivation and exposure; attitude; age; personality; and stress, intonation and rhythm.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in English pronunciation.

**Table 4. Independent Sampled t-Test Analysis of the Male and Female Teachers in Their Perceptions on the Factors Responsible for the Phonological Errors Committed by English Language Teachers**

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	T	Sig.(p-value)
Male Teachers	49	25.93	12.23	118	1.090	0.278
Female Teachers	71	25.87	12.15			

$\alpha=0.05$

Table 4 shows the male respondents' mean=23.93; standard deviation=9.23 and the female respondents' mean=25.8; standard deviation=12.0; t=1.090 and p-value=0.278. Testing the hypothesis at the alpha level of 0.05, the p-value (0.278) is greater than the alpha value. This shows that there is no significant difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in pronunciation. Conclusively, there is no significance difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in pronunciation errors.

#### 4. Discussion of Findings

Research question one revealed that the phonological perversion affects the effective use of spoken English among secondary school English teachers in Ogun State. The finding of this study also revealed that the English Language teachers in Ogun State have problems with the pronunciation of some English consonants and vowels such as: /v/ which is wrongly pronounced as /f/; /z/ is wrongly pronounced as /s/; /ei/ is wrongly pronounced as /e/, /iə/ is wrongly pronounced as /ea/, /i:/ is wrongly pronounced as /i/ and h-dropping (happy as appy). The result of this study is in agreement with the findings of Chukwuma and Otagburuagu (2002), who discovered that the Yorubas realize /v/ as /f/, e.g., "very" becomes "fery", /z/ does not exist in Yoruba so it is substituted with /s/, e.g., "zeal" is pronounced, "seal, issue is pronounced 'izzue'". Moreover, Owolabi (2014) 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 are obtainable in the Yoruba language. The results of the study showed that the participants, who are

teacher trainees and expected to be models cannot pronounce some sounds correctly, especially 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. Kanoksilapatham (2014) investigated the Thai elementary school teachers’ English pronunciation competence. The instrument used to collect data in the study are: a questionnaire to elicit Thai teachers’ personal information and a stress identification test consisting of 50 multisyllabic words. The test scores were used to help describe Thai teachers’ pronunciation competence. The results show that Thai teachers have difficulty identifying stressed syllables in English.

Research question revealed that the participants’ perceptions on the factors responsible for the phonological errors committed by English Language teachers are: mother tongue interference; inadequate instructional materials; motivation and exposure; personality; attitude; age, stress, intonation and rhythm. The result of this study is in consonance with the findings of Wheelock (2016), who investigated the phonological difficulties encountered by Italian learners of English and found that the factors that influence English pronunciation acquisition are: motivation, interference of L1 (mother tongue) and many instructors find pronunciation difficult to teach due to inadequate skills and/or teaching materials. Rehman, Khan and Bukhari (2012) also found that the factors in pronunciation errors are: interference from the mother tongue particularly in pronunciation, syntax, and idiomatic usage; lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives; unchallenging English lessons; being passive learners; lack of responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, Kanoksilatham (2010), who examined the 574 Thai teachers’ ability to place a stress syllable on 80 multisyllabic English words, found that the teachers’ performance was relatively low and the factors that claimed to be responsible for the teachers’ failure are: unqualified teachers, teachers’ underestimation of the importance of English stress placement, inadequate instructional materials, and the curriculum.

Hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant difference in the performance of male and female English Language teachers in pronunciation. The result of this study is in line with the findings of OmovrighoIdialu (2015), who examined the effects of Oral English Language Cards (ORELANCADDRS) on students’ achievement in segmental and supra segmental phonology (test of oral English). The finding of the study showed no significant difference in performance of the participants with respect to their gender. However, the findings in hypothesis one is not in agreement with the findings of Akindele (2014), who investigated the Educated Edo English (EEE) speakers’ level of conformity to established phenomenon in Standard English (SE). Auditory analysis revealed that EEE speakers’ could not alternate stressed and unstressed syllables of the English words with syllabic consonants appropriately as findings revealed 4.2% overall performance for EEE speakers, with males performance at 2% and females 2.2%. Also, Osikomaiya (2018) investigated teachers’ achievement in Oral English between male and female primary school teachers, using t-test comparison, she discovered that difference in male and female teachers’ achievement was statistically significant, that is, the values of means achievement of female primary school teachers is higher than their male counterparts. Ceron, Gubiani, Oliveira, Oliveira and Keske-Soares (2017) determined the occurrence of

phonological disorders by gender and a phonological evaluation was performed to analyze the operative phonological processes. The finding revealed that phonological alterations were more prevalent in males than females.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the English Language teachers in Ogun State who have Yoruba background encounter phonological difficulties in pronouncing some English vowels and consonant sounds and 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 resulting in communication deficiency.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion, it is recommended that:

- 1) Nigerian teachers of English Language need professional development as well as regular training/seminars/workshops to achieve effective English pronunciation teaching to learners.
- 2) Teachers should be well prepared and equipped to meet the challenges of teaching English pronunciation in both primary and secondary schools.
- 3) Teachers should not dodge from teaching oral aspect of English language to learners.
- 4) English teachers in primary and secondary schools should have good knowledge of phonetics and phonology because this will provide a basis for teachers to pronounce a word correctly and identify the physical reasons for inaccurate approximations of foreign language sounds which will enable them to give precise instructions of correcting faulty pronunciation.

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