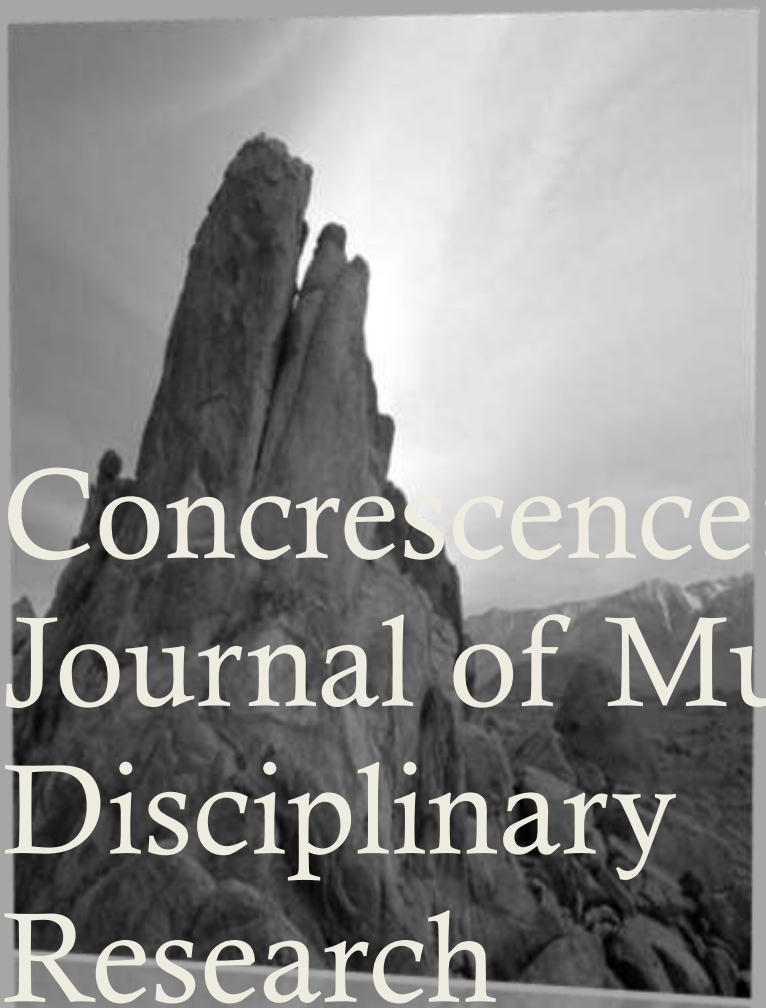


Concrescence: Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research

Volume 2, Number 3, 2025, E-ISSN: 1595-9287

Faculty of Humanities, Imo State University

Concrescence: Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research
Vol. 2, No. 3, 2025, E-ISSN: 1595-9287

A Detailed Examination of Native Language Interference on the Spoken English of Igala Students in Some Selected Schools in Anyigba

Idegu A. Solomon, Ph.D
Department of English and Literary Studies
Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State
Solomon.idegu@fulokoja.edu.ng

Abstract
The aim of the study is to determine the native language interference on the spoken English of Igala students in some selected schools in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area, Kogi State. It aims at identifying the areas in spoken English where the interference of mother-tongue takes place. It also carries out a systematic inquiry into the differences between the phonemic systems of the Igala language and English against the background of similarities, with the purpose of providing recommendations that will help tackle or minimize phonological errors among Igala students. In order to determine the likely areas in spoken English that are problematic to the subjects during communicative events, oral tests, textbooks, and online textual materials were used. Primary data were obtained from oral test conducted among twenty (20) students from Our Lady of Schools, Anyigb and Secondary Commercial College, Anyigba. Two classes were used in each of these schools: SS1 and SS3. The Theoretical Frameworks used for the study were Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning. While CAH compares two or more languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them, the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning explains the nature of some learners' performance in a second language and accounts for reasons why they speak the way they do. The finding shows that the Igala language lacks certain English sounds, hence the mother-tongue interference on the spoken English among Igala students. It also shows that native language interference hampers the students' fluency, intelligibility and mastery of the English language.

Keywords: Acquisition, Contrastive, Differences, Native language, Similarities

Introduction

Language is a system of communication that consists of a set of symbols, sounds, and rules used to convey meaning and express thoughts, ideas, and emotions. It is an indispensable tool that every human being acquires at a tender stage of their life. The capacity to perceive and comprehend language, as well as to produce and use words and sentences to communicate, involves different processes. Different linguists have attempted to define language from various perspectives, but it can be defined as an arbitrary system of communication, either through speaking, writing or sign. It is the fundamental process of expressing, transmitting, and communicating ideas, values, and skills from one person to another. It is the medium with which human beings communicate effectively.

Human beings exist in a world of language. They use language to communicate with one another. The fundamental of every language system is to link meaning and expression; to provide verbal expression for thought and feeling and for that expression to be comprehensible to others. The differences in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of these languages bring about mother tongue interference.

According to Awoniyi (1980), language is so important to man that one can equate it with the air we breathe. Going further, he explains that every tongue expresses the culture of the society to the complete satisfaction of its members. The language an individual speaks is for him or her, the most expressive and the most beautiful of all languages. To emphasise the place of language in man's existence, he states that language modifies and directs the behaviour of other people and influences the ideas of other people. Hence, we can persuade another person to change their action, depending on the choice and style of the language we employ. He also states that language is used to communicate to others our ideas or information, and that human beings use language as an instrument of thinking. This is because language and thought are like body and soul, each influencing the other. Drawing from this inspiration, it is an indisputable fact that language plays an important role in society. If language is so important, as seen from the foregoing, then the native language of any child is an important factor in the growth and development of that child. Over the years, there has been an increasing interest in the study of Native language interference on the English language, which, in practice, is the official language of Nigeria. It functions as a lingua franca. It is the language of politics, education, and media and so on. As a result of this, the native language of the learner interferes with the second language in the course of learning the latter. The implications of this interference are made manifest in the deficient phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels of usage. This problem has motivated researchers to look into the interference of native language on the English language. Language is dynamic; hence it is very hard for anybody to acquire the whole words of a language. Most learners of English as a second language always experience some problems while communicating in English as a result of native language or mother tongue interference. This is because there is a strong tendency for any second language learner to get some items of the second language confused with those of his or her first language.

Several efforts have been made by researchers to identify the mother tongue or native language interference on the spoken English of Igala speakers, but most of them focus on the supra segmental level of the Igala language and the English language. It is on the basis of this that the researcher examines the problem of mother tongue or native language interference among Igala-English speakers from the segmental aspect.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for the study is a synthesis of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is a theoretical framework in linguistics that predicts that language learners will encounter difficulties when there are differences between their native language (L1) and the target language (L2). The main idea of the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis is that it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language by systematically comparing the two languages and cultures. This is required in this research work in order to predict, explain, correct, minimise, and if possible, eliminate errors due to interference between Igala as the first language (L1) and English as a second language (L2) among Igala-English students.

The Concept of Native Language or Mother Tongue Interference

Different scholars have posited different notions of mother tongue. According to Okpanachi (2013), when languages are in contact, the target language, which is usually of greater economic, social and political importance, influences the other(s). To her, the first language of a

learner interferes with the target language in the course of learning the latter. According to Romaine (1989), mother tongue interference is the introduction of new forms or rules into the target language from the first language where they already exist. He claims that where there is an overlap of two codes, interference is said to have occurred.

Ellis (1997) refers to interference as 'transfer', which he says is the influence that the learner's first language exerts over the acquisition of a second language. He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in second language learning. Selinker (1971), Seligar (1988), Ellis)1997) argue that in learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules with the use of their first language knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the second language for transfer to be possible.

Ellis (1997) posits that errors reflect gaps in the learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Mistakes, on the other hand, reflect occasional lapses in performance; they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows. To some extent, it appears to be much more difficult for an adult to learn a second language. According to Alabi (2007), there are three types of interference, namely phonological, lexical, and grammatical. In the words of Alabi, "Interference occurs virtually at all the primary levels of language description, most especially phonology, lexis, and grammar". For the purpose of the study, only phonological interference will be discussed.

Phonological Interference

Phonological interference occurs when the sounds of one language influence the pronunciation of words in another language. Berthold et al. (1997) define phonological interference as terms including foreign accent, such as stress, rhyme, intonation, and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second language. A second language learner may not be expected to reach a native speaker's standard of pronunciation.

Alabi (2007) in Weinreich (1968) identifies six major ways of phonological interference, which are: Under-differentiation, Re-interpretation of sound, phonemic substitution, Hypercorrection, and Epenthesis.

Under-differentiation: Here, the second users of English tend to use many sounds /phonemes for only one. For example, "power" is pronounced as /pawa/ instead of /pɑuə/.
Over-differentiation: This is the use of a sound /phoneme in many ways that are not necessary. For example, the interpolations of the glottal sound in words like "hour" and "honour", etc., in the initial level.

Re-interpretation: This is seen when a bilingual reorganises the phoneme of the target language based on the features of his/her first language. For instance, the word "mosque" /mɒsk/ is often pronounced as /mocks/ by some speakers of English.
Phonemic substitution: This is when a bilingual replaces a sound/phoneme in the target language with one in his/her mother tongue. For example, a word like "thing" /ϴiŋ/ is pronounced as "tin" /tin/ by replacing /ϴ/ with /t/ and /ŋ/ with /n/.

Hypercorrection: This occurs when a bilingual pronounces a sound in order to meet a standard in the target language. For instance, some speakers of English as a second language pronounce "debt" /dɛt/ as /dɛbt/, thereby following spelling pronunciation.

Epenthesis: This is a superfluous insertion of vowel segments as a way of alleviating the complexity of consonant clusters that characterize English. For example, the word, "little /litl/ as /litul/.

Factors that Cause Transfer

According to Skinner et al. (1957), language transfer is a general problem that occurs in bilingualism. They opine that several variables are related to the occurrence of transfer. To them, the more thoroughly something is learned, the more likely it is to be transferred to a new situation and the more similar two situations are, the more likely it is that what is learned in one situation will be applied to the other situation. In the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning, Skinner argues that similarity of either stimuli or responses is necessary for transfer to occur. This theory asserts that second language learners imitate what they hear and develop habits in the target language through routine practice. Learners relate what they already know in their native language to the second language. A positive transfer that occurs is due to the similarities between the first language and the second language, but a negative transfer is also likely to occur due to differences and difficulties in the languages. He also claims that when confronted with something new, whether it is a new food, a different kind of music, or just new information, it is a natural instinct to look for similarities with things that are familiar, to try to draw some comparison with what one knows already. Consciously or unconsciously, one brings what he/she knows to what he/she does not, making it, to some extent, impossible to learn anything entirely from scratch. Errors manifest sometimes and these errors are those caused by the influence of the learner's mother tongue or native language on their production of the target language, presumably in those areas where the languages clearly differ. The Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning also affirms that when old habits get in the way of learning new habits, it is interference (Skinner, 1957). The notion of interference has a central place in this theory. Thus, differences between the first and the second language create learning difficulty, which results in errors.

Gick and Holyoak (1987) propose that transfer depends on the retrieval of relevant information at the appropriate time and that the perceived similarity rather than actual similarity of the two situations is important.

Jordens (1977), Keller-man (1979), and Touchie (1983) enumerate some of the factors that cause transfer in second language learning. These factors include the following: Simplification, Hypercorrection, Faulty teaching, Fossilisation, and Avoidance.
Simplification: Learners often choose simple forms and constructions instead of the more complex ones. For example, the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous in grammar.
Overgeneralization: This is the use of one form or construction in one context and extending its application to other contexts where it should not be applied. For instance, some students who are taught that "th" in "thing"," thought", "smooth", and "three" is pronounced as /ϴ/ tend to articulate "th" in "Thames", "Thailand", and "thyme" as such due to the fallacy of overgeneralisation. This automatically leads to a phonological error.

Hypercorrection: The zealous efforts of teachers in correcting their students' errors sometimes induce the students to make errors in otherwise correct forms. This is because the students are faced with too many corrections that they sometimes do not know the correct form to adopt.

Faulty teaching: Sometimes, it happens that learners' errors are teacher-induced ones, which are caused by the teacher, teaching materials, or the order of presentation. This factor is closely related to the hypercorrection above. It is interesting to note that some teachers are even influenced by their pupils' errors in the course of long teaching.

Fossilisation: Some errors, especially errors in pronunciation, persist for long periods and become quite difficult to get rid of. For example, the word "but" /bʌt/is pronounced as /bɒt/ in Nigerian English.

Avoidance: Some linguistic elements are difficult to pronounce for some learners of a second language. As a result, these learners avoid these elements and use instead simpler

ones they are familiar with in their mother tongue. In other words, it will be quite acceptable to say that students draw from their background experiences and prior knowledge of their mother tongue to acquire a second language. They use structures from their first language that are similar to the second language and experiment with this new language. An inter-language, which consists of the learner's existing knowledge of the second language, is thus created, hence interference. The learner is, in the end, able to overcome communication breakdowns by using what he already knows.

Phoneme

A phoneme is the smallest distinctive unit of speech. It is through the use of phonemes that one word is distinguished from another. It is for this reason that a phoneme is said to be in contrastive distribution. By using one or the other phoneme in an identical environment, a different word is produced in a language.

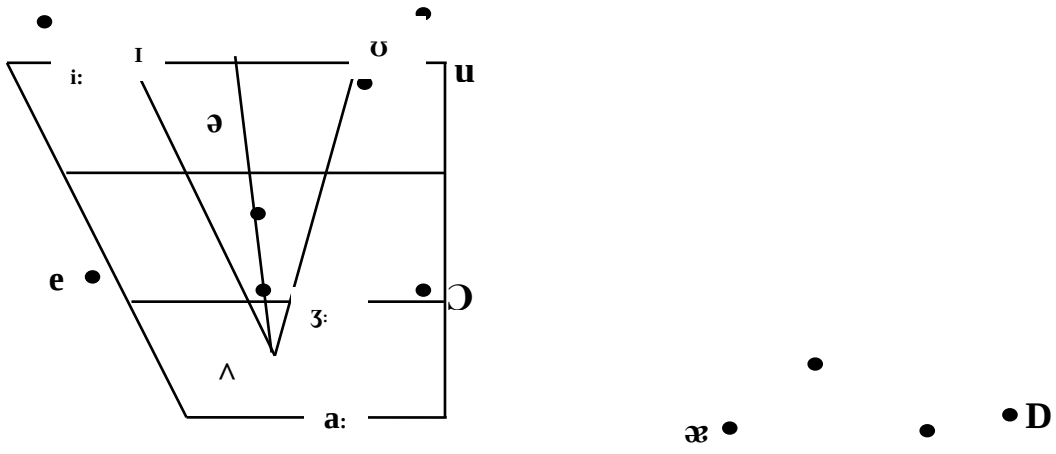
According to Omachonu (2000), Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2010), a phoneme is best described using minimal pairs, a pair of words which differ in only one segment or phoneme in the same environment, and this difference brings about a difference in meaning.

The Phonemes of the English Language

English has a total of forty-four speech sounds: twenty-four consonants and twenty vowels.
The Consonants Chart of English:

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveola	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	pb			td			kg	
Fricative		Fv	ϴð	sz	ʃʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral				l				
Approximant	w				R	j		

The Vowel Chart of English

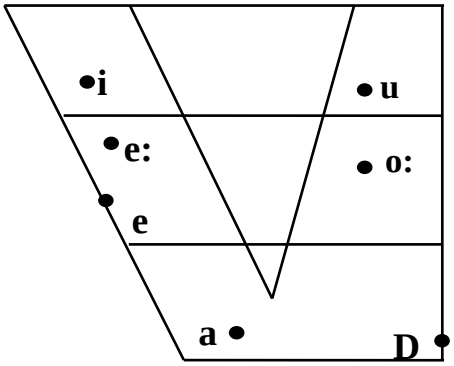


The Phonemes of the Igala Language

According to Omachonu (2001) and Ayegba (2013), Igala has a total of thirty speech sounds: twenty-three consonants and seven vowels. The consonants comprise 8 plosives, 4 affricates, 2 fricatives, 5 nasals, 1 lateral, 1 retroflex and 2 approximants. The vowels are short or lax with a slight change in their position when compared with English vowels.
The Consonant Chart of Igala:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	P b			T d			K g	Kp gb	
Affricate					ʧ ʤ			Kw gw	
Fricative		F							h
Nasal	M			N		Nj		ŋw ŋg	
Lateral				L					
Retroflex				R					
Approximant	W					J			

The Vowel Chart of Igala



Despite the fact that different scholars have different opinions concerning mother tongue influences, it appears that a majority of learners rely extensively on their native languages for support while learning a second language and this increase the possibility of the use of old habits that will result in interference. Mispronunciation may occur because some English sounds are not found in Igala, as reviewed above. But it has rightly been observed that in the first language, the learner is highly motivated and is surrounded by linguistic environments, the kind that the second language lacks. This implies that though language learning is generally difficult, second language learning has greater problems, which result in a greater number of errors in performance on the part of the users. It is therefore necessary to examine the issue of interference to bring a free flow from mother tongue to the learning of English among Igala-English learners.

Methodology

In carrying out this research work, the researcher used different methods to collect data for the investigation of mother tongue interference on the spoken English of Igala students. In the course of this investigation, textbooks were used and some pieces of information were retrieved from the internet, and oral tests were conducted amongst the Igala-English students. Recording devices were used to collect data from students during the oral test conducted in the class. The population used in the study was drawn from two selected secondary schools from Anyigba: Our Lady of Schools, Anyigba and Secondary Commercial College, Anyigba. In these schools, four

classes were used (SSS1 and SSS3 in both schools), and a total of twenty students were selected as subjects (five from each class).

The researcher will use the tabular form in analyzing the data collected from both schools. Given that the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is used for the analysis, the tabular form makes obvious the research problems as the phonemes that are included or omitted are noticed.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In doing this, the results of the oral exercise conducted among students from the two secondary schools stated earlier are presented in tables. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning are adopted to investigate the differences between the phonemic systems of Igala and English against the background of similarities and to give an account of what is responsible for the interference of the Igala language on the English language amongst Igala students respectively.

The oral test conducted for the study contains twenty-four English words. This is to test the students ' proficiency in the pronunciation of English words. The recorded oral test is used for the analysis.

Data Analysis

In this research work, the analysis is based on the observations from the data collected. The aim of the analysis is to find out the causes of mother tongue interference on the spoken English of Igala students. Due to the theories adopted for the study, Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning, the analysis is done in tabular form in order to make explicit the similarities and differences of the phonemic systems of both languages. This will also explain the reasons for the phonological interference. To do this, the analysis is grouped into two: vowels and consonants.

(A) Vowels

SECTION 1: Results of the Oral Test Conducted in Our Lady of Schools, Anyigba

Table I. SS 1.

S/NO.	RP (ENGLISH)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/i:/	Thief	25	75	100
2	A:/	Cart	20	80	100
3	/ɔ:/	Port	35	65	100
4	/u;/	Fool	20	80	100
5	/ɜ:/	Bird	20	80	100
6	/æ/	Cat	50	50	100
7	/Λ/	Such	15	85	100
8	/ə/	Above	0	100	100

9	/əu/	Home	5	95	100
10	/ʊə/	Tour	10	90	100
11	/ei/	Late	45	55	100
12	/iə/	Peer	75	25	100
13	/eə/	Care	30	70	100
14	/aiə/	Fire	50	50	100
15	/eiə/	Layer	15	85	100
16	/ɔiə/	Royal	45	55	100

Table II: SS 3

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/i:/	Thief	50	50	100
2	/a:/	Cart	20	80	100
3	/ɔ:/	Port	30	70	100
4	/u:/	Fool	20	80	100
5	/ɜ:/	Bird	20	80	100
6	/æ/	Cat	10	90	100
7	/Λ/	Such	5	95	100
8	/ə/	Above	0	100	100
9	/əu/	Home	20	80	100
10	/ʊə/	Tour	0	100	100
11	/ei/	Late	40	60	100
12	/iə/	Peer	95	5	100
13	/eə/	Care	25	75	100
14	/aiə/	Fire	35	65	100
15	/eiə/	Layer	0	100	100
16	/ɔiə/	Royal	35	65	100

SECTION II:

Results of the Oral Test Conducted in Secondary Commercial College, Anyigba

Table I: SS I

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/i:/	Thief	30	70	100
2	/a:/	Cart	40	60	100
3	/ɔ:/	Port	25	75	100

4	/u:/	Fool	45	55	100
5	/ɜ:/	Bird	50	50	100
6	/æ/	Cat	25	75	100
7	/Λ/	Such	0	100	100
8	/ə/	Above	0	100	100
9	/əu/	Home	0	100	100
10	/uə/	Tour	0	100	100
11	/ei/	Late	45	55	100
12	/iə/	Peer	90	10	100
13	/eə/	Care	40	60	100
14	/aiə/	Fire	20	80	100
15	/eiə/	Layer	0	100	100
16	/ɔiə/	Royal	45	55	100

Table II: SS 3

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/i:/	Thief	30	70	100
2	/a:/	Cart	40	60	100
3	/ɔ:/	Port	35	65	100
4	/u:/	Fool	50	50	100
5	/ɜ:/	Bird	50	50	100
6	/æ/	Cat	35	65	100
7	/Λ/	Such	0	100	100
8	/ə/	Above	0	100	100
9	/əυ/	Home	0	100	100
10	/υə/	Tour	0	100	100
11	/ei/	Late	40	60	100

12	/iə/	Peer	85	15	100
13	/eə/	Care	20	80	100
14	/aiə/	Fire	30	70	100
15	/eiə/	Layer	0	100	100
16	/ɔiə/	Royal	25	75	100

From the tables above, the difficulties encountered in articulating some of the English vowels by the Igala students stem from:

i. Vowel Length and Position

ii. Monophthongisation of diphthongs

iii. Division of Triphthongs into syllables (de segmentation)

i. Vowel Length and Position: Long vowels are rare in Igala. This means English vowels such as /i:/, /ɑ:/, /u:/, seldom have no equivalence in Igala. Almost all the subjects have difficulty in making a distinction between the English long and short vowels. For example, 80% of them pronounced the English word, "thief" /Ɵif/ as [tif], thereby creating confusion between /i:/ and /i/ to them; there is no distinction between the vowels in "thief" and "sing".

/ɑ:/ was also substituted with [ɑ] by 80% in the analysis. To students, there is no distinction between "cart" /kɑ:t/ "cat" /kæt/.

/ə/ was replaced by /ɑ/ in the word "above" /əbʌv/ and "murder" /mɜ:də/. The phoneme also occurred as /ɒ/ in "favour" and "razor".

/ʌ/ was realized as /ɒ/ in the words "such" and "subtle"; about 95% of the students failed blatantly in articulating this sound.

/ɜ:/ is another difficult sound for 80% of the subjects examined. This is because, apart from being a long vowel, it is also a central vowel, and this is not present in Igala. The /ɜ:/ in "murder" /mɜ:də/ and "bird" /bɜ:d/ were realized as [e].

ii. **Monophthongisation of Diphthongs:** Some of the English diphthongs were very problematic for the students to pronounce; diphthongs such as /ei/were monophthongized as /e:/ by 75% of the students. Thus, "late" /leit/ becomes [le:t].

/əʊ/ was realized as [o:] by 95% of the students. This occurred in the word "home" /həʊm/ that was realized as [hom].

However, the realization of /ɑ/, and /ɑʊ/ and /ɔi/ was 100% correct. This is because three is a near realization of those sounds in the mother tongue of the subjects and makes it easy for them to articulate them.

The centering diphthongs of English: /iə/, /eə/, and /uə/ are difficult for the students to articulate. There is no equivalence of these sounds in the Igala language; yet /iə/ was realized in the word "pear" /piə/ correctly by all the students. Sometimes the students

cannot clearly differentiate /eə/ from /iə/. For example, the word "care" /keə/ was realized as [kiɑ] by 80% of the students.

iii. Division of Triphthongs into Syllables: Triphthongs are in Igala. This makes the speakers break the cluster of vowels into syllables. For example, the words "layer" /leiə/, "royal" /rɔiəl/ and "fire" /fɑiə/ were realized as [lejɑ], [rojɑ], and [fɑjɑ] respectively.

B. Consonants

SECTION I: Results of Oral Exercise Conducted in Our Lady of Schools, Anyigba

Table I: SS I

S/NO	*RP (English)*	*Word*	*Percentage of RP Realisation*	*Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference*	*Total Percentage*
1	*/Ɵ/*	*Thief*	*30*	*70*	*100*
2	*/ʒ/*	*Division*	*20*	*80*	*100*
3	*/ʧ/*	*Such*	*50*	*50*	*100*
4	*/t/*	*Mortgage*	*20*	*80*	*100*
5	*/ð/*	*Themselves*	*20*	*80*	*100*
6	*/ŋ/*	*Sing*	*0*	*1oo*	*100*
7	*/b/ silent*	*Subtle*	*15*	*85*	*100*
8	*/p/ silent*	*Coup*	*15*	*85*	*100*
9	*/v/*	*Favour*	*95*	*5*	*100*

Table II: SSS 3

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/Ɵ/	Thief	30	70	100
2	/ʒ/	Division	20	80	100
3	/ʧ/	Such	40	60	100

4	/t/ silent	Mortgage	20	80	100
5	/ð/	Themselves	5	95	100
6	/ŋ/	Sing	0	100	100
7	/b/ silent	Subtle	30	70	100
8	p/ silent	Coup	25	75	100
9	/v/	Favour	100	0	100

SECTION II: Results of Oral Exercise Conducted in Secondary Commercial College, Anyigba

Table I: SSS I

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/ɵ/	Thief	40	60	100
2	**/ʒ/**	Division	35	65	100
3	/ʧ/	Such	55	45	100
4	/t/ silent	Mortgage	15	85	100
5	/ð/	Themselves	5	95	100
6	/ŋ/	Sing	0	100	100
7	/b/ silent	Subtle	25	75	100
8	/p/ silent	Coup	20	80	100
9	/v/	Favour	90	10	100

Table II: SS 3

S/NO	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realisation	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/ɵ/	Thief	20	80	100
2	/ʒ/	Division	15	85	100
3	/ʧ/	Such	60	40	100
4	/t/ silent	Mortgage	30	70	100
5	/ð/	Themselves	20	80	100
6	/ŋ/	Sing	0	100	100

7	/b/ silent	Subtle	10	90	100
8	/p/ silent	Coup	15	85	100
9	/v/	Favour	75	25	100

From the responses obtained from the Igala subjects in the tables above, the difficulties in articulating some of the English consonants stem from:

I. Substitution of English consonants with the nearest Igala consonants

II. Spelling Pronunciation (articulation of silent consonants)

Substitution of English consonants with the nearest Igala consonants: The voice fricatives are not present in Igala. Despite the fact that they are absent, the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ and the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ were pronounced correctly by the students in the words "favour" and "razor".

The voiceless and voiced dental fricatives /ɵ/ and /ð/ were pronounced as [t] and [d] respectively. In words like "thief" /ɵi:f/ and "thought" /ɵɔ:t/, 80% of the students articulated them as [tif] [tɒt]. a; so, the word "themselves" /ðemselvz/ was pronounced as [demselvs], thereby replacing /ð/ with [d].

There is the voiceless palate-alveolar affricate /ʧ/ in Igala, yet 60% of the students pronounced it as voiceless palate-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ in the word "such".

The voiced palate-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ is a difficult sound for most of the students; 85% of them replaced it with /ʃ/ as in the word "division" /diviʒn/ that was realized as [divison].

The voiced alveolar nasal /ŋ/ is another difficult sound for the students. None of the students was able to articulate it correctly in the word "sing" /siŋ/. Instead, it was pronounced as [siŋg].

Spelling Pronunciation (Articulation of silent consonants): 90% of the students did not get the pronunciation of "mortgage" /mɔ:gidʒ/, "coup" /ku:/, and "subtle" /sʌtl/ correctly. The sounds meant to be silent in the words above were articulated aloud. Thus, these are their own versions: mortgage [mɔtgeidʒ/, coup [kup] and subtle [sɒbtul].

Findings

The research findings reveal that mother tongue interference hampers the students' fluency, intelligibility and mastery of the English language. The findings also show that a contrastive analysis of the phonemic systems of both languages has helped to elucidate the sounds that are difficult for Igala students to articulate. These sounds are: /i:/, /ð/, /ɵ/, /s/, /ŋ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ʊə/, /æ/, /ei/, /ʌ/, /iə/, /ə/, /eə/, /ɜ:/, /ɑiə/, /a:/, /eiə/ , /ʊ:/, /ɔiə/, /ɔ:/, /əʊ/, /əʊə/ and /ɑʊə/. With the use of the Behavioural Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning, the study reveals that the causes of the problem of mother tongue interference among Igala-English learners are due to the differences in the phonemic systems of Igala and English.

Conclusion

Where English serves as a second language and the language of instruction, there are bound to be problems that may hamper students' fluency, intelligibility and mastery of the language. One of these problems is the first language, that is, mother tongue interference.

However, the study has been able to identify from the findings that those problems are due to the differences in the phonemic systems of Igala and English; if all the sounds in both languages were the same, there would have been no interference of mother tongue on the spoken English of Igala students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this research work, the study proffers the following recommendations to tackle or minimize mother tongue or native language interference on the spoken English of Igala students and even Igala speakers at large:

The content of English language in Secondary Schools should be more practical. More emphasis needs to be placed on oral performance and application rather than on theory. This will help check the problems associated with mother tongue interference.

The teaching of oral English should start from the nursery schools, instead of secondary schools, because experience has shown that the inadequate teaching of English, both in nursery and primary schools, creates strong obstacles at later stages of a pupil's process of acquiring linguistic competence.

Teachers should be exposed to the differences between standard English and Nigerian English through capacity building programme such as workshops, seminars, etc., which should be organised regularly by the Ministry of Education.
Language laboratories should be made available for studets or learners to test their competence and performance in oral English.

References

Alabi, S.A. (2007). Effect of Bilingualism. (A European/American (EA) Journal, Vol. 12, pp 35-46.

Awoniyi, C. (1980). The Teaching of African Languages. Holdef Company, London.

Ayegba, I. (2013). Ukoche Igala Ejodudu. Global Land Integrated Prints Limited, Kaduna.

Berthold, M., Mangubhai, F. and Batorowicz, K. (1997). Bilingualism and Multilingualism: Study Book. Distance Education Centre. University of Qeensland. Toowooba.

Chomskt, N. (1972). Language and Mind. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. New York.

Dulay, Heidi, C., Marina, K., Krachen, and Stephen, D. (1982). Language Two. Oxford University Press. New York.

Ellis, R. (1997). Understanding Language Acquisition. Oxford University Press. London.

Gick, M.L., and Holyoak, K.J. (1987). The Cognitive Basis of Knowledge Transfer. Academic Press. San Diego.

Ladefoged, P. and Johnson, K. (2011). A Course in Phonetics. Sixth Edition. WadsworthCengage Learning. Canada.

Okpanachi, D. (2013). Phonological Problems of Igala Learners of the English Language as L2. Retrieve from: Journal of the Igbo Language and Linguistics (JILL), JILL NO: 6, Page 67-72).

Omachonu, G.S. (2001). Fundamentals of Phonology and the Study of Igala Language. Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers.

Roach, P. (2010). English Phonetics and Phonology. A Practical Course. Fourth Edition. Cambridge University Press, UK.

Romaine, S. (1989). Bilingualism. Oxford University Press. Blackwell.

Skinner, B.F., Ivan, P. and Watson, J.B. (1957). Verbal Behaviour. Appleton Century Crofts. New York.