

Contrastive Study Of The Morphological Differences Between English, Izon And Isoko Languages

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ABSTRACT

Often times, due to the complex nature of the En-Oglish language coupled with its phonological system, most Nigerian speakers of the English language find it very difficult communicating effectively in the language. Besides, the phonological variations between the English language and other Nigerian language pose a serious problem to English as Second Language (L₂) speakers, hence making them to articulate English words wrongly. This study is therefore put forward to examine the morphological difference between the English, Izon and Isoko languages. Specifically, the study intends to investigate consonant clusters as well as the orthography of the three languages with a view to unveiling their similarities and differences. Both interview and documented literature was used for the study. It is anticipated that the outcome of this study will put the L₁ learner of the English language, in our case Izon and Isoko learners of the English language in the right perspective to learn the English language. Findings from the study shows that L₁ learners of the English language (L₂) are greatly affected by their knowledge of the L₁, especially, when there exist no noticeable linguistic affinity between the L₁ and the L₂, as the L₁ interferes with the L₂. It was also observed also that though, both the English and Izon/Isoko languages operate work with the IPA, there are differences in their orthography and that, while the English has a patterned consonant cluster system, the Izon and Isoko languages adopt a much more flexible consonant system, especially when such words are borrowed from the former. To this end, in order for the Izon and Isoko learners of the English language to have a mastery of the language, especially its morphology, they must as a matter of fact, make concerted efforts to avoid the L₁ interfering with the L₂.

Keywords: Contrastive Study, English, Izon, Isoko, Morphology, Difference

INTRODUCTION

English, Izon and Isoko are three languages that are distinct one from another. English is the language of the former colonial master to Nigeria and is from far away Europe. On the other hand, Izon and Isoko are languages spoken in the same geographic area. Despite the fact that the later are from the same geographical area, as far as they do not have identical phonological system, their mode of articulating the English language differs. What then is the missing link? Is it that the English language is too difficult and complex too? Or, are there certain phenomena that are responsible for it? It is to get answers to this salient questions that this work is centered on a contrastive study of English, Izon and Isoko languages, with special attention on their morphology.

Izon and Isoko are among the numerous indigenous languages that are spoken in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. While Izon is spoken among a cluster of people from across the various states that make up the Niger-Delta, as well as some other inhabitants of the coastal area in some parts of West Africa. According to Prezi (2014), "The Izon people are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. They are scattered all over the Niger Delta Region in several states of Nigeria, namely: Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, and Ondo." On the other hand, Isoko language is spoken predominantly in two local Governments Areas of Delta State of Nigeria and maybe, some others who live at the borders of

neighboring local governments. It should be noted also that there exist some Isoko settlements, precisely, in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

English, being the official language of Nigeria and of course the language of administration and commerce, etc, Nigerians need it at all times to communicate with one another, as a result of the multi-linguistics nature of the country.

Learning or acquiring a foreign language especially from a distant linguist background is very tasking. In most cases, learners find it very difficult communicating perfectly in the English language. This is not just because the language is strange to them, but that such an individual is already grounded in the L₁.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts contrastive linguistics theory. Language acquisition starts at the point the L₁ speaker is able to produce meaningful sounds of his or her L₁. At this point, such a learner begins is passionate about learning his/her mother tongue in order to communicate effectively with his immediate environment. According to Kusor, (2012) “Children do not need explicit instructions to learn their first language but they seem to “just pick the language up” in the same way they learn to rollover, crawl and walk”.

With the adoption of the English Language as the official language of Nigeria, it became the language of government, commerce, education, mass media, law etc. (Onyekachi and Ugwu, 2018), as such, Nigerians are compelled to learn and understand the English language if they must be involved in the day to day communication activities in the country. In an attempt to learn the English language, the Nigerian learner is encountered with so many problems, hence affecting communication efficiency. Consequently, the L₁ learner of the L₂ commits errors, when trying to pronounce words in the L₂.

In trying to proffer solutions to this linguistic problem, there needs to be a study to investigate the points of differences between the English and Nigerian languages, hence a contrastive study of the English language and other indigenous Nigerian language, is appropriate.

What is Contrastive Study?

Also called Contrastive Analysis or Contrastive Linguistics, contrastive study is the study of the structures of two or more languages with the aim of identifying the relation or difference that exist among languages of different linguistic environments. Crystal (2008) view Contrastive analysis (CA) as “a general approach to the investigation of languages (contrastive linguistics) particularly carried on in certain areas of applied linguistics ...” Gast (2016) opines that “contrastive studies mostly deal with the comparison of languages that are ‘socio-culturally linked’, that is languages whose speech communities overlap in some way, typically through (natural or instructed) bilingualism”. Oyewole (1987: 20) stated that

Contrastive Analysis teaches the teacher to compare areas of the target language like tense, aspect, the verbal group and nominal group with those of the learner’s mother tongue. It is expected that by so doing the teacher will be able to explain errors committed by learners and be able to prevent further occurrences of such errors.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the primary aim of contrastive study is to investigate the distinction between two or more languages, especially one foreign and the other native with a view to understanding their difference.

The Orthography of English, Izon and Isoko

Structurally, there is a great difference between the English, Izon and Isoko languages, especially when the latter attempts to articulate certain words from the former.

There are 26 letters in the English alphabet which help in the correct spelling of words in the language. On the other hand, the Izon language is made up of 27 alphabets, while the Isoko language makes use of 36 letters.

The following are the letters of the alphabet in the three languages:

English: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Izon: A B D E E F G (H) I I K L M N O O P R S T U U V W Y Z

Isoko: A B D E E F G H I J K L M N O O P R S T U V W Y Z

Note that it is the correct combination of these letters that can make one to be able to spell words correctly in any human language.

Vowels and Consonants in English, Izon and Isoko

The English Vowel

The English language is made up of twelve (12) pure vowels, also called monophthongs /i: I ε æ α: ɒ ɔ: u u: ʌ ɜ: ə / and eight (8) double quality vowels called diphthongs /eɪ əʊ aɪ aʊ ɔɪ əə ə /the monothongs are further grouped into long and short, according to their length in articulation.

Izon Vowels

The Izon language is comprised of nine vowels and 21 consonants. These nine vowels are all oral. While the vowels without underscore: e, i, o, and u are wide, those with underscore: i, e, o, and u are narrow. One important feature of the izon vowels is that the wide vowels and the narrow vowels do not occur together in a word. Furthermore, there is vowel harmony among the eight non-open vowels. The open vowel /a/ is neutral to vowel harmony. It can occur together with either wide or narrow vowels. One thing peculiar about Izon vowel is that whenever two vowels occur in a word before a final n, both are affected by the nasalization. Example: bien (to shit, to defecate), afian (shit), fain (to be bent), kajn (torn), gbain (to keep safe), kien (to count), gbain (to throw, to sew), etc.

Figure 1

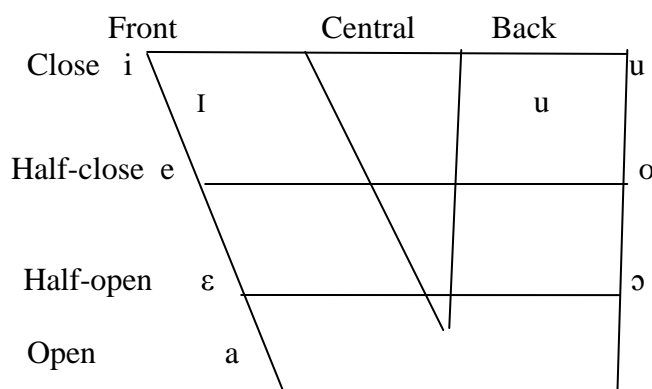


Figure: Izon Vowel Chart

Isoko Vowel

Using Uzere, which is claimed to be the standard Isoko dialect, Efe (2012) aver that "...Isoko has nine (9) vowel phonemes. These are /i ɪ e ε a ɔ o u/ and are nasalized in an environment of a nasal consonant. /I I e ε/ are front unrounded vowels, while /ɔ o u u/ are back rounded vowels. The vowel /a/ is regarded as an open central vowel...".

On the other hand,

Figure II

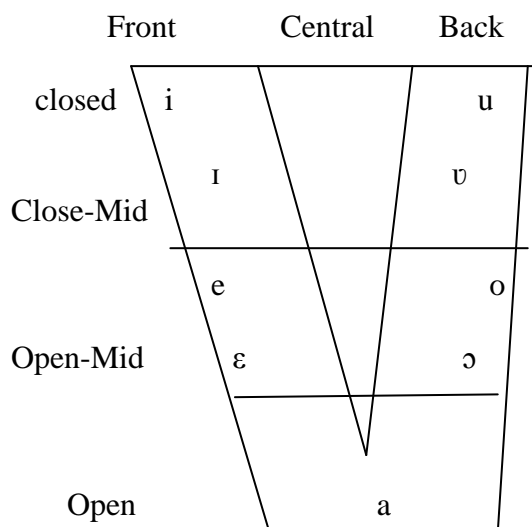


Figure: Isoko Vowel Chart

Vowels and Consonants in English, Izon and Isoko

Table 1: Izon Consonant Chart

Manner of Articulation	Place of articulation						
	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		k g	kp gb	
Nasal	n		n		ŋ		
Fricative		f v	s z		ʃ		h
Trill			r				
Lateral			l				
Approximant				j		w	

Source: C. B. Agbegha, G. T. Prezi, Tarilayefa, and A. Prezi (2011, pp. 2-3)

Notes: Phonemes on the left hand side are voiceless while those on the right hand side are voiced

Table 2: Isoko Consonant Chart

Manner of Articulation	Place of articulation						
	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Nasal	m		n		k g	ŋ ^w	
Stop			t d		k g	kp gb	
Affricate		f v	s z		ʃ		
Tap							
Trill			R				
Fricative	f v		s z		ʃ	ʃ ^w	h
Lateral approximant			L				
Central Approximant	v			j		W	

The structure of English, Izon and Isoko Morphology

As earlier said, the morphology of English and the two languages under study are not at all identical as such the Izon and Isoko learners of the English language tend to super impose their knowledge of the L₁ on the L₂. While the English language makes use of consonant clusters, the Izon and Isoko languages have a special structure where words, especially those corrupted from the English are spelt as they are pronounced.

Table 1: Structure of Words in English, Izon and Isoko

English	Word Structure	Izon	Word Structure	Isoko	Word Structure
Church	CCVCCC	Sose	CVCV	ishoshe	VCCVCCV
School	CCCVVC	Sukulu	CVCVCV	Isukulu	VCVCVCV
Bread	CCVVC	Buredi	CVCVCV	iBuredi	VCVCVCV
Teacher	CVVCCVC	Tisa	CVCV	Itisha	VCVCCV

Source: Oral Interview with Mr. Afekuro J. O. (Izon); Mr. Ovreme A.O and Mr. Ake Esime, (Isoko) 2019

The above table shows that both Izon and Isoko languages follow a patterned morphological structure of CVCV. It implies therefore that Nigerian languages do not accommodate consonant cluster. This was also the view of Udemmadu & Chinyeaka (2017) when she averred that “Igbo word structure

does not accommodate consonant clusters”. On his part, Efe, (2012), opined that, “through linguistic borrowing consonant clusters in English are simplified to CV or VCV in Isoko language. Nevertheless, the IZONS have some level of consonant cluster system as can be seen below:

Preye – CCVCV
Bra – CCV
Pre – CCV

It should be noted here that majority of IZON and Isoko words begin in vowels, as such, in trying to articulate English words, the Isoko learner normally imposes vowels on words that are originally sourced from the English, while the IZON learner seems to retain it.

Table 2: English words borrowed into Nigerian languages

English	Izon	Isoko
School	Sukulu	Isukulu
Bicycle	Basikulu	Ibasikoro
Driver	Deraiva	Idrava
Mango	Magoro	Imagoro

Source: Oral Interview with Mr. Afekuro J. O. (IZON); Mr. Ovreme A.O and Mr. Ake Esime, (Isoko) 2019

It should be noted also that in the spelling and pronunciation of words, the IZON and Isoko learners of English apply the CVCVCV structure, on like the English. As stated earlier, the spelling pattern of words in IZON and Isoko have a one-to-one correspondent with their pronunciation, thereby facilitating the spelling and pronunciation processes, while the English has words that have different spellings from their pronunciation.

Example:

English	Izon	Isoko
One /wʌn/	Keni /kene/	Qvɔ
Two /tu:/	Mamu /mamɔ/	Ive
Ear /iər/	Beri /beri/	Qzɔ
Eye /ai/	Toru /tɔrɔ/	Erɔ

Source: Oral Interview with Mr. Afekuro J. O. (IZON) Mr. Ovreme A.O and Mr. Ake Esime, (Isoko) 2019

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research work has been able to explain to us that “to a great extent the knowledge of the acquired language influences negatively the mastery of learnt language especially where the L₁ and L₂ are from different language group” (Udemmadu & Chinyeaka, 2017). This viewpoint is also true about the IZON and Isoko languages, especially when there is no clear linguistic affinity and when there is a noticeable morphological difference. To this end, undertaking a contrastive analysis or study will no doubt help in differentiating the morphological systems of the IZON and Isoko languages and that of the English, thereby helping the L₁ learner to better understand the L₂.

From the study, it was discovered that both the IZON and the Isoko learners of the English language do not have much difficulty in articulating the English consonant segments as both languages operate similar consonant forms. It was further noticed that the Isokos are more at ease in producing certain consonants that seem difficult to produce by the IZONS as such consonants are also found in Isoko orthography. Such consonants include: /ʃ ʒ ʧ ʤ/ which are conspicuously absent in the IZON alphabet.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was based on a contrastive study of the morphological differences between English, IZON and Isoko languages. The study became necessary especially when English is the only means of official communication in Nigeria and for the fact that both the IZONS and the Isokos communicate with the English language on daily basis. Furthermore, it has been noticed by several researchers and users of the three languages in question that most times the IZON/Isoko learner or speaker of the

English language tends to impose their knowledge of the L₁ on the L₂ thereby making the communication much more difficult.

By undergoing this study, we would have contributed to existing literature as well as informed the L₁ learner of the L₂ that differences exist between the L₁ and the L₂, and that the only way to overcome this communication difficulty is to better understand the phonology and morphology of the English language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for the study:

1. Learners should be conscious of the fact that since the English language and Izon and Isoko languages are not from the same linguistic milieu there is bound to be difference in their phonology;
2. Teachers of English language should try in as much as they can to make the teaching-learning process simple to the non-native learners, in our case Izon and Isoko languages;
3. In teaching the English language special attention should be given to its phonology;
4. More time should be given in schools' time-table to the teaching of spoken English; and
5. There should be regular training and retraining of teachers of English as a Second Language and English as a foreign language.

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