Mada Phonemes and Areas of Interference in the Learning of English as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

Language interference is a universal phenomena and Nigeria or (Mada students in particular) learning and speaking English as a second language are no exception. There are varieties of English spoken around the world. These two languages (Mada and English) belong to two different linguistic groups with distinct phonemic possibilities in their use of monophthongs, diphthongs (vowels), consonants and consonants clusters or the segmental. While English language belongs to the Indo-European languages, Mada language however, falls within the Benue-Congo linguistic sub-group or a branch of the larger Niger-Congo group of African language family. This presupposes that Mada Students learning and speaking English as a second language are likely to face some challenges which are impediments for fluency and articulation in English as a second language. This gives the impetus for this study on Mada phonemes and area of interference in the learning of English as a second language. The study has reveal that some monophthongs are problematic to many Mada students learning English as a second language. Also, consonant clusters have been found to be problematic for Mada students learning English as second language. The difficulties in the respective phonemes stemmed from errors of phoneme alteration, subtraction, separation, substitution and transposition. Consequently, language committees in various indigenous languages should liaise with state governments to improve the orthography of indigenous languages.
Keywords: Mada Phonemes, Learning of English, Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English language is a sine qua non for Mada students in particular and Nigerian students in general learning and speaking English as a second language. The standard of English language in our secondary or tertiary school is still low. This is because the Nigerian Student does not consider English as an important aspect of the curriculum. This is so because there ought to be an improvement in competence and performance since it is a mark of elitism and contact with the international community (Olaofe, 1996), Maisamari (1999) and Saleh (2005). Odumuh (1987) and Awonusi (2004) call for proficiency and fluency in English as he categorizes Nigerian English into four: The non-standard, basic or general, standard or educated and sophisticated or near-native. The Nigerian Student should aim at the third category, that is to say, standard or educated category. On the other hand, Oral English is an integral part of English which helps to eliminate some flaws

and improve competence. Therefore, the teacher of English is saddled with the responsibility to impart his knowledge skillfully from known to unknown, simple to complex using various methods of teaching as Ikonta (2002) posits that:

> The teacher of English as a second language has to consciously, deliberately and consistently make efforts to improve his students English through the use of various methods of Oral English teaching through the use of recorded speeches, drills, charts, audio cassettes, substitution table, dictionary, textbooks, newspaper cuttings, tape-recorders, well-constructed dialogue, video-tapes, radio sets, diagrams of speech organs, pictures, flash cards, word lists etc.

These skills can be transposed to suffice the teaching of other language such as Mada language. This premise makes relevant this study on Mada phonemes and area of interference in the learning of English as a second language. Therefore, the main aims of the study are:

i.   To find out or identify the phonemes or sounds in English which are impediments to the learning of English as a second language.

ii.   To identify phonemes or sounds in English language which are not available in Mada language.

iii.   To identify the phonemes or sound in Mada language which are not available in English language.

Mada Language and Sounds

Mada is the Second largest spoken language in Nasarawa State of Nigeria. The Mada people are also found in Kaduna State, Abuja – FCT and North Western Cameroun. The language is classified under the Benue-Congo linguistic sub-group, a branch of the larger Niger-Congo of African language family (Ngharen, Muazu and Saleh, 2014). The development of the Mada orthography started in 1912 when the first contact or presence of the English language through the colonial masters and the missionaries came into being at Ngampwar (Nco or Ncho) in Madaland. These missionaries established schools and started teaching the natives how to read and write in English language. The same missionaries started the development of Mada orthography almost at the same time which culminated into the production of tracts, pamphlets, chapters of the New Testament and the complete New Testament in the Language in 1985 (Saleh, 2007). While there are twenty six alphabets in the English language, Mada Language Committee (1985) highlights thirty seven (37 phonemes) while Blench and Dendo (2006) and Price (2006) identify thirty four (34) phonemes in the Mada language.

They are:

A	AÑ	Ə	B	C		D	E	EÑ		
				Pronounced /tʃ/				'Ñ' silent		
F	G		GB	H	HW	IÑ	J	K	KP	L	M	N
NG	NGG		O	ɔn	UÑ	P	R	S	SH	T	TS	U
UÑ	V		W	Y	Z							

NB: All nˢ with tone marks are silent while letters "q" and "x" are completely absent in Mada language as "q" takes the form of "k" and "x" takes the form of "s". Compared to English sounds, the strange sounds in Mada language are:

AÑ   əN   EÑ   GB   HW   IÑ   KP   NG
NGG   Ñ   TS   UÑ

The vowels of Mada language:

1.   /A/
2.   /AÑ/
3.   /ə/
4.   /E/
5.   /ɛ/
6.   //ɛÑ/
7.   /I/
8.   /IÑ/
9.   /O/
10.   /ɔ/
11.   ɔ N/
12.   /U/
13.   /UÑ/

Five of these have the nasalized consonant 'n' which is silent as in añ ɔñ əñ iñ uñ

The vowels could produce words in this form:

It will be noticed that vowel (10) i.e. / ë/ in Mada is produced with the same with vowel (8) i.e. / ë:/ in English, though the / ë/ is not regarded as a long sound but a short sound since long sounds are absent in the Mada language. Similarly, vowel (3) i.e. /Ù/ in Mada language is similar to vowel (12) i.e. /Ù/ in English which is also regarded as schwa sound. The two languages produce words with the same vowel using the same sound.

Mada Consonants and Examples

S/N	Consonant	Orthographic	Gloss
1.	/b/	Beki	seeds
2.	/c/ pronounced /tʃ/	Ci	Rat
3.	/f/	fɔ pronounced (fɔ:)	Search
4.	G	Gugu	Goat
5.	Gb	gbur 'r' silent	town/city
6.	Hw	hwi	Fish
7.	J	Ji	Mortar
8.	K	Kə	house/home
9.	Kp	Kpə	take/receive
10.	L	Ləlan	Scorpion
11.	M	Mene	People
12.	N	Nunu	person/somebody
13.	Ng	Ngə	i/me/myself
14.	Ngg	nggə-(gg) silent	marry/marriage
15.	P	Pɔ	Eleven
16.	R	Rɔ	dance/play/game
17.	S	Sə	Drink
18.	Ts	Tsə	knowledge/skill/wisdom
19.	t	Tu	head/leader/ruler
20.	V	Vo	catch/wrestle
21.	W	Wɔ	rearing
22.	Sh	Shishen	life/alive
23.	Y	ya	Mother
24.	D	Do'n	market
25.	Z	zon	sifting

English consonants like /ð/ - voiced as in they, /θ/ - voiceless as in think, /K/ - ing as in being, /ç/ as in seizure and /q/ as in quite, are completely missing in the Mada language.

A contrastive Analysis of Consonants in the two Languages

Plosive	Mada		English	
Bi-labial	p	b	p	b
Alveolar	t	d	t	d
Velar	k	g	k	g
Labial	gb	kp	-	-
Affricates				
Palato Alveolar				
Fricatives				
Labio-Dental	f	v	f	v
Dental	-	-	θ	ð
Alveolar	s	z	s	z
Palato Alveolar	j	–	j	
Glottal				
Nasals				
Bi-labial	M		M	
Alveolar	N		N	
Velar	–		Ŋ	
Lateral				
Alveolar	L		L	
Labio-velar (semi-vowel)	W		W	

Consonant Clusters in Mada

Jones (2003), Roach (2000), (Omachonu (2010), Ladefoged and Johnson (2011 define consonant clusters as "two or more consonant phonemes in sequence with no vowel sound in between them". In Mada language, there are some two consonant clusters, three consonant clusters and a few four consonant clusters except agglutinated.

Examples of Words with Two Consonant Clusters

S/N	Consonant cluster	Orthographic	Gloss
1.	Bl	Bla	read/study/count
2.	Br	Bri	spirit (evil)
3.	Gl	Glo	fire/inferno/light
4.	Kl	KlÙ	Hanging
5.	Kr	Kre	stay/stand/remain
6.	Gb	Gbo	remove/take/away
7.	Kw	kwa (dialectal)	we/us
8.	Fr	Fre	Separate
9.	Ky	Kyen	look/see/watch
10.	Gr	Gren	red/yellow

Examples of Words with Three Consonant Clusters

S/N	Consonant cluster	Orthographic	Gloss
1.	Gbr	Gbri	spirit/ghost
2.	Nkr	Nkru	Ram
3.	Kpl	Kpla	Bachelor
4.	Mbl	Mblå	Tomorrow
5.	Mbr	Mbrå	tomorrow (dialectal)
6.	Ngw	Ngwe	Hausa people

Examples of Words with Four Consonant Clusters

S/N	Consonant Cluster	Orthographic	Gloss
1.	Nklw	Nklwe	Cloth
2.	Ngbl	Ngbleki	Triviality
3.	Ngbr	ngbre-ngbre (reduplication)	strength

Interference in Consonant System

The Dental Fricative /θ/ and /ð/

This is an area of difficulty as these sounds are completely missing in Mada language as in many languages in Nigeria. Saleh (2007) provides areas of interference affecting the learning and speaking of English as a second language. The dentalized voiceless

/θ/ interferes with the production of sounds in English language.

Consonant	English	Transcriptions	Predictions
/ θ / th	Think	/ θink/	Tink
	Throw	/ru/	Tro
	Thirty	/ç:ti/	Tati
	Thank	/ænk/	Tank
	Thrill	/r:l/	Trill

Similarly, the (ð) voiced consonant also interferes with the production of sounds in English language. As 'h' interferes.

Consonant	Orthographic	Transcription	Predictions
/ð/	They	/ðəi/	De
	Themselves	/ðemselz/	Demselves
	This	/ðis/	Dis
	The	/ðə/	De
	Than	/ðæn/	Dan
	There	/ðea/	Dea
	Thereby	/ðeabai/	Dea
	Thigh	/ðai/	Dai

Nasal consonant K (-ing or –ng)

This velar nasal consonant sound (voiceless) is almost always omitted by Mada students learning and speaking English as a second language. Instead, it takes this form of short /i/ sound.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
sitting	/sitiŋ/	Sitin
coming	/kΛmiŋ/	Kɔmin
beating	/bi:tiŋ/	Bitin
teaching	/ti:tʃːŋ/	Tichin
sleeping	/sli:piŋ/	Silipin
Walking	/wɜ:kiŋ/	Wokin
reading	/riidŋ/	Ridin
driving	/draiviŋ/	Drivin
preaching	/pri:tʃːŋ/	Pricing

Velar Plosive

This consonant sounds is sometimes clustered alongside the nasal bi-labial 'n'

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
Go	/gəu/	Ngo
Girl	/gɜ:l/	Ngei
Get	/get/	Nget
Grace	/greis/	Ngres
Grade	/greid/	Ngred
Give	/giv/	Ngiv
Goal	/gəul/	Ngol
Game	/geim/	Ngem
Gamble	/gæmbl/	Ngambul
Goat	/gəut/	Ngot

Alveolar Plosive and Alveolar Fricative

The consonant cluster alveolar fricative 's' and alveolar plosive 't' pose problems to Mada Students learning and speaking English as a second language as shown in this table with intervening vowels separating the consonants.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
Station	/stəiʃn/	satation
Stone	/stəun/	Saton
Stigma	/stigmæ/	Sitigima
Sting	/stinŋ/	Siting
Stick	/stik/	Sitik

Alveolar Fricative 's'

Likewise, it is not easy for typical Mada students to produce words ending with 's' without the short vowel 'u'.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
Bus	/bʌs/	Bosu
Focus	/fəukəs/	Fokusu
Caucus	/kɔ:kəs/	Kokusu
Surplus	/sɜ:pləs/	Soplosu
Jos	/jʌs/	Josu

Elimination of vowels at the beginning of words and names

Examples	Predictions
Eliminate	Liminate
Information	Nformation
Emmanuel	Manuel
Iscariot	Sakariot
Interview	Nterview

Interference in Vowels System
The Frontal Vowels /i:/ and /i/

Most Mada Students of English may encounter problems pronouncing words with long vowel /i:/ replacing it with short vowel /i/.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
weed	/wɜɜ:d/	Wid
Keep	/kɪ:p/	Kip
Feed	/fi:d/	Fid
Sleep	/sli:p/	Silip
Sheep	/ʃ:p/	Ship

Open Frontal Vowel /æ/

This is a vowel that is missing even in standard Nigerian English.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
man	/mæn/	Mann
Cat	/kæt/	Kat
Catch	/kætʃ/	Katch
Cattle	/kætl/	Katul
mantle	/mæntl/	Mantul

Half Opened – Centering Vowel /ɜ:/

Most students of English find it difficult to differentiate between vowel /ɜ:/ and /e/ respectively, Mada students inclusive; they replace vowel /ɜ:/ with vowel /e/

Example	Transcriptions	Predictions
bird	/bɜ:d/	Bed
girl	/gɜ:l/	Gel
Burn	/bɜ:n/	Ben
Flirt	/flɜ:t/	flet
dirt	/dɜ:t/	det

Half-Closed Long Vowel /u:/ as non-existent in Mada Language

Most Nigeria languages do not have this vowel, Mada inclusive.

Example	Transcriptions	Predictions
food	/fu:d/	Fud
Cook	/ku:k/	Kuk
Moon	/mu:n/	Mun
Zoom	/zu:m/	Zum
Zoo	/zu:/	Zu

Half-Closed Back Vowel /ɔ:/

Surprisingly, this vowels is obtainable in Mada language, though its phonetic symbol in Mada is not the long /ɔ:/ but the short /ɔ/. It has words in Mada language as /pɔ/ (eleven), /shɔ/ - honey, /fɔ/ - search/find, /mgbɔ/ - marsh, /tsɔ/ - twelve etc. It is with the exception of 'r' in long sound as in native variety. Mada Students may not find it difficult to pronounce these words with the same vowel except the interfering consonant as the case may be.

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
Lord	/lɔ:(r)d/	/ɔd/
Cord	/kɔ:(r)d/	Kɔd
Born	/bɔ:(r)n/	Bɔn
Door	/dɔ:(r)/	Dɔ
Bore	/bɔ:(r)/	Bɔ

This vowel may be mis-represented or mis-pronounced with the back-short vowel /Ð/. The Mada Students may produce words as:

Examples	Transcriptions	Predictions
Art	/a:t/	At
Cord	/ka:d/	Kad
Part	/pa:t/	Pat
Yard	/ja:d/	Yad
Car	/ka:/	Ka

Back Vowel /ɔi/

Typical Mada Students of English may find it hard to pronounce words with this long vowel.

Example	Transcriptions	Predictions
Voice	/vɔis/	Vos
Soil	/sɔil/	Sol
Boil	/bɔil/	Bol
Foil	/fɔil/	Fol
coil	/kɔil/	kol

Diphthongs

Because of the absence of diphthongs and tripthongs in Mada language, the Mada students of English may find it difficult to separate any English word involving a diphthong without intervening vowel.

Example	Transcriptions	Predictions
shear	/ʃiə(r)/	shiya
Real	/riəl/	Riyal
Bear	/biə(r)/	Biya
Dear	/diə/(r)/	Diya
fear	/fiə(r)/	Fiya

The dental fricatives of /θ/ and /ð/ happen to be the universal problems for students of English as a second language. This is because these sounds are absent or non-existed in Mada language as in many Nigerian and most African languages. The sounds are substituted for "t" and "d" respectively as in thumb-tumb and this-dis. The nasal consonant /-?/ is completely missing in Mada language, probably in many Nigerian languages. It is replaced with (-in). The velar plosive /g/ (voiced) is sometimes clustered alongside nasal bi-labial 'n' as in "grace" and "ngrace" the alveolar plosive /t/ and fricative /s/ (consonant clusters) are areas which pose great problems to Mada Students of English. It is always extremely difficult for Mada to cluster the cluster of 's' and 't' and 's' and 'l' as in stay-satay, sleep-silip.

Similarly, it is not easy for Mada Students of English to pronounce words ending with alveolar fricative 's'. It is occasionally accompanied with the back short /u/ vowel. There is also the interference of alveolar nasal in short vowel /i/ which hinders the free flow pronunciation of words ending with letter (-y) or the short vowel /i/ sound. On the other hand, words and names in Mada language rarely begin with vowels as obtainable in other languages in Nigeria, especially Alago and Eggon languages in Nasarawa State. Most typical Mada Students eliminate the vowels at the beginning of words or name. There are also a lot of agglutinations, reduplications and compounding in Mada language. In the same vein, the long frontal vowel of /i:/ is always substituted for the short frontal vowel of /i/ even as the frontal vowel of /æ/ is also back vowel /ɜi/ is substituted with the 'o' sound while the long back vowel /a:/ is substituted with /a/.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are areas of interference from Mada language in the learning of English as a second language. These areas of interference are both in consonants, consonant clusters and vowels (monophthongs and diphthongds). On the whole, it has been difficult to discover any use or function of a diphthongs and triphthong in Mada language except otherwise. It is assumed for now that Mada language has no diphthong and triphthong in its orthography or sounds. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- The teaching of oral English should be included in the curriculum of the senior primary schools; this will improve competence and performance.

- Oral English teaching should be done from 100-300 levels of the University or NCE 1-3 in the Colleges of Education irrespective of the course.

- Various State governments should encourage students and teachers who excel or are interested in Mother Tongue Education. This will help to standardize the orthography of indigenous languages.

- Language committees in various indigenous languages should liaise with State governments to improve the orthography of indigenous languages.

- Mada language committee should intensify teaching of Mada language in different rural and urban centers to enable the people read the language because the phonemes are in standard orthography and difficult to understand.

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