A SOCIO-PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH FRICATIVE ARTICULATION AMONG SELECTED EDUCATED SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH IN LOKOJA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study identified and described the various patterns of inter-ethnic realisations of fricatives among selected ethnic speakers of English from Ebira, Igala, Hausa and Okun Yoruba. It measured the acoustic features of the identified patterns and discussed the factors that accounted for the ethnicised renditions. This was with a view to describing the articulation of English fricatives among English speakers in Lokoja metropolis.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were purposively sourced from 120 respondents selected from Ebira, Hausa, Igala and Okun-Yoruba ethnic groups of Lokoja. Thirty informants were selected from each ethnic group; the informants were civil servants drawn from three tertiary institutions in Lokoja. The major instrument used for this study is a Sentence Reading Task containing eighteen carefully-structured sentences. The test items were subjected to perceptual and acoustic analyses. The acoustic analysis was conducted using PRAAT. The secondary source included books, journals, articles and the Internet. A synthesis of Trubertskoy’s Distinctive Features and Ferguson’s Contrastive Phonology formed the framework for this study.

The results showed that the respondents articulated differently in relation to diverse ethnic groups in Lokoja. The study revealed that this could have resulted from the differences in ethnic orthography, educational qualifications, cohabitation and inter-ethnic influence / transfer. It discovered that respondents’ renditions of English fricatives were influenced by the phonemic systems of their first languages. The results also showed that the respondents’ speaking styles differ greatly, and as such, their renditions of the test items were acoustically measured
depending on the phonemic inventories of their backgrounds. Also, the results revealed that there was a high tendency for the respondents to transfer some phonological traits which are as a result of the influence of a neighbouring language. Furthermore, the study revealed that respondents did not have the same exposure to English despite their educational qualifications; rather, their level of competence was a reflection of their familiarity with the use of English as a second language. Finally, the results showed that cohabitation and proximity of the ethnic groups brought about certain phonological influences in which are ethnic group’s manners of articulation of some sounds influences some other ethnic groups. This process brought about mutual / linguistic intelligibility among such groups where renditions of some sounds have some natural resemblance.

The study concluded that a description of the articulation of English fricatives among the ethnic groups in Lokoja metropolis could be indicative of the dynamics of how social relations impact on language use in a plurilingual ESI environment.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

There is no doubt that the English Language is a dominant world language which equally has variety of forms in various parts of the globe to the extent that it constitutes a problem for some non-native speakers. In affirmation, Trudgil (2009:2) submits that the “English language has been brought to so many locations (of the world) and this has given rise to extreme diversification and the birth of countless ‘new’ varieties…” Owolabi (2012:1) observes that “the number of people, spread across the different continents that use the language for one purpose or the other, attest to the fact that English is, indeed, a global language.” In this regard also, McArthur (2001; cited by Adegbite et al., 2014:1) provides an overview of World Standard English in the innermost circle, enclosed in a circle of eight regional varieties: British and Irish Standard English, American Standard English, Canadian Standard English, Caribbean Standard English, West, East and Southern African Standardizing English, South Asian Standardizing English, East Asian Standardizing English and Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific Standardizing English. The outermost circle contains a list of national varieties of English of which Nigeria is one.

It is a truism to claim that linguistic variety is a feature of human life in both the social and the individual contexts. Nigeria is a practical example as it has an estimated 394 to 513 linguistic groups, which according to Olaniyi and Josiah (2013:38) “culminate in the multifarious accents, dialects, varieties and diversities of spoken English in the country.” This huge resource of second language speakers of English use it for the purpose of administration, education, mass
media, business transactions, commerce, politics, advertisement, judiciary proceedings, science and technology, and so on. English language in Nigeria further performs functions of intra-ethnic, inter-ethnic, inter-religious, inter-cultural and international linkages for peaceful coexistence.

Many scholars have found it worthy to study Nigerian English because of its non-native peculiarities in relation to the forms and usages in different social and individual contexts. The English language has been nativised as different ethnic groups come in contact with it (E.g.: Igbo English, Hausa English, Yoruba English, Ebira English, Okun-Yoruba English, Igala English, etc. At the same time, English Language experiences different “colourations” as each ethnic group adopts its use at the levels of Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics. To this effect, deviant and variant forms have emerged which have made the speaking of the English Language by some Nigerians a somewhat daunting task; even more daunting, perhaps, is the issue of (mutual) intelligibility.

Needless to say, “one of the formidable challenges that learners of English Language face, especially in the second language situation, is the pronunciation of English words” (Onuoha, 2015:1). For instance, speakers and listeners are confronted with different “English sounds” which are invariably articulated at the mercy of different ethnicised versions. From an international perspective, however, it is pertinent that L2 learners acquire native-like or near-native pronunciation in order to be intelligible beyond their local environment. This study is therefore interested in describing some of the issues relevant to the articulation of English sounds, especially the fricative sounds. The study is interested in the articulation, the variant patterns of inter-ethnic realizations as well as the social variables affecting the production of English fricative sounds among four ethnic groups within the Lokoja metropolis.
1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1.1 Ethnic Composition of Kogi State and Lokoja

Kogi State consists of several ethnic groups. The indigenous ethnic groups are: Bassa-Nge, Bassa-Komo, Bunu, Ebira, Ebgura-Koto, Gwari, Igala, Ijumu, Kakanda, Magongo, Nupe, Ogori, Owe, Oworo and Yagba. There are several other non-indigenous but long-resident ethnic groups like Hausa, Okun-Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Edo, Urhobo, etc in different parts of the state, especially in Lokoja. The current study is interested in four ethnic groups, namely Ebira, Hausa, Igala and Okun-Yoruba (Cleen Foundation, 2011).

Lokoja metropolis is located on the confluence of Rivers Benue and Niger. The dominant ethnic groups in Kogi (and invariably much so in Lokoja) is the Igala, located in the Eastern flank and Kogi East Senatorial District; Ebira is the second largest ethnic group in the state. The Ebiras are located in the Western flank of the Niger River and in the Central Senatorial District. The next major group is a cluster of ethnic minorities identified as Okun, following the common usage of the word for greeting. A large subset of the group also identifies itself as Yoruba. They are in the Western Senatorial District. Sandwiched between these three blocks of ethnic groups are several minorities (Cleen Foundation, 2011). It should be noted that Hausa is not indigenous to Kogi, it is a settler language, yet it is selected in this a major language in Lokoja because it is a language of wider communication that cuts across all the states Northern Nigeria. Needless to say, a typical Ebira, Igala and Okun-Yoruba person can speak Hausa. That was why Hausa was selected as part of the major languages to be described in this study.

Out of the ethnic groups mentioned above, four (Igala, Ebira, Okun and Hausa) are assumed to be in the majority and are further considered the dominant languages living within the Lokoja metropolis. These ethnic groups are exposed to the English Language and they use it for
different purposes. They have equally “domesticated” the English Language in such a way that it projects identifiable ethnic “colourations” of each group (as stated earlier, Igbo English, Hausa English, Okun-Yoruba English, etc). It is therefore “easy” to identify a particular ethnic group from the way they articulate certain sounds of the English Language. Of interest to this study are the different forms, patterns and articulations of the English fricatives by these ethnic groups. The motivation for the study is spurred from the fact that the researcher is resident in Lokoja and is in constant interaction with the different ethnic groups under discussion. Moreso, the researcher is fascinated by the rich linguistic resources that abound in the locale and wishes to explore its potential in the studies of second language acquisition and learning. Also, the researcher intends to describe how ethnicised English renditions of the English fricatives bridges the gap of communication among educated speakers of English vis-à-vis the standard forms. Similarly, the study intends to describe how fricative use (by educated speakers of English in Lokoja) can aid (if possible) or not the aspired approximation to either the ideal model or the realistic goal of a variety which is mutually and internationally intelligible as well as socially acceptable. Hence, the study will do a quadruphonic description of all fricatives, and how each ethnic group articulates and realizes them.

1.2 Phonetics and Phonology

In their definitions of phonetics and phonology, Harmann and Schmitz (2005:3) differentiated these two concepts thus:

Phonetics is concerned with how sounds are produced, transmitted and perceived. Phonology is concerned with how sounds function in relation to each other in a language. In other words, phonetics is about sounds of language, phonology is about sound systems of language.