



A Contrastive Study of Syllable Structures of Ika and English and their Attending Phonological Processes

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Abstract

Against the framework of Contrastive Analysis, this study examined the syllable structure of Ika and English highlighting the interference features observable in the speeches of Ika speakers of English as a second language (ESL). To achieve these objectives, the study explicated the syllable structures of English and Ika and carried out a contrastive description of both languages in order to determine the areas of similarities and differences between these languages. It was discovered that there are structural and articulatory similarities such as the presence of onset and nucleus in the syllable structure of both languages which facilitate the learning of English by the Ika people. Also, there are areas of differences. For instance, while the structure of the English syllable permits codas, that of the Ika does not, and this brings about interference in ESL. Forty Ika speakers of ESL were sampled. The data showed 80.7% of deletion errors and 75% of vowel insertion errors, bringing the average of syllable structure interference errors to 77.9%. In view of the above, it was recommended that curriculum designers and English Language teachers in Ika land should take note of the differences that exist between Ika and English in order to enhance effective teaching and learning of English among Ika learners.

Keywords: Contrastive Analysis, Syllable Structure, Phonological Processes, Ika, English

Introduction

The essence of learning a second language is to equip one with another set of signs and codes with which one can express oneself, consolidate one's ideology and mix up socially in the community where one lives. This is because the primary purpose of language is communication which makes mutual sharing and coexistence possible among members of a community. "The study of [these] signs used in communication and the rules operating upon them and upon those who use them form the core of the study of communication." (Longe & Ofuani, 1996, p. 1). Longe and Ofuani (1996) noted that this is hinged on the fact that languages possess some structures which can be described as a set of rules. But these rules vary cross linguistically since every language has features that are unique to it. Therefore, learning a second language involves learning a set of rules of the language being learnt which are often different from those of the first language of the learner and these rules manifest along the various components involved in describing and analysing language which are phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Every correct definition of phonology will definitely mention that it concerns the study of the systematic patterning of speech sounds in a given language. For instance, Yule (1996, P. 54) defined it as "the description of the systems and patterns of speech sounds in a language". Ladefoged (1975, qtd in Umera-Okeke, 2011, P. 3) defined it as the "description of the systems and patterns of sounds that occur in a language". And Umera-Okeke (2011, P. 3) said "It deals with sound systems of a language in terms of the internal relations between sounds". This means that sounds (phonemes) do not just combine haphazardly in the process of speech production. Rather they follow a systematic pattern which the phonotactic and phonological rules of a language offer. And a branch of phonology that deals with restrictions on the permissible sequence of phonemes in a language is termed phonotactics which derives from two Greek words 'phono' which means sound and 'taktikos' which has to do with arrangement.

This study concerns syllable structures in English and Ika, hence, it examines the English and Ika syllable structures within which allowable sequences and constraints are examined. Consequently, the learning of a second language is not without some rigours and challenges since the learner has to learn the sound systems,

prosodic and structural features of the second language against the already firmly consolidated first language in his mind. This is partly due to the differences that often exist between the learner's native language and the language being learnt. Adapting to these differences can result in a mismatch, causing the learner to produce sounds that may be unclear to other speakers of the language. According to Otagburuagu and Okorji (2002), this is because each language has its own unique phonological and phonemic characteristics, which the learner must learn and use in order to communicate effectively with native speakers and other users of the language.

Research Questions

The research questions that form the focus of this study include the following.

1. To what extent does the syllable structure of Ika differ from those of English?
2. What are the effects of the differences between the syllable structure of Ika and those of English on Ika learners of English as a second language?

Theoretical Background: Contractive Analysis

The theory adopted for this study is Contrastive Analysis. The choice of this theory is informed by the aim of the study which is a comparative description of the syllable structures of the languages under study. Apparently, this exercise can best be hinged on Contrastive Analysis.

The theoretical foundation for Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (henceforth CAH) was formulated in Robert Lado's book titled: *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*. Lado (1957) argued that elements resembling the learner's native language will be easier to learn, while differences will create challenges. Contrastive analysis involves comparing corresponding sections of two different languages, typically the learner's first language and the target (second) language. The purpose of contrastive analysis is to identify the probable problems that speakers of a particular first language will have in learning a certain second language. Contractive Analysis identifies potential errors of second language learners, hence it is chosen for this exercise. Lado (1957) observed that the main - or possibly the only - source of difficulty and mistakes in learning a second language is interference from the learner's first language. Conducting a contrastive analysis can help determine which errors are caused by this interference.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is an inductive research method that focuses on identifying unique features of a language. It was developed to assist teachers in teaching foreign or second languages more effectively. According to its originator, Lado (1957), CAH involves systematically comparing specific linguistic features of two or more languages to provide valuable insights for teachers and textbook authors. This information can support the creation of teaching materials, course planning, and classroom strategies. The core idea of the contrastive hypothesis is that a learner's first language structure typically influences the learning or acquisition of a second language (Lado, 1957; Fries, 1945). The term "Contrastive Hypothesis" refers specifically to the theory itself, while "Contrastive Analysis" relates to how that theory is applied. Meanwhile, "Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis" encompasses both the theoretical framework and its practical application.

Whiteman and Jackson (1972) pointed out that contrastive analysis follows a series of structured steps. These steps include: (1) creating formal descriptions of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), (2) selecting specific forms from those descriptions to compare, (3) contrasting the selected forms, and (4) predicting areas of learning difficulty based on the comparison. To explain the prediction stage, Stockwell et al. (1965) introduced the idea of hierarchy of difficulty grounded in the concept of language transfer, which consists of three types: positive, negative, and zero transfer. Positive transfer happens when structures in both languages are similar, negative transfer occurs when there are structural differences, and zero transfer arises when there is no apparent relationship between the two language structures.

It is pertinent to note that C.A is useful for preparing new teaching materials, that is, curriculum development. After contrasting L1 with L2, teachers are able to know what areas are to be emphasized. According to Ogenyi (2002), differences between a learner's L1 and L2 bring about legions of errors. It is basically for this reason that the Contrastive Analysis approach has been chosen for this task of comparing the syllable structure of Ika to that of English.

Literature Review

Imoleayo (2011) carried out a study on mother tongue interference in the speech of broadcasters of Kwara Television News, using phonological conventions in analyzing sampled data. With this study, Imoleayo proved that interference at the phonological level is a major problem confronting media houses in Nigeria. Imoleayo's study accounted for errors that can be classified as phonological phenomena under differentiation, substitution, hypercorrection, and epenthesis. Using contrastive analysis, she accounted for changes in the linguistic performance of L2 speakers. She noted that these changes can be associated with the inconsistencies between

the configurations of the mother tongue of the L2 speaker and the target language. The present work is similar to Imoleayo's study since it is hinged on Contrastive Analysis but different from it in that our interest here is on the suprasegmentals. Anozie (2002) conducted a study to identify error patterns in spoken Igbo among students in the Igbo Department at the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu. He collected his data using a cassette and tape recorder. His findings revealed that social background had a negative impact on the students' spoken Igbo proficiency. While Anozie's research focused on variations within a single language, the current study examines how one language (the first language, Ika) influences another (the target language, English). Like Anozie's approach, this study also uses cassette recordings and real-time evaluation of participants to gather data for analysis.

Okpara (2001) aimed to identify the phonological errors made by students in order to find ways to address them. His study was conducted in Onitsha Local Government Area of Anambra State. As part of his research, he asked students to recognize vowel sounds and pronounce specific words, which were recorded using a cassette recorder. His findings revealed that the students' phonological errors fell into two main categories: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors, according to his study, are caused by the influence of the students' native language. The earliest linguistic documentation of the Ika language is attributed to Williamson (1968). In her study, she compiled a comparative word list of Ika and Ukwuani, noting that although both are considered dialects of Igbo, they differ significantly from other Igbo dialects based on linguistic criteria. Williamson observed that Ika employs three tones - high, low, and mid - with the mid tone referred to as a downstep. This conclusion is drawn from her classification of tone types, where she does not explicitly list a midtone but instead includes the step tone. She identified four distinct tone categories, as follows:

- Tone I high - high
- Tone II low - high
- Tone III high - low
- Tone IV low - low

The tone classifications have since been revised, as research in Igbo linguistics has advanced significantly since Williamson's work. Uguru (2010) noted that Williamson did not address the intonation patterns present in Ika. The distinctions she observed in Ika's sound system, compared to other Igbo dialects, may actually be due to these overlooked intonational features. This gap in Williamson's study created a limitation in Ika language research and prompted further investigation by Uguru, whose work will be discussed later. Other scholars who supported Williamson's view of Ika as part of the Niger Igbo dialect cluster include Ikekeonwu (1986) and Nwaozuzu (2008), as cited in Anya (2012). Uguru (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of the intonation patterns in Ika and English. To do this, she recorded monosyllabic, disyllabic, and short utterances featuring two types of rising intonation - Low Rise and High Rise - from two male native speakers of Ika and one native speaker of English. These recordings were analyzed using the Praat software. The study involved two main comparisons: first, the intonation curves of Ika utterances in each rising pattern were compared with those of English utterances using the same patterns. Second, a comparison was made within each language, examining the differences between the Low Rise and High Rise intonations. The results showed that, despite Ika being a tonal language and English being an intonational one, both languages exhibited similar intonation curves in the rising patterns. This suggests that Ika also displays features of intonation, supporting the idea that tone languages can reflect intonational characteristics. However, when comparing the two rising patterns within each language, the study found significant differences, which were attributed to distinct articulatory processes involved in producing the Low Rise and High Rise tunes.

The above work by Uguru, though uses the Contrastive Analysis approach to compare Ika with English, is different from this present study in that it concentrated only on intonation. The present research endeavour is an attempt to explore the syllable structure of the languages under study which Uguru's work did not cover. The similarity, however, is that both studies bother on the suprasegmentals of Ika and English and also both studies are hinged on the theory of Contrastive Analysis. Anya (2012), in his *Grama Ika* (Ika Grammar), did a quantitative study of the structure of Ika grammar. Anya's study did not only dwell extensively on the parts of speech in Ika, but also it covers other structural aspects such as concord, speech reporting, proverbs and idioms in Ika. Anya began his study from elementary; he wrote the Ika alphabet in comparison with that of English and some guides to spelling in Ika. Anya's work is different from the present study in that it was geared towards the promotion of the teaching, learning and speaking of Ika, unlike this present study which is geared towards the promotion of the teaching, learning and speaking of English by the Ikas. Moreover, while Anya's work centered on grammar, this present work is a phonological description which bothers only on the suprasegmentals. Evidently, it is admitted that the domain of second language learning generally and CAH in particular have been well explored before now, but not with reference to Ika. From our review, it is evident that not much has been

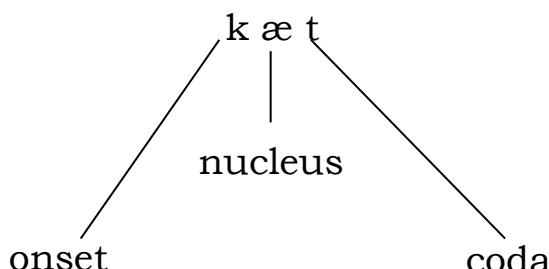
done on Ika. The syllable structure of Ika has not been well explored. Consequently, this study becomes necessary as it aims to fill this academic gap.

Methodology

The population for this study constitutes the Ika speaking students of the various levels of the NCE students of the College of Education, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. We believe that this population is representative enough to generalise for the other Ika speakers of English. The reason for this assumption is because the population of the Ika speaking students in the college is a conglomeration of the various kingdoms and dialects of Ika. A total of forty instruments were sampled. The process of data collection is the purposive sampling technique. This method is considered suitable since not all the students of the college are Ika first language speakers. The researcher has to ensure that the students sampled are those who speak Ika as first language. The ages of the respondents are within eighteen years old to thirty-five years old. Respondents were duly informed of the essence of the exercise, and the researcher got their consent before they were sampled. The instrument consists of two components. The first is a questionnaire designed to get demographic information of the respondents. This section is to indicate the age bracket, school, department, secondary school attended and languages spoken by the respondents. The second is a purposeful competence test (phonological reading passage). The text is written in English and designed in such a way that the likely phonological problems the researcher envisages that the students would have are incorporated in it. Attempts are made to deliberately incorporate words with different syllable structure from that of Ika so as to detect the suprasegmental interference features in the English spoken by the Ika people. The respondents are asked to read this passage which is about one hundred and eighty (180) words. Speech sounds were collected by recording the voice of the respondents as they read the designed passage. The data were anonymized and are preserved in rewritable compact disc electronic devices. Once spoken data were collected, the entire corpus was transcribed in RP using Daniel Jones pronouncing dictionary. For each respondent's record, an attempt is made to single out the pronunciation of the target words, that is, those words the researcher hypothesised the respondents may not pronounce correctly. Each of these target words are transcribed according to the respondents' pronunciation of them. This is achieved by repeatedly playing the recorded voices, paying particular attention to the target words by means of playing and replaying portions of the record where the target words occur. The method of data presentation is tabular, and the method of data analysis is quantitative. Percentage error is used as the statistical tool for the analysis of the data. Also, qualitative analysis is deployed in that the data are described systematically.

English Syllable Structure

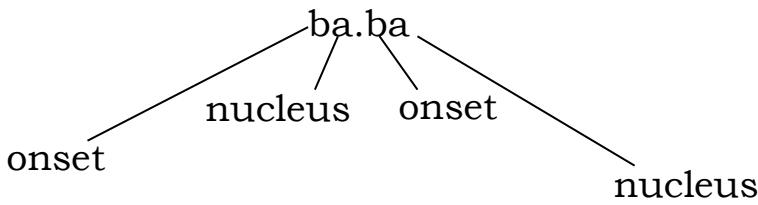
There are three elements that could constitute a syllable in English: onset, nucleus and coda. The onset is the optional initial consonant(s) in a syllable, the nucleus is the mandatory vowel element which forms the core of a syllable; and the coda is another optional consonant(s) following the nucleus. We illustrate with the word 'cat' /kæt/.



We noted that only the vowel segment is mandatory in a syllable. So we can have syllables without onset as in 'ask' /a:sk/ and syllables without coda as in 'two' /tu:/.

Ika Syllable Structure

In Ika language however, the structure is not the same as Ika syllables do not take coda. The presence of the vowel element which forms the nucleus of a syllable is a common core feature in human languages; while the presence of onset(s) and coda(s) is parameterised cross linguistically. This is true with regard to Chomskyian universal grammar (Lamidi, 2000). The syllable structure of Ika takes only the nucleus (which of course is a mandatory element) and onset. Let us show the structure of the word '**baba**' (father).



See the following table showing Ika mono and disyllabic words for more examples:

Table 1: Ika Mono and Disyllabic Words

ika WORDS	MONOSYLLABIC	ika DISYLLABIC WORDS WITH ONSET	ika DISYLLABIC WORDS WITHOUT ONSET
We them	Baba father	Uwa world/life	
Me me	Turu stand	Ali ground/land	
Pu leave	Bidon start	Olu pit/neck	
Bia come	Nani how	Eka hand	
Le see	Bidon begin	Uku leg	
Ri eat	Ficha clean	Efo belly	
Su wash (of clothe)	Buto keep	Ukun waste	
Kwo wash (of hand)	Weri take	Opia cutlass	
Wu bathe	Buru carry	Nma beauty/knife	
Gi yam	Wata child	Anu meat	
Ra drink	Wunye wife	Enya eyes	
Di husband	Jeme go	Ehu body	

The following table shows Ika tri and polysyllabic words:

Table 2: Ika Tri and Polysyllabic Words

ika TRISYLLABIC WORDS	ika POLYSYLLABIC WORDS
Ododo read/flower	Ihunenya love
Onyibo English	Arabasi onion
Achicha cockroach/sponge	Nkporogun log
Agara chair	Ogbodogbo thigh
Afere plate	Okorobia young man
Ohuma kindness	Ali-oke palm plantation
Ewere luck	Okeny-oba adult man
Okeny boy/man	Okpoho-oba adult woman

From the inventory of Ika words in the tables above, it is evident that Ika words/syllables do not take codas, and while some words/syllables take onset, some others do not. Furthermore, English has a wide range of consonant clusters unlike Ika. English syllables can take as much as three onsets and four codas; see words like:

stray/streɪ/ - cccv; split/split/ - cccvc
 strike/straɪk/ - cccvc; asked/a:skt/ - vccc
 tempts/tempts/ - cvcccc; sixths/sɪksθs/ - cvcccc

Conversely, we already noted that syllables in Ika do not take coda and consonant clusters are not possible in Ika. Syllables in Ika may only take zero or one onset. See the following disyllabic words in Ika where there is zero onset in the first syllable and one onset in the second:

ude (cream); **ohu** (one);
ebug (two); **eto** (three);
eno (four); **ise** (five).

Consequently, Interference will occur in the areas of syllable structure and consonant cluster because of the difference in syllable structure and absence of clusters in Ika as we have shown above. An Ika learner of English as a second language may therefore have difficulty in producing English syllables and clusters. In a bid to simplify English words to suit the speech capacities and habits of Ika learners, there are bound to be some kind of insertion (vowel epenthesis) and cluster reduction in form of deletion or elision. For this reason an Ika learner of English is likely to produce “buredi” instead of bread/bred/, “sukuru” instead of school /sku:l/, “kneti” instead of connect /kənekt/ etc. This hypothesis will be established by means of the analysis of the data (phonological reading test) which comes in the next section of this work.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Table 3: Target Words for Error Occurrence

Target Words	Correct Pronunciation	Wrong Pronunciation	Kinds of Error
1. Connect	/kənekt/	/kəneti/	Deletion
2. Mostly	/məʊstli/	/mosuli/	Deletion & insertion
3. Exist	/igzist/	/ezisiti/	Deletion & insertion
4. Exchange	/ɪksfɛindʒ/	/esfEndʒ/	Deletion
5. Direct	/dIrect, dai/	/dæreti/	Deletion
6. Contact	/kəntækt/	/kəntæti/	Deletion
7. Stage	/steɪdʒ/	/stEdʒi/	Insertion
8. Adulthood	/ædʌlθud/	/ædpθhudu/	Deletion & insertion
9. Factors	/fæktəz/	/fætəs/	Deletion
10. Pitfalls	/pitfɔ:lz/	/pitifɔs/	Deletion & insertion
11. Task	/tæsk/	/tæs/	Deletion
12. Instructor	/instrʌktə/	/insiturstɔ/	Deletion & insertion
13. Exercise	/eksəsaɪz/	/esisaizi/	Deletion
14. Correction	/kərekʃn/	/kɔrefʃn/	Deletion & insertion
15. Access	/ækses/	/æsesi/	Deletion
16. Anxious	/æŋkʃəs/	/æŋʃəsu/	Deletion
17. Excited	/ɪksaitid/	/esaitedi/	Deletion
18. Obviously	/ɒbviəsli/	/ɒviəsuli/	Deletion & insertion
19. Notebook	/nəutbuk/	/nOtubuku/	Insertion
20. Designated.	/dezigneitid/	/deziginEtedi/	Insertion

No of deletion = 17

No of insertion = 10.

From the sampling (the audio record), a total No of 549 deletion errors were committed by the forty respondents while a total No of 300 insertion errors were committed.

Percentage of Deletion Errors Committed

Total No of possible deletion = No of deletion (17) \times No of respondents (40)

$$17 \times 40 = \underline{680}$$

Total % of deletion errors committed = total No of deletion errors committed (549) \div total No of possible deletion (680) \times 100

$$549 \div 680 \times 100 = \underline{80.7 \%}$$

Percentage of Insertion Errors Committed

Total No of possible insertion = No of possible insertion (10) \times No of respondents (40)

$$10 \times 40 = \underline{400}$$

Total % of insertion errors committed = total No of insertion errors committed (300) \div total No of possible insertion (400) \times 100.

$$300 \div 400 \times 100 = \underline{75 \%}$$

Average of Syllable Structure Interference Errors

Percentage of deletion (80.7) + percentage of insertion (75) \div 2

$$(80.7 + 75) \div 2 = \underline{77.9}$$

Interpretation of Findings

As postulated earlier in this work, there is always bound to be interference in situations of second language learning, since languages are different in structure and rules of usage. In the data analysed, there are a total of 680 possible deletion errors and 400 possible insertion errors. From the instrument administered, 549 and 300 deletion and insertion errors respectively were actually committed. Using the formula of “percentage error”, this amounts to 80.7 % of deletion error and 75 % of insertion error. To get the average of syllable structure interference error, percentage of deletion and percentage of insertion were added and then divided by 2. This brings the average (deletion and insertion put together) of syllable structure interference error to 77.9 %. Consequent upon this analysis, syllable structure interference is on the high side in the English spoken by the Ika people and, as already noted, this is brought about by the differences that abound in the structure of the languages. And Lado (1957) argued, elements resembling the learner's native language will be easier to learn, while differences will create challenges. This therefore consolidates Lado's theory of Contrastive Analysis.

Conclusion

In this research, emphasis has been on a comparison of the syllable structures of English and Ika. Since these two languages are different in their sound systems, Ika speakers while learning ESL are bound to be confronted with some difficulties resulting from interference. This is in line with the core idea of the contrastive hypothesis, which is that a learner's first language structure typically influences the learning or acquisition of a second language (Lado, 1957; Fries, 1945). An examination of the syllable structure of Ika has been thoroughly carried out. The focus has been to identify the probable problems that the Ika learners of English are faced with at the suprasegmental levels. An attempt has been made to find the reasons why the Ika speakers encounter these difficulties. The facts that have been observed are due to dissimilarities that exist between the syllable structures of these two languages, and this, of course, is the claim of the exponents of Contrastive Analysis.

Recommendations

In view of the above,

1. It is recommended that curriculum designers and English language teachers in Ika land should take note of the differences that exist between Ika and English in order to enhance effective teaching and learning of English among the people of Ika. It is important that they (English language teachers) emphasise these areas of dissimilarity between English and Ika so as to enable the learners to consciously learn those aspects of the structure of English which are different from the structure of Ika. For instance, the teachers should emphasise that clusters of consonants are possible in English and learners should be taught to patiently, carefully and consciously articulate them correctly.
2. It is also recommended that practical phonological reading be incorporated in tests of oral classes. This would enable the teacher to detect the learners with special cases of difficulty so as to give special attention to such areas of difficulty.
3. Finally, it is recommended that Test of Orals teachers should be experts in English phonology. In view of this, it is pertinent to discourage the use of graduates of other disciplines such as Mass Communication, Theatre Art, International Relation, Political Science, etc. as English language teachers both in primary and secondary schools.

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