Contrastive Analysis of Standard British/American and Nigerian/Kenyan Pronunciation

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Abstract

This paper compares the Standard British/American and the Nigerian/Kenyan varieties of English pronunciation. The focus of this work is on the phonological variations in these Englishes. The aim of this work is to explore some of the common differences in the pronunciations patterns of these varieties of English. This paper is anchored on two theoretical frameworks – the Contrastive Analysis (CA) and the descriptive approach to language analysis. It was found out that unlike the British users of English, American users of English retain the retroflex /r/ in both word-final and middle positions. It was also noticed that the vowel /ɒ/ in British English is realized as either /aː/ or /ɔː/ in American English while the vowel /ə/ in British English can be realized as /æ/ in American English. The study further found that the pronunciation patterns of the Standard British/American English and the Nigerian/Kenyan differ significantly. The voiceless dental fricative /θ/ in British/American English is usually voiced in Kenyan English while it is usually substituted with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in Nigerian English. This paper also noticed that whereas a proficient speaker of Kenyan variety of English may have difficulty in articulating the glottal

fricative /h/, the lateral approximant /r/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in the Standard British/American English, it is observed that none of these sounds can pose a challenge to a competent user of the Nigerian variety of English.

Introduction

Since the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s, linguists have developed keen interest in the study of linguistic variations, also known as linguistic variability (Nordquist, 2019). Linguistic researches have proven that all natural languages including English have some kind of internal variations. The variations may be based on geographical boundaries, gender, social class, age, profession and educational background of the user (Denham & lobeck, 2013). In essence, social circumstances affect language and bring about variations. Linguistic variation therefore, refers to regional, social, or contextual differences in the ways that a particular language is used (Nordquist, 2019). This implies that there is no natural language that is totally uniform. In other words, a language such as English varies with regard to the differences in circumstances which may include the social or geographical environment.

As the English language travelled across the globe, new varieties emerged. Holmes and Wilson (2017) aver that African American English, Black English and Māori English are examples of 'new' varieties of English (Englishes), compared to the older, well-established varieties such as British standard English and US standard English. This justifies the claim that there is no natural language that is totally uniform as earlier. Simply put, language variation which means the differences in a language on the basis of circumstances is an unavoidable sociolinguistic phenomenon. Sil (2022) opines that the variation in a language is demonstrated by linguistic differences in terms of sounds (phonetics) and structure (grammar). These variations might be minor pronunciations of words or slight changes of grammatical structure that do not inhibit intergroup communication.

In view of the foregoing, this paper posits that the variety of English that is spoken in Britain may vary from the one that is spoken in America (which by the way are standard forms). The variety spoken in Nigeria may vary from the one spoken in Kenya and both the Nigerian variety and the Kenyan variety may differ from the

BrE and AmE. It is believed that the Nigerian English and the Kenyan English may differ from the BrE and AmE in pronunciation (phonetics and phonology), spelling (orthography), syntactic structure, morphology and semantics. Consequently, this paper compares the Standard British/American English phonologhy with Nigerian/Kenyan English phonology. It focuses on their similarities and differences in pronunciation

Conceptual Review

The Nigerian English (NE)

The history of English in Nigeria dates back to the mid nineteenth century; with the missionary activities then, English was taught as of 1880s (Meierkord, 2010). At the end of the colonial era English language was graciously adopted as the official language as well as the language of education and politics (Nwachukwu et al, 2007). This decision in a way, served the national communication needs in the linguistic heterogeneous Nigerian state and in turn popularized English in Nigeria among the ethnic groups in the country. It is important to state that with the presence of 500 to 600 languages spoken in Nigeria today, the variety of English spoken in Nigerian has a cultural coloration which is simply the result of the impact of these indigenous languages and cultures on the English language spoken in Nigeria, which could be termed as Nigerian English (Goncalves, 2020).

According to Ekpe (2007) Nigerian English (NE) is one of the varieties of global English and it is that variety of English used by Nigerians to communicate across socio-cultural boundaries, and which is clearly different from that of the native speaker. Ajasin (2020) posits that the variety tagged Nigerian English emerged due to deviations which occur in the course of learning and using standard English as L_2. He further argues that these deviations occur as a result of the linguistic deficiencies of Nigerian English users which can be traced to both linguistic and cognitive issues generally peculiar to most L_2 learners. Similarly, Bamgbose (1995, p. 11) avers that there is a case of nativization of English in Nigeria which of course may not necessarily be limited to phonology, some linguistic patterns of Nigerian languages are transferred into English resulting in the "creative development of a type of English – an evolution of a distinctively Nigerian usage, attitude and pragmatic use of the language.'' Bamgbose explains that the Nigerian variety is characterized by a reduced vowel system; non-rhoticity (zero realization of /r/ in

words *like* car or *arm*, epenthesis, the reduction of consonant clusters in syllable-final position; sound elision and prosodic features disarticulations.

The Kenyan English (KenE)

The English spoken in Kenya today can be said to be a stable post-colonial variety, which is basically used as an inter-ethnic lingua franca in the unofficial domains and a medium of instruction in the school; language of the parliament and the court rooms (Buregeya, 2019). According to Meierkord (2010) English first came to Kenya in the 19th century, when the British colonized the territory and after declaring Kenya, a protectorate, in 1920, it became a British colony. Meierkord further explains that English is the official language in Kenyan whereas Swahili functions as a national language.

Buregeya (2019) states that like other 'new' Englishes, the Kenyan English has some of the ethnically-marked features that makes it unique, different from other world Englishes. On a similar stand, Meierkord (2010) points out that the major phonological features of the KenE include: the avoidance of fricatives, the loss of length contrast in vowels, the monophthongisation of diphthongs, and the dissolving of consonant clusters.

Standard English (SE) – BrE, ArmE

Linguists most certainly believe that no variety of language is superior compared to others. However, some forms are generally acceptable among the educated class. Nordquist (2018) affirms that Standard English is a controversial term for that particular form of English that is written and spoken by educated users. Nordquist sees Standard English as the variety that is used in most public discourse in the regular operations of American social institutions: the news media, the government, the legal profession and the teachers in the schools. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines Standard English as the "English that with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform though not devoid of regional differences, that is well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated, and that is widely recognised as acceptable whenever English is spoken and understood." For Bhana (2014), SE describes a form of the English language that was universal

or common in the nineteenth century. And by the 1930s, it became associated with social class and was regarded by many as the language of the educated.

There is just not one form of standard English as different English speaking countries have slight variations in their own standard. Each standard variety aligns with the rules and structure prescribed by the speakers (StudySmarter, 2013). The BrE and ArmE are very popular varieties across the globe. Nordquist (2019) states that Standard British English is sometimes used as a synonym of Received Pronunciation (RP) and it is the variety generally used in professional communication in Britain. Similarly, the Standard American English is the variety that is also used for formal discourse.

Related literatures

Many scholars have carried out researches on world Englishes from varying perspective and have contributed to the literature on language variations. Jowitt (1991), Tamunobelema (2011), Olaniyi & Josiah (2013), Umera-Okeke (2016) and Buregeya (2019) studied Nigerian English Usage, Sociolinguistics - Varieties of English, Nigerian Accents of English in the Context of World Englishes, the English Language and Origin, History and Varieties of Kenyan English respectively. According to Jowitt (1991), Nigerian English is a dynamic organism with an internal momentum, sustained by literary production, official encouragement, among others. He also notes that the variety of English spoken in Nigeria is distinct from the variety of the language that is spoken elsewhere. Thus, the nomenclature "Nigerian English" is very appropriate. Similarly, Tamunobelema (2011) acknowledges that there are different varieties of English language on the basis of region, religion, profession, geographical environment, etc.

Furthermore, Tamunobelema (2011) and Umera-Okeke (2016) agree that the English language in Africa including the Nigerian and Kenyan varieties of the language has gone through a lot of processes and shaped by a lot of factors. Tamunobelema (2011) and Umera-Okeke (2016) agree with Bamgbose (1995) that the varieties of English language spoken in Nigeria and Kenya have undergone modifications in the Nigerian and Kenyan environments. Therefore, the language has been pidginized, nativilized, acculturated and twisted to express

unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction. This implies that the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria and Kenya must have areas of similarities and differences with the variety that is spoken Britain and America. In view of that, this paper will compare the pronunciation of some words in Standard British/American and the Nigeria/Kenya English.

More so, Umera-Okeke (2016) asserts that British and American English are the two major varieties of English throughout the world. This is because both varieties are institutionalized national standards of the English language. This suggests that the British and American English are usually the standard for passing judgement about the competence of a speaker of English language. Unlike Tamunobelema (2011) who insists that the varieties of English that are spoken in England, America, India, Australia and Africa are different dialects of the language that are scattered all over the world; Umera-Okeke (2016) opines that British English is the basis for the varieties spoken in England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Nigeria and South Africa. On the other hand, she avers that American (or North American) English is the variety spoken in Canada and the United States. She further insists that none of these varieties can be said to be homogenous.

Also, Tamunobelema (2011) and Umera-Okeke (2016) unanimously affirm that the British and American varieties of English are extremely mutually intelligible. Umera-Okeke (2016) indicates that the British and American English have more resemblances than differences. It is observed that both varieties have similar orthography, graphological and punctuation system throughout the world. This does not suggest that both varieties are totally the same in all aspects. It is the aim of this paper to examine both varieties of Englishes in order to identify their phonetic and phonological resemblances and differences.

Olaniyi & Josiah (2013) observes that despite the simmering rage over the reality of any variety of Nigerian English in some circles, the major varieties are being presented as the core regional dialects of a World English. The researchers analysed the speeches of one hundred and fifty (150) Nigerians who are of the Northern, Western and Eastern origin. The speeches were sorted for perceptual and acoustic analyses. The three ethnic groups had 50 participants each, to ensure

a national outlook, excluding the minority groups. The articulations of the subjects used for the experiment suggested varying dialectal traces. This formed the basis for the identity markers of fricatives, stops, sonorants, liquids and other obstruents emphasized in the study. The findings in the study further suggest that different regions in the world may have areas of convergence and divergence of phonemes from the Standard English. These possibilities have informed our conclusion that regions thus have areas of comparative advantage over others in phoneme articulations. Furthermore, Buregeya (2019, p. 17) observes that "the main phenomena which a keen observer of Kenyan English is likely to notice are the following:

i. the use of loanwords from Swahili and other indigenous languages of Kenya;
ii. the code mixing of Swahili words into English;
iii. the transposition of local language idioms into English idioms and English idioms into local languages;
iv. the use of English as almost the sole language of reading both fiction and non-fiction…."

From the foregoing, it is observed that there are different varieties of English language and in most cases; these varieties are usually based on geographical locations of the users or speakers. The literatures reviewed so far clearly prove that the British and American English are the two major varieties of English throughout the world. This is because both varieties are institutionalized national standards of the English language. This suggests that the British and American English are usually the standard for passing judgement speaker of English language.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on two theoretical frameworks which are the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) and the descriptive approach to language analysis. Adesanya (2002) and Nwala (2015) aver that the CA theory was propounded by Robert Lado in the year 1957. According to Adesanya (2002) and Nwala (2015), the CA theory is connected or associated with language teaching and language learning. They also unanimously state that CA theory is very pertinent in the examination of the areas of similarities and dissimilarities between two or more languages. On the other hand, language scholars such as Anyanwa & Ndimele

(2001) and Buhari (2011) clarify the descriptive approach. Anyanwa & Ndimele (2001) study the descriptive approach to language study from the historical viewpoint. According to them, the approach was proposed by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle in the 19th Century. This period witnessed a total shift from the analysis of how language changes overtime to the description of specific languages. That is, language scholars (linguists) started shifting attention from prominence on how human languages have changed overtime to the description of the unique grammatical features of different languages. More so, Buhari (2011) contends that the descriptive approach is still appropriate in the study or analysis of diverse human languages. Buhari (2011) concurs that the descriptive approach pinpoints the distinctive linguistic structures that exist in a specific language. Again, he notices that the descriptive approach to language analysis can be applied in the description of the uniformity of linguistic phenomena in two or more natural languages. The statement of Buhari (2011) clearly implies that the descriptive approach is sometimes similar to the CA theory. Buhari (2011) implies that the descriptive approach can be applied in the identification of the resemblances and variations between different languages.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the CA and descriptive grammatical approach are very appropriate to this paper. This is because the descriptive approach can aid the researcher to find out the phonetic and phonological resemblances and differences between the Standard British/American English and Nigerian/Kenyan English. This will assist English language teachers in Nigeria and Kenya to identify areas of possible challenges in teaching and learning of sounds in English language.

Data1

Table 1: Pronunciation Patterns of Standard British and American Englishes

1.	**Word**	**British transcription**	**American transcription**
a.	Preacher	/priːʧə/	/priːʧəʳ/
b.	Teacher	/tiːʧə/	/tiːʧəʳ/
c.	worst	/wɜːst/	/wɜːrst/
d.	cigarette	/sigəˈret/	/ˈsigəret /
e.	address	/əˈdres/	/ˈædres/
f.	want	/wɒnt/	/waːnt/ or /wɔːnt/
g.	watch	/wɒʧ/	/waːʧ/
h.	lost	/lɒst/	/lɔːst/
i.	product	/prɒdʌkt/	/praː dʌkt/
j.	process		/prəʊ.ses/ /paː.ses/

The examples in 1a-c in table 1.1 indicate that unlike the British users of English, American users of English retain the retroflex /r/ in both word-final and middle positions. It is noticed that in both British and American Englishes, the /r/ is not trilled and the airstream is less narrowed than for a fricative as in examples 1d-e. Also, examples 1f-i reveal that the vowel /ɒ/ in British English is realized as either /aː/ or /ɔː/ in American English while the example 1j shows that for the word 'process' the British achieve a diphthong /əʊ/ while the American stick to /aː/. In the item 1e the vowel /ə/ in British English can be realized as /æ/ in American English. According to Enwere (2021), another visible feature of American English which differs from the British English is the pronunciation of the intervocalic /t/. Whereas (/t/) is articulated as a voiceless stop in British English, it is realized as a voiced tap which is a rapid articulation of a stop with a single tongue tip movement in American English. Furthermore, examples 1d-e demonstrate that both British and American varieties of English differ in terms of stress pattern.

Data2

Table 2: Pronunciation patterns of Nigerian and Kenyan Englishes

2.	**Word**	**British/American**	**Nigerian**	**Kenyan**
a.	Three	/θriː/	/triː/	/ðriː/
b.	Ruth	/ruːθ/	/ruːt/	/ruːð/
c.	harm	/haːm/	/ham/	/aːm/

d.	head	/hed/	/hed/	/ed/
e.	rice	/rais/	/rais/	/lais/
f.	English	/iŋgliʃ/	/ ingliʃ/	/iŋglis/
g.	sugar	/ʃugə/	/ ʃuga/	/sugə/

The examples in 2a-g in table 1.2 demonstrate that the pronunciation patterns of the Standard British/American English and the Nigerian/Kenyan English differ significantly. For instance, examples 2a-b illustrate that the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ in British/American English is usually voiced in Kenyan English while it is usually substituted with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in Nigerian English. Also, note that the voiced dental fricative is maintained in Kenyan English but substituted with the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ in Nigerian English. It is further noticed in examples 2c-d that whereas the glottal fricative /h/ is realized in British/American and Nigerian Englishes, it is usually omitted in Kenyan English. More so, examples 2e-g indicate that the alveolar lateral approximant /r/ and the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ are usually substituted with the alveolar lateral /l/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ respectively in Kenyan English.

The Similarities and Differences between the Standard British/American English and Nigerian English

The available data prove that the pronunciation patterns of the Standard British/American English and the Nigerian English have areas of similarities and dissimilarities. In terms of similarities, both varieties pronounce the glottal fricatives /h/, the voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ correctly. This suggests that a Nigerian learner of the Standard British/American variety of English may not have difficulty in the realization of the glottal fricatives /h/, the voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ in the language. This is in line with the CA theory which holds that the areas of similarity or resemblance does not present challenge to an L2 learner.

On the other hand, it is observed that both varieties (that is British/American and Nigerian Englishes) differ significantly in the use of the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/. They are usually substituted with the voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ in Nigerian English. It is also observed that sometimes the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ is usually realized in Nigerian English

where it is silent in the Standard British/American English. Therefore, listen /lisn/, castle /ka:sl/, wrestle /resl/, etc. in the Standard British/American variety of English are realized as listen /listn/, castle /kæstl/ and wrestle /restl/ in Nigerian English. Following the CA theory which postulates that the areas of differences between languages can pose learning difficulty to the learner, this paper posits that a competent user of Nigerian English may have difficulty in the realization of the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives in Standard British/American English.

The Similarities and Differences between the Standard British/American English and Kenyan English pronunciations

Like the Nigerian English, it is noticed that the Kenyan variety of English has some areas of similarities and differences with the Standard British/American English. It is observed that both varieties are similar in the realization of the voiced dental fricative /ð/. On the contrary, it is observed the voiceless dental fricatives /θ/ in the Standard British/American variety of English is usually realized as voiced in the Kenyan variety of English. It is also observed that the unlike the Standard British/American variety of English, the glottal fricative /h/ is usually dropped in Kenyan variety of English. The voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in the Standard British/American English is commonly realized as the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. In line with the CA theory, this paper postulates that a proficient speaker of Kenyan variety of English may have difficulty in articulating the glottal fricative /h/, the lateral approximant /r/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in the Standard British/American English.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to compare the Standard British/American variety of English pronunciation and the Nigerian/Kenyan variety of English pronuciation. It was deduced from the literatures reviewed that there are different varieties of English language and in most cases; these varieties are usually based on geographical locations of the users or speakers. It was found out that unlike the British users of English, American users of English retain the retroflex /r/ in both word-final and middle positions. It was also noticed that sometimes the vowel /ɒ/ in British English is realized as either /a:/ or /ɔ:/ in American English while the vowel /ə/ in British English can be realized as /æ/ in American English.

Furthermore, this paper concludes that the sound system of the Standard British/American English and the Nigerian/Kenyan English differ significantly. For instance, examples 2a-b illustrate that the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ in British/American English is usually voiced in Kenyan English while it is usually substituted with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in Nigerian English.

From the foregoing, this paper postulates that whereas a competent user of the Nigerian variety of English may have difficulty in the realization of the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives in Standard British/American English, it is only the voiceless dental fricative that may pose a challenge to a competent user of Kenyan variety of English. This paper also points out that whereas a proficient speaker of Kenyan variety of English may have difficulty in articulating the glottal fricative /h/, the lateral approximant /r/ and the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in the Standard British/American English, it is observed that none of these sounds can pose a challenge to a competent user of the Nigerian variety of English.

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