

## Identity Dilemma among Nigerian Speakers of English as a Second Language

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### Abstract:

*The main aim of this article is to discuss how pronunciation of some English language sounds by Nigerian speakers of English who are non-native speakers creates identity dilemma. This particular dilemma is as a result of audience expectations, pedagogical issues, examiners expectations, and employers' expectations. The study found that most Nigerians speakers of English as a second language find themselves in a stage of identity dilemma because they want to maintain their status as African and in the same vain speak English as native speakers. The study demonstrates this using some illustrations from Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups as the three major Nigerian languages. In this regard, this study has a pedagogical implication to the stakeholders such as policy makers, syllabus designers, and English teachers at all levels of education to device a means of solving the speakers' identity dilemma in Nigerian English language classroom context. The paper recommends that further studies should be conducted to explore identity dilemma among other non-native speakers of English language across the globe using empirical evidences.*

**Key words:** identity dilemma, speakers of English, second language, Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as one of the Anglophone countries across the globe is the most populous country with diverse ethnic and religious groups. Considering its diversity in terms of religion and

ethnicity government adopts English language for the sole aim of uniting the people of the country through the medium of English language apart from their mother tongue. The use of English language dated back to 1914 before the amalgamation of the three protectorates namely, northern, southern, and eastern regions (Danladi, 2013). It is against this background that English is use as a language of instructions in Nigerian schools comprise of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Similarly, it is use as a administrative language in private and public institutions such as in the three ties of government namely; executive, judiciary, and legislature as a result of that speaking and writing in English language is a pre-requisite of securing employment in Nigerian public and private organizations (Edem etal, 2011). In another hand, the status of English language in Nigerian context is similar with the other sister countries across the globe in particular the Anglophone nations who are colonized by the British (Crystal, 1987). Also, it helps in integrating the diverse ethnic groups irrespective of its status in terms of the number of its speakers for the purpose of peaceful coexistence and understanding among themselves (Ezenwosu, 2011).

Apart from integrating the diverse ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. English language is taught to students in order to help them to have the needed academic requirement of the labour market in the world as a global language and in Nigeria in particular (Chiluwa, 2008; Ezenwosu, 2011) and also for the purpose of communication (Danladi, 2013) in a multilingual country such as Nigeria, with more than five hundred diverse ethnic groups (Muhammad etal, 2016). The figure 1 below shows the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria based on their regions they are predominantly located in the country.



Source: Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism 2013.

**Figure: 1. Map of Nigeria showing the three major ethnic groups**

With reference to figure 1 above it further illustrates that Nigeria is a multilingual and multiethnic country comprises of different ethnic groups consisting of the three major ones and other smaller groups with approximate population of about one hundred and fifty million people (Danladi, 2013). Similarly, a number of scholars are of the opinion that Hausa-Fulani ethnic group who are predominantly Muslims and are found in northern Nigeria consist of 30%, Yoruba who are situated in the south west of the country have 20% of the total population. The Igbo ethnic group claimed 18% of the population and majority of them are found in the south east of Nigeria. However, the balance of 32% of the country's population is shared among the other minority groups (Danladi, 2013; Muhammad etal, 2016). In line with these percentage distributions makes the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani to be considered as the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria to be use concurrently with English language and as the regional lingua-franca according federal

government decree 1979. In line with above background, Nigerian user of English as a second language is confronted with a lot of conflicts more specifically in area of pronunciations of some English sounds (Fakuade, 1998). In fact, this result to identity conflicts because if the Nigeria speaker abundant his or her accent it can affects his or her identity. Certainly, this can cause identity in conflict in terms of pronunciations.

In a nutshell, this paper focus on discussing how pronunciations of Nigeria speakers of English language create identity conflicts with their ethnic people and the native speakers of English language. As a result of this dilemma, the Nigerian speakers of English language are in identity conflict and looking for way forward.

## **IDENTITY AND DILEMMA**

Certainly, the act of pronunciations plays an important part in conveying intending information to the target audience through the means of spoken discourse in any giving local or international language. However, mispronunciation of words can alter intelligibility and understanding the message by the audience (Morley, 1991). Several studies have been conducted on the challenges of pronunciation by English foreign language learners EFL with different language backgrounds which are all geared towards the influence of the mother tongue. First and foremost, Keshavarz and Abubakar (2017) investigated the problems associated with the act of pronunciation of some English words by Hausa speakers of English language in Nigeria. The study employed the use of qualitative approach in collecting and analysing the data, sixty native speakers of Hausa language were used as participants from three northern universities in Cyprus. The data were transcribed and analysed. The result revealed that native speakers of Hausa have challenges in the pronunciation of some English vowels and consonant sounds. Tsojon and Aji (2014) examined the

courses of pronunciation difficulties of some English words among Jukun speakers of English. Qualitative approach was used in collecting and analysing the data. The findings showed that the problem connected to pronunciation of some English words among Jukun people in the central part of Nigeria is as a result of their mother-tongue interference. Chitulu and Njemanze (2015) explored how ICT knowledge can help in solving problem of poor English pronunciation among Nigerian students. The study used qualitative method in analysing and collecting data. It reveals that ICT helps tremendously as a teaching aid in enhancing the teaching of spoken English. Josiah et al (2012) examined pronunciation patterns of English words by some selected final year students from four Nigerian universities. Sixty five Nigerian students were selected based on stratified random sampling techniques as participants and observations and interviews were used in collecting the data. The study demonstrates that the Nigerian English teachers who are expected to provide needed training to the students in terms of pronunciations are also having some difficulties in English pronunciations. Iyere (2013) examined how English learners at the National open university of Nigeria, Lagos study centre encountered with challenges of pronunciation of some English words as a second language. Qualitative approach was used in collecting the data through the means of observations. The study revealed that mother-tongue interference contributes greatly in the challenges that students have in English pronunciation as a second language. Buba and Kaigama (2015) investigated the difficulties Hausa speakers of English are confronted in the course of pronouncing some English sounds. The study employed qualitative descriptive approach during collecting and analysing the set data, thirty students from university putra Malaysia who are native speakers of Hausa language were used as respondents. The result showed that the participants have difficulties in pronouncing most of the English fricatives consonant sounds. Maiunguwa (2015)

explored the production and perception of the English fricatives by the Hausa ESL learners. Quantitative method is used in collecting and analysing the data with the help of descriptive statistics and five masters' students were used as participants. The finding demonstrates that most of the respondents cannot able to differentiate between English labio-dental fricatives and dental fricatives in spoken discourse. Ata (2015) explored the production of monothongs vowels by Hausa speakers in Nigeria. The study employed the used of qualitative approach during collecting and analysing the data, ten Hausa native speakers were used as participants. The result demonstrates that the monothongs vowels were pronounce concurrently. Igboanusi (2006) examined the phonological features of Igbo and Yoruba English speakers in Nigeria context. Qualitative method was used in the course of collecting data through previous studies and observations. The finding revealed that there is wide range of differences in terms of phonological features between Igbo and Yoruba English speakers in Nigeria. Oladunjoye and Esan (2010) investigated the phenomenon of homographic words to communication among Nigerian undergraduates' students. The study employed the used of qualitative approach through the means of observations in collecting its data, twenty four selected Nigerian university students were used as participants. The result indicates that the students have difficulties in pronouncing English words that they are not familiar with them in their knowledge of vocabularies. Owolabi (2014) examined how Yoruba speakers of English as a second language identify some vowels and its production as a result of inconsistencies between spelling and sounds as against what are obtainable in the mother tongue. Qualitative method was used in the course of collecting and analysing the data. Similarly, listening and observations were employed as instrument of collecting data from the forty respondents selected randomly as participants. The study found that there is interference of the participant's mother tongue during

pronunciations of some English words and it also revealed that the teachers who are expected to provide the needed training to the students are also having some challenges in their English pronunciations.

## **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

It is no doubt that as a native or non-native speaker of English language one cannot disputes the fact that knowledge of the four basic language skills are paramount and speaking which required correct pronunciations of English words as a second language to Nigerians contributes immensely in conveying to the target audience or listener accurate message with its intended meaning (Fakuade, 1998). This study found a number of issues that led to the pronunciations identity conflict among Nigerian speakers of English. First and foremost, pedagogical aspects of teaching pronunciations of English words is important in providing the needed training of Nigerian students in English pronunciations as a multiethnic country and most of the teachers themselves are non-native speakers of English having also similar difficulties in the aspects of pronunciation like the students which is obtainable among speakers of English in the other sister countries such as Ghana (Adogba et al, 2018). In this regard, governments at all levels must create a policy of providing adequate and required training to the English teachers on how to improve their teaching of pronunciations (oral English) to the students in tune with the base practice across the globe. This can only be realised with providing appropriate atmosphere for the teaching and learning by providing well equip language laboratories in our schools, and tape recorders to the teachers and the students. With this, it can help in solving the existing conflict of pronunciations identity among Nigerian speakers of English from the schools levels. Similarly, if the government can do that it can help in responding to the expectations of the

audience (examiners and employers) in aspect of accurate pronunciations. The three major Nigerian languages are used as illustrations on the existing pronunciations identity conflict among Nigerian speakers of English language. First and foremost, native speakers of Hausa language in Nigeria have conflict in using some English sounds such as /f/ and /v/. For instance, they mispronounced /f/ as /p/ as illustrated in the following words: fish-pish, film-pilm, from-prom, first-perst. Similarly, the sound /f/ in English is referred as labio-dental. But, in Hausa language it is identified as bilabial (Schuh, 2008).

In another hand, most of the Hausa speakers have challenges in pronouncing the sound /v/ correctly; instead they mispronounced it as /b/ as a result of mother tongue interference. These are some of the words that can demonstrates the conflict of pronouncing /v/ sound by Hausa speakers of English language: TV as /ti:bi:/, very /beri/, lovely /lobli/, and evening /ibenin/ (Keshavarz, 2017). Secondly, the Igbo speakers of English language have a number of difficulties in English pronunciations of words that have /l/ and /r/ consonant sounds as in the following words: lebel (for rebel), platically (for practically), crinic (for clinic), cathoric (for catholic) as highlighted by (Igboanusi, 2006). Consequently, Igboanusi (2006) found how Yoruba speakers of English language in Nigeria are having some challenges in the production of /v/ and /s/ sounds because they lack these forms of sounds in their language. For instance, they use /v/ sound as in /f/ as in the following words: fegetable (for vegetable), safings (for savings), fenture (for venture). Also, the sound /s/ is always replaced for /z/ as demonstrated in the following words: sip (for zip), sinc (for zinc), and sise (for size).

Similarly, the study found that stakeholders such as parents, employers, and teachers contribute in no small major in putting the students in a stage of dilemma in the case of pronunciations identity conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, most



of the parents create a lot of pressure on their children to speak English language which they attached more value and importance than their mother tongue as a way of modern civilisation. According to Rugemalira (2005) speaking in English in Tanzania is considered by parents as key to sound education. Also, in the context of Ghana parents mostly gives more pressure to the children to speak more English language than their mother tongue because of its economic, social, and political benefits to them (Adogba et al, 2018). Similarly, in Nigerian context in which most parents take their children to private schools with the expectations that their wards can speak English language fluently and as a result can have better opportunities in terms of employment and admission into higher level education. In this regards, stakeholders are no doubt part of the problem of pronunciations identity conflict in African countries and in particular Nigeria. In a nutshell, this study revealed that the Nigerian speaker of English language as a second language is in dilemma of pronunciations identity conflict, nationality identity conflict, and conflict of job satisfaction. In an attempt of teaching the students the correct English pronunciation as a teacher and at the same time maintaining his or her nationality at the end gives birth to pronunciations as an identity conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

In line with the findings of this paper that were drawn from the review of the previous literature. It indicates that most Nigerian speakers of English as a second language are in a stage of identity dilemma in terms of pronunciation of some English consonant and vowel sounds because of the mother tongue interference during pronunciation of such sounds in spoken discourse. This study is optimistic that communication can only be effective between the two interlocutors if the audience understood the speaker and this dilemma that the

Nigerian confronted through the medium of English as a language of instruction contributes tremendously. In this regards, this can continue to affects the academic performance of Nigeria child in schools and in chances of employment.

The study has a pedagogical implication on the need of inculcating into the students the interest of English subject in particular oral English with this it can help them to improve on their English pronunciations by engaging in frequent practices. Similarly, training and re-training of English teachers are also paramount in order to enhance the teaching and learning of English sounds which can help the Nigerian speakers of English as a second language to address their problems of identity dilemma. In a nutshell, the study recommends that governments at all level should provides an enabling environment in schools in order to improve the teaching and learning of English pronunciations by providing language laboratories in all schools and the needed teaching aids such as radio, and tape recorders for the English teachers and students which can help in addressing the problem of identity dilemma among Nigerian speakers of English as a second language.

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