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Aspects of phonological constraints on the English of Igala students in selected schools in Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Igala-English speakers produce sounds in their communicative English that are not identical with standard English to the extent that this sometimes leads to communication breakdown. Despite this, scanty literature exists on the areas in the spoken English of Igala-English users where the influence of the Igala language occurs.
Objectives: This study sought to identify the different ways in which mother tongue affects the spoken English of Igala speakers; it investigates specific English speech sounds Igala speakers find difficult to articulate; and suggests possible ways of minimizing such phonological constraints.
Methodology: In order to determine the likely areas in spoken English that are problematic to the subjects during communicative event, oral tests, textbooks, and online textual materials were used. Primary data were obtained from oral tests conducted among twenty (20) students from Holy Rosary College and Secondary Commercial College, both in Idah, Kogi State. Two classes were selected in each of these schools: SS1 and SS3, since the former marks the entry point into senior secondary and the latter marks the exit from senior secondary when a higher level of competence would have been attained.
Results: It was found that the Igala language lacks certain English sounds in its phonemic inventory; hence, the phonological constraints (or mother tongue influence) on the spoken English among Igala students.
Unique contribution: Unlike previous studies which paid more attention to comparative analyses, specific sound segments that pose challenges for the Igala-English speakers were identified and pedagogical approaches to overcoming them were suggested.
Conclusion: The causes of the problems of mother tongue influence among Igala-English learners are due to the differences in phonemic systems of Igala and English.
Key recommendation: Stakeholders, policy makers, educationists, and linguists should make concerted efforts, having looked into these problems, and proffer workable and realistic solutions to help Igala-English students to overcome these phonological constraints.

Keywords: English Language; Igala; interference; phonology; students.

Introduction

Human beings exist in a world of language. They use language to communicate with each other and with one another. The most important function of natural languages and their underlying systems is to enhance mutual intelligibility in a given speech community. The differences in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of different languages create mother tongue influence in using or learning another language. In fact, language is an indispensable tool which every human being acquires at the tender stage of their life. Thus, the perceptive ability and comprehension of languages and the reproduction of it involves different processes. Different linguists have attempted to define language from different perspectives but these varying definitions agree that it is an arbitrary system of communication, either through speaking, writing or sign. It is the fundamental process of expressing, transmitting and communicating ideas, values or skills from one person to another. It is the medium which human beings effectively communicate.

Awoniyi (1980) explains that all languages inherently reflect the socio-cultural nuances of the people and completely satisfies their aesthetic needs as well. To emphasize the importance of language to humans, he outlines some uses of language to include: communicating our ideas or information to others, and using language as an instrument of thinking. From the foregoing, language undoubtedly plays an important role in society. If language is so important, then the mother tongue of any child is very crucial to the growth and advancement of that child. Over time, there has been an increasing interest in studying interference especially of other tongues on the English language which is the de facto national language of Nigeria. Apart from being the language of instruction, it also functions as a lingua franca and the language used in politics, the media, and education. Undoubtedly, the first language of the users interferes with the target language in the course of learning the latter. The implications of this interference are made manifest in the deficiency across the different levels of linguistic description. The focus of this paper however is interference at the phonological level of linguistic analysis

Aim of the study

The focus of this work is to investigate segmental aspects of the phonological constraints of Igala-English speakers in selected schools.

Review of related literature

Studies that have direct significance to this research are reviewed in order to cite the gap which it intends to fill. We undertake a review of basic concepts in the literature as well as empirical studies. Studies have been carried out in the area of phonological constraints. Different notions of mother tongue have also been posited by different scholars. 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 or mother tongue of a learner interferes with the target language in the course of learning the latter.

To Romaine (1989), mother-tongue interference is the introduction of new forms or rules into one language (second language) from another (first language) where they already exist. He claims that where there is overlapping of two codes, interference is said to have occurred. Elis (1997, p. 51) describes interference as 'transfer', which is 'the influence that the learner's first language exerts over the acquisition of a second language'. According to him, this phenomenon is guided by the learner's perceptive ability of what item can be transferred at a particular developmental stage in second language learning. While Dulay *et al.*, (1982) perceive mother tongue influence as learned habits of the structures of one language automatically transferred to the target language, Lott (1983) sees the phenomenon as errors resulting from poor mastery and traceable to a mother tongue influence.

Selinker (1971), and Elis (1997) all argued in favour of the idea that learners formulate their own mental rules from an understanding of the first language, believing this will enhance their proficiency in the second language. Elis (1997) however separates mistakes from errors, arguing that the latter reflects a vacuum in the second language learner's knowledge, which occurs as a result of the learner's inability to determine what is wrong, while the former is a reflection of occasional slips in speech or writing, resulting from the learner's inability to perform what he already knows. Thus, learning a second language as an adult becomes quite difficult. Larson-Freeman and Long (1991), Beebe (1988), Chomsky (1969), Beardsmore (1982) have also expressed varying opinions on mother tongue. Chomsky (1969) questioned the relevance of mother-tongue as an arbiter in second language learning even though he acknowledged the influence of one language over the other which might create some relative ease. To Beardsmore (1982), second language learners have difficulties in learning the different levels of linguistic description mostly due to habits already acquired from the first language. Thus, in learning a second language, the relationship between the first and second language must be considered. On his part, Onike (2009) advanced the psycholinguistic reality of learning a second language, arguing that the influence of mother tongue brings about errors. Two types of transfer as a result of interference have been identified by Onike, positive and negative transfer. While the latter complicates the process of learning, the former enhances learning, especially when both languages share similar elements.

Many types of interference have been identified by different scholars. Berthold *et al.*, (1997) and Alabi (2007) identified phonological, lexical and grammatical interference. Weinreich (cited in Alabi, 2007) identifies six major ways of phonological interference viz: Under-differentiation, Over-differentiation, Re-interpretation of sound, Phonemic substitution, Hypercorrection, and Epenthesis. Transfer occurs as a result of a number of factors. Skinner *et al.*, (1957), Jordens (1977), Keler-man (1979) and have enumerated some of the factors that cause transfer in second language learning. They include simplification, over-generalisation, hypercorrection, faulty teaching, fossilization and avoidance. Skinner *et al.*, (1957) opine that transfer occurs as a result of different variables. They argued that when a language has been well learnt, then there would be a likelihood of transferring the habits of the language learnt to another context and the closer

the context, the more likelihood of such application in the given context. In Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning, Skinner argues that similarity of either stimuli or response is necessary for transfer to occur. His theory asserts that imitation is the basis for the acquisition of new habits in the second language through constant practice, stemming from mental comparison between the first language and the target language. On this basis of mental comparison, a positive transfer could result without error, but due to dissimilarities, the negative transfer leading to error is not unlikely. He also claims that newness of language brings about comparison especially on the basis of similarity and familiarity. Bringing what is already known to the unknown is a social reality and this makes it, in the case of language learning, impossible to learn anything entirely from scratch. Errors manifest sometimes as at points where the languages differ considerably. The Behaviourists also affirm that when earlier traits obstruct the smooth learning process of the new language, interference has occurred (Skinner, 1957). Interference as a phenomenon is key to the behaviourist theory, and it brings about difficulties in language learning.

The Cognitivists argue that the question of transfer is perceptual and not actual reality since it relies on the extraction of important discourse in given contexts (Gick & Holyoak, 1987). In other words, it will be quite acceptable to say that learners gather socio-linguistic resources from experience and previous knowledge of their first languages. In the final analysis, error in communication is minimized over time. Linguistic structures from the mother tongue are used for experimentation in the new context. In the final analysis, issues of interference resulting from inter-language are surmounted with the learner overcoming earlier linguistic impediments with a relatively high degree of proficiency.

The concept of phoneme

The phoneme is a term used to denote the discrete, minimal, distinctive and contrastive and meaningful sound unit. The communication process cannot be fully understood unless one understands how sounds and prosodies of a particular language organize themselves into meaningful units. A number of scholars have tried to describe the phoneme variously but these points to same thing. Anagbogu, *et al*., (2010) assert that any meaningful unit or sound that can distinguish meaning in a language is known as a phoneme. Cruttenden (2008) sees the phoneme as a class of phonemically similar sounds contrasting and mutually exclusive with all similar classes in the language. Ladefoged (1993) describes the phoneme as a set of the smallest units of speech in a language that distinguishes one word from another. Mbah and Mbah (2010) put it that phonemes are discrete sounds that cannot be further decomposed. That is, phonemes possess some phonetic properties which make them distinctive. A phoneme is however best described using minimally contrastive pairs, signalled by a difference in one segment only and in a similar environment, bringing about a difference in meaning (Anagbogu, Mbah & Eme, 2010) and (Omachonu 2001).

i. **Phonemes of the English Language**

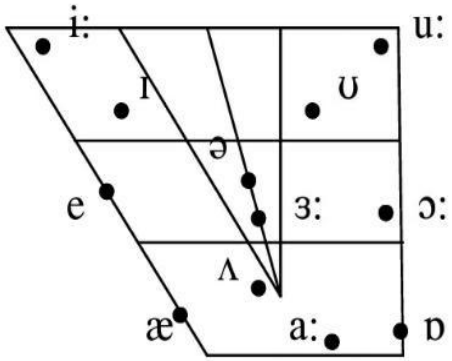
English has a total of forty-four speech sounds: twenty-four [24] consonants and twenty vowels.

The consonant chart of English:

	Bilabial	*Labiodental*	*Dental*	*Alveolar*	*Palato-alveolar*	*Palatal*	*Velar*	*Glottal*
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral				l				
Approximant	w				r	j		

Roach (2010)

The Vowel Trapezium of English:



Roach (2010)

ii. **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

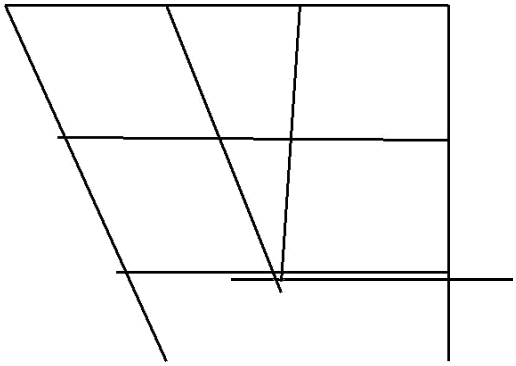
	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	P B			t d			K G	Kp Gb	
Affricate					ʧ ʤ			Kw Gw	
Fricative		f							H
Nasal	M			n		Nj		ŋw ŋg	
Lateral				l					
Retroflex				r					
Approximan	w								

Omachonu (2001, modified)

Example of consonants in Igala:

Sound	**Word**	**Meaning**
/p/	opia	(cutlass)
b/	Obi	(cola nut)
/t/	Attah	(father)
/d/	Adu	(load)
/k/	Akele	(frog)
/g/	Oga	(sickness)
/kp/	Akpe	(scorpion)
/gb/	Igbi	(snail)
/tʃ/	Oche	(soap)
/dʒ/	Uja	(fight)
/kw/	Ukwu	(death)
/gw/	ugwa'a	(greeting)
/f/	Afe	(shirt)
/h/	Uhia	(tiredness)
/m/	Imu	(mosquito)
/n/	Ana	(in-law)
/nj/	Unyi	(house)
/ŋw/	Añwago	(exam)
/ŋg/	Añeje	(tortoise)
/l/	Alu	(mouth)
/r/	Oro	(okra)
/w/	Awuwu	(surprise)
/j/	Oya	(wife)

The Vowel Trapezium of Igala



Omachonu (2001) (Modified).

Sound	Word	Meaning
/i/	ika'a	Gardenegg
/e/	je	Eat
/e/	ele	Gift
/a/	aja	Market
/D/	oko	Money
/o/	olo	Poison
/u/	ubi	Back

In spite of different opinions from different scholars concerning mother-tongue influence, it appears that a majority of learners rely extensively on their native languages for support while learning a second language, and this increases the likelihood reintroducing old norms resulting in interference. Mispronunciation in English occurs mainly as a result of the absence of certain sounds in the Igala phonemic inventory as reviewed above, but it must be borne in mind that conducive learning environment is critical in the acquisition of a second language, what has quite often been neglected for the

learner. What this goes to show is that the learning of a second language is much more difficult as reflected in the quantum of errors noticed on the part of the speakers of English as a second language. It has become imperative to examine the phenomenon interference with a view to enhancing the spoken English among Igala-English speakers/learners.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Whereas a synthesis of the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning and Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis has been adopted for the study, the method of data collection is purposive sampling from two schools in Idah. The phonological data collected at the segmental level is analysed to determine the problems that result in the mother tongue influence on the oral English of Igala leaners.

The synopsis of the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning explains the nature of some learners' performance in second language and accounts for reasons why they speak the way they do. The postulation of the theoretical framework is that imitation is involved as learners quite often reproduce the sounds they perceive and develop this through constant practice. In other words, learners juxtapose what they have already acquired in their native language with the new language. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis on the other hand shows the comparison of the structure of two languages that can be compared. This is required in this paper so as to guess, correct, explain, minimize and, if possible, eradicate errors resulting from interference in Igala as first language (L1) and English as second language (L2) among Igala-English students.

Methodology

Relevant literature to this study has been consulted; both primary and secondary data have been used for this research. The primary data are obtained from all the tests conducted among twenty (20) students in SS1 and SS3 in Holy Rosary College and Secondary Commercial College both in Idah while offering adequate awareness of the purpose of the data collection. The secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals and online textual materials.

Presentation and analysis of data

This section covers the analysis of data for the study. In Carrying out this, the result of the oral exercise conducted among students from the two secondary schools stated earlier is presented in tables. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning are adopted here to investigate the contrast between the Phonemic system of Igala and English against the background of similarities and to give account of what is responsible for the influence of Igala language on English language among Igala students respectively.

The consonant charts of English And Igala

The Consonant Chart of English

	Bilabial	*Labiodental*	*Dental*	*Alveolar*	*Palato-alveolar*	*Palatal*	*Velar*	*Glottal*
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral				l				
Approximant	w				r	j		

Roach (1998)

The Consonant Chart of Igala

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palata	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	P b			t d			K G	Kp Gb	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			Kw Gw	
Fricative		F							h
Nasal	m			n		Nj		ŋw ŋg	
Lateral				l					

Retroflex				r					
Approximant	w					J			

Omachonu (2001, modified).

The tables show that Igala and English have the following consonants in common:/p/,/b/,/t/,/d/,/k/,/g/,/ʧ/,/ʤ/,/f/,/h/,/m/,/n/,/l/,/r/and/w/. Because these sounds cut across both languages, Igala-English speakers do not find them difficult to produce when speaking English. Even though both languages have certain sounds in common, there are differences in some of the consonants of both languages and this brings about mother tongue influence on the spoken English of Igala learners.

The following sounds placed side by side show the presence and absence in the phonetic inventory of both languages.

English

/v/
/ð/
/θ/
/s/
/z/
/ŋ/
/ʃ/
/ʒ/

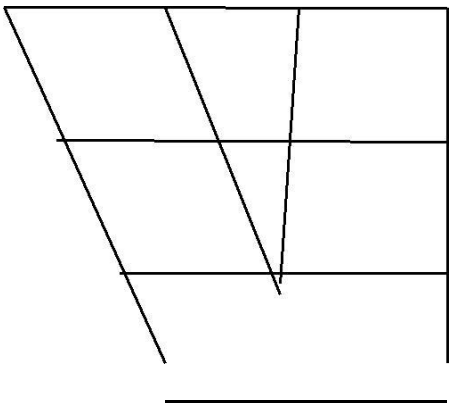
Igala:

/kp/
/gb/
/kw/
/gw/
/nj/
/ŋw/
/ŋg/

Due to these differences, Igala speakers, like in other second language Learning situations, fall back on the nearest and available sounds of their mother tongue to realise the difficult English sounds.

The vowel trapezium of English and Igala

Roach (2010): The Vowel Trapezium of English



Omachonu (2001, modified): The Vowel Trapezium of Igala

From the following trapezia, the Igala language has only seven vowels and therefore lacks certain vowels found in English. Those that are likely common to English are slightly different in terms of their position. The absence of some of these sounds in Igala gives room for mother tongue influence. The following vowels are present in the English phonetic inventory but absent in Igala: /iː/, /ʊə/, /æ/, /eɪ/, /ʌ/, /ɪə/, /ə/, /eə/, /ɜː/, /aɪə/, /aː/, /eɪə/, /uː/, /ɔɪə/, /ɔː/, /əʊ/, /əʊə/ and /auə/. Igala has a rare occurrence of diphthongs, but triphthongs are completely absent.

The oral test conducted for this study contains twenty four English words. This is to test the students on their proficiency in the pronunciation of English words. This recorded oral test is used for the analysis. The analysis is based on the observations from the data collected. The aim of the analysis is to investigate the cause(s) of the interference/ influence on the spoken English of Igala students. The analysis is hereby presented in a tabular form in order to make overt or explicit the similarities and differences of the Phonemic system of both languages. This will also explain the reason(s) for the phonological interference. The analysis is further grouped into two: vowels and consonants.

(A). Vowels

SECTION I: Results of the Oral Test Conducted in Holy Rosary College, Idah

Table 1: SS1

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue	Total
1	/iː/	thief	25%	75%	100%
2	/aː/	cart	20%	80%	100%
3	/ɔː/	port	35%	65%	100%
4	/uː/	fool	20%	80%	100%
5	/ɜː/	bird	20%	80%	100%
6	/æ/	Cat	50%	50%	100%
8	/ʌ/	such	15%	85%	100%
9	/ə/	above	0%	100%	100%
10	/əʊ/	home	5%	95%	100%
11	/ʊə/	tour	10%	90%	100%
12	/eɪ/	late	45%	55%	100%
13	/ɪə/	peer	75%	25%	100%
14	/eə/	care	30%	70%	100%
15	/aɪə/	Fire	50%	50%	100%
16	/eɪə/	layer	15%	85%	100%
17	/ɔɪə/	royal	45%	55%	100%

Table 2: SS3

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/iː/	thief	50%	50%	100%
2	/aː/	cart	20%	80%	100%
3	/ɔː/	port	30%	70%	100%
4	/uː/	fool	20%	80%	100%
5	/ɜː/	bird	20%	80%	100%
6	/æ/	cat	10%	90%	100%
8	/ʌ/	such	5%	95%	100%
9	/ə/	above	0%	100%	100%
10	/əʊ/	home	20%	80%	100%
11	/ʊə/	tour	0%	100%	100%
12	/eɪ/	late	40%	60%	100%
13	/ɪə/	peer	95%	5%	100%
14	/eə/	care	25%	75%	100%
15	/aɪə/	fire	35%	65%	100%
16	/eɪə/	layer	0%	100%	100%
17	/ɔɪə/	royal	35%	65%	100%

Section II:
Results of the Oral Test Conducted in Idah Secondary Commercial College, Idah
Table 3: SS1

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/iː/	thief	30%	70%	100%
2	/aː/	cart	40%	60%	100%
3	/ɔː/	port	25%	75%	100%
4	/uː/	fool	45%	55%	100%
5	/ɜː/	bird	50%	50%	100%
6	/æ/	cat	25%	75%	100%
8	/ʌ/	such	0%	100%	100%
9	/ə/	above	0%	100%	100%
10	/əʊ/	home	0%	100%	100%
11	/ʊə/	tour	0%	100%	100%
12	/eɪ/	late	45%	55%	100%
13	/ɪə/	peer	90%	10%	100%
14	/eə/	care	40%	60%	100%
15	/aɪə/	fire	20%	80%	100%
16	/eɪə/	layer	0%	100%	100%
17	/ɔɪə/	royal	45%	55%	100%

Table 4: SS3

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage Per Sound
1	/iː/	thief	30%	70%	100%
2	/aː/	cart	40%	60%	100%
3	/ɔː/	port	35%	65%	100%
4	/uː/	fool	50%	50%	100%
5	/ɜː/	bird	50%	50%	100%
6	/æ/	cat	35%	65%	100%
8	/ʌ/	such	0%	100%	100%
9	/ə/	above	0%	100%	100%
10	/əʊ/	home	0%	100%	100%
11	/ʊə/	tour	0%	100%	100%
12	/eɪ/	late	40%	60%	100%
13	/ɪə/	peer	85%	15%	100%
14	/eə/	care	20%	80%	100%
15	/aɪə/	fire	30%	70%	100%
16	/eɪə/	layer	0%	100%	100%
17	/ɔɪə/	royal	25%	75%	100%

From the tables above, the difficulties encountered in articulating some of the English vowels by the Igala students stem from: Vowel Length and Position, Monophthongisation of Diphthongs, and Division of Triphthongs into Syllables (Desegmentation).

i. Vowel Length and Position

Long vowels are rare in Igala. This means English vowels such as /iː/, /aː/, /uː/ seldom have any equivalence in Igala. Almost all the subjects have difficulty in making distinction between the English long and short vowel. For example, 80% of them pronounced the English word "thief" /θiːf/ as [tif] thereby creating no contrast between /iː/ and /I/. To them, there is no distinction between the vowels in "thief" and "sing"; /aː/ was also substituted with [a] by 80% in the analysis. To the students there is no distinction between "cart' /kaːt/ and "cat" /kæt/. The schwa /ə/ was replaced by /a/ in the word "above' /əbʌv/ and 'murder' /mɜːdə/. The phoneme also occurred as [ɔ] in 'favour 'and 'razor'. /ʌ/ was realized as [ɔ] in the words 'such' and 'subtle'. About 95% of the students failed blatantly in articulating this sound. /ɜː/ 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 /ɜː/ in 'murder' /mɜːdə/ and 'bird' /bɜːd/ 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 monophthongised as [eː] by 75% of the students. Thus, 'late' /leit/ becomes [leːt]. /əʊ/ was realised [o] by 90% of the students. This occurred in the word 'home' /həʊm/ that was realised as [hom]. However, the realization of /aɪ/, /au/ and /ɔɪ/ was 100% correct. This is because there is a perceptual realization of those sounds in the mother tongue of the subjects and that makes it easy for them to articulate them. The centering diphthongs of English: /ɪə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/ were difficult for the students to articulate. There are no equivalents of these sounds in Igala; yet /ɪə/ was realised in the word 'peer' /pɪə/ correctly by all the students. Sometimes, the students could not clearly differentiate /eə/ from /ɪə/. For example, the word 'care' /keə/ was realised as [kɪa] by 95% of the students.

iii. Division of triphthongs into syllables

Because triphthongs are rare in Igala, this makes the speakers to break the cluster of vowels into syllables. For example, the words 'layer' /leɪə/, 'royal' /rɔɪəl/ and 'fire' /faɪə/ were realised as [leja], [roja] and [faja] respectively.

B. Consonants

SECTION I: Results of Oral Exercise Conducted in Holy Rosary College, Idah
TABLE 5: SS1

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/θ/	thief	30%	70%	100%

2	/ʒ/	division	20%	80%	100%
3	/tʃ/	such	50%	50%	100%
4	/t/ silent	mortgage	20%	80%	100%
5	/ ð /	themselves	20%	80%	100%
6	/ ŋ /	sing	0%	100%	100%
8	/b/ silent	subtle	15%	85%	100%
9	/p/ silent	coup	15%	85%	100%
10	/v/	favour	95%	5%	100%

Table 6: SS3

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/θ/	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%
8	/b/ silent	subtle	30%	70%	100%
9	/p/ silent	coup	25%	75%	100%
10	/v/	favour	100%	0%	100%

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

Table 7: SS1

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/θ/	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%
8	/b/ silent	subtle	25%	75%	100%
9	/p/ silent	coup	20%	80%	100%
10	/v/	favour	90%	10%	100%

Table 8: SS3

S/N	RP (English)	Words	Percentage of RP Realization	Percentage of Mother Tongue Interference	Total Percentage
1	/θ/	thief	20%	80%	100%
2	/ ʒ /	division	15%	85%	100%
3	/tʃ/	such	60%	40%	100%
4	/t/ silent	mortgage	30%	70%	100%
5	/ ð /	themselves	20%	80%	100%
6	/ ŋ /	sing	0%	100%	100%
8	/b/ silent	subtle	10%	90%	100%
9	/p/ silent	coup	15%	85%	100%
10	/v/	favour	75%	25%	100%

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

i. Substitution of English consonants with the nearest Igala consonants
ii. Spelling pronunciation (articulation of silent consonants).
iii. Substitution of English Consonants with the Nearest Igala Consonants

The voiced fricatives are not present in Igala. Despite their absence, the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ and voiced alveolar fricative /z/ were appropriately realized by the students in the word ‘favour’ and ‘razor’. The voiceless and voiced dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ were pronounced [t] and [d] respectively. In words like 'thief' /θi:f/ and 'thought' /θɔ:t/ ,85% of the students articulated them as [tif] and [tɔt]. Also, the word 'themselves /ðemselvz/ was pronounced [demselvs] thereby replacing /ð/ with [d] and [z] with [s]. There exist the

voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /ʧ/ in the Igala phonetic inventory, yet 65% of the students pronounced it as voiceless palato-alveolar fricative [ʃ] in the word '*such*'. The voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ is a difficult sound to most of the students; 85% of them replaced it with [ʃ] as in the word 'division' /diviʒn/ that was realized as [diviʃɔn]. 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]. With respect to spelling pronunciation (i.e. 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 articulate producing this version: mortgage [mɔtge:dʒ], coup [kup] and subtle [sɔbtul].

Conclusion

The findings are in consonance with the research objectives of the paper. First, it has been found that mother tongue influence affects the students' fluency, intelligibility, and mastery of the English language. Second, it has been found too that a contrastive analysis of the Phonemic System of both languages has helped to elucidate the sounds that are difficult for Igala students to articulate. These sounds are: /i:/, /ð/, /θ/, /s/, /ŋ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ʊə/, /æ/, /eɪ/, /ʌ/, /ɪə/, /ə/, /eə/, /ɜ:/, /aɪə/, /a:/, /eɪə/, /u:/, /ɔɪə/, /ɔ:/, /əʊ/, /əʊə/ and /aʊə/. The third significant point realised is that the Behaviourist Theory of Language Acquisition and Learning, applied in the study, has revealed that the causes of the problem of mother tongue influence among Igala-English learners are due to the differences in phonemic systems of Igala and English. In addition, where English serves as a second language and the language of instruction, there are bound to be problems that may affect students' fluency, intelligibility and mastery of the language. One of these problems is first language or mother tongue influence. However, this research has been able to identify from the findings that these problems are due mainly to the differences in phonemic systems of Igala and English. If all the sounds in both languages were the same, there would have been no interference or influence of mother tongue on the spoken English of Igala students. Finally, having carefully identified and analysed these problems, few recommendations are given to help minimize or overcome mother tongue influence on the spoken English of Igala students. It therefore becomes necessary stakeholders, for policy makers, educationists and linguists to look into these problems and proffer workable and realistic solutions to help Igala-English students to overcome these phonological constraints. Each research has its limitations. The basic limitation in the current study is that the researcher examined only one native language which is the Igala. Further studies should be expanded to cover other languages.

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