

Dialectal Idiosyncrasy in the Use of the English Language by Wimbun Students at the University of Dschang - Cameroon

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Abstract: This paper highlights the problems of pronunciation with and among the Wimbun students who speak English language with exerted influence from the Limbum Mother Tongue. Worth noting fact is that most of them are not aware of this dialectal idiosyncrasy, a fact that they are speaking English language with mother tongue influence. This linguistic interference from the Limbum language into the English language during oral interactions poses pronunciation prejudice on the Limbum speakers. We came up with questions like: Is it a deliberate or natural phenomenon when speaking English with Limbum accent? Are they unable to pronounce correctly? Or is it due to the fault of their elementary school teachers who undermined pronunciation lessons? From interviews conducted and a participant-observation approach with the Wimbun students of the University of Dschang – Cameroon on regular bases, we came up with findings that, Limbum is a language with a unique sound system that differs from that of the English language, thus for a Wimbun student to speak English with Limbum accent is not synonymous to non-mastery of the English language, but rather a natural phenomenon emanating from the sociolinguistic and psychological construct of the Limbum language.

Keywords: English language, interference, Limbum, pronunciation, Wimbun students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every human being is born or endowed with a language immediately he or she is born. It is therefore not an overstatement in saying that Language has a vital role to play in human life as the only bridge to human communication. The linguistic background of every language user has an impact on his or her speech behaviour. Considering the fact that every language possesses prosodic aspects that are unique, so equally do speakers of each language possess some unique components of their mother tongue. The first language (L1) humans acquire at birth influences their speech when they acquire the second language (L2). Thus, language users export prosodic features from their L1 into their L2.

According to [1] pronunciation is the act or manner of speaking a word. For various reasons, many English words are not pronounced the way they are written, and some sounds can be represented by more than one combination of letters such as www.thoughtco.com.

The Cambridge dictionary defines articulation as “the way in which you pronounce words or produce sounds”. www.dictionary.cambridge.org.

Articulation refers to the formation of clear and distinct sounds in speech. In the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, (8th edition), Mother Tongue is defined as the first language that one first learns to speak as a child.

Due to the fact that Mother Tongue is a language someone acquires at infancy, this constitutes a greater part of one's life as it is informally gotten from parents in the process of child upbringing as compared to the language learnt later, be it formally or informally. The childhood language remains that with a high linguistic potency and has a very strong linguistic grip on L2 performance.

From the Cameroon linguistic landscape perspective, the English language which is the Mother Tongue of the British, doubles as one of the national languages of Cameroon that is used as language

of instruction in all schools with the Anglo-Saxon sub-system of education in Cameroon. Following the status given to the English language, especially in the domain of education, it is naturally the second language for every child who embarks on any educational career. Moreover, it serves as the first formally acquired language since Mother Tongue is informally learnt at home. Therefore, speaking the English language with a particular British accent and tone far off from the MT idiosyncrasy could necessitate a daunting task if one has to operate at MT linguistic community levels.

This linguistic infiltration from Mother Tongue to English language as second language among the Wimbun students at the University of Dschang poses psychological and socio-cultural threats to, and among the students. Questions like *why do they pronounce some English words differently from the way students from other areas do? Where were they born and bred, and by who? Were they not well drilled on pronunciation during English language lessons at school?*

These preoccupations led us to investigate why such differences in articulation occur in the speech of these Wimbun students, and to examine the sociolinguistic context.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper handles the issues that arise with the prosody of the Wimbun students residing in Dschang from the year 2019 to 2022. The sample population comprised of 80 Wimbun students of both sexes with ages ranging from 15 to 35 years; with educational levels from Secondary through high school and to the University. The research was carried out during daily encounters with the Wimbun Students and during their meeting sessions we used a random sampling with an ethnographic approach using Wimbun students who reside in Dschang from 2019 to 2022.

We used both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies because the topic touches on both characteristics of the two methods. Qualitatively, data came from individual responses to open-ended questions through interviews, observations and personal experiences. Words were jotted down in English and later transcribed into Limbum with the help of tools such as the Limbum – English Dictionary by Francis Wepngong and the Oxford English Dictionary Quantitatively, we provided explanations on testing hypotheses following responses to questions in relation to the three hypotheses. This design made use of tools such as calculators, tables and figures to collect, and present our data. After both qualitative and quantitative data analyses were conducted, the results were interpreted collectively and qualitatively.

The instrument of research was a list which was comprised of words gathered from conversations with and from these students. The said list was also realized by sorting out frequently mispronounced words gotten from daily conversations, audios chats from students' groups via media platforms like WhatsApp groups, chats, and messenger. After gathering many words, we sorted out 20 words which we presented as our corpus for this work and used the ethnography of communication approach which is an approach to understanding language in use propounded by Dell Hymes' in describing and analysing the ability of the students to use language for communication in real life situations.

3. PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

3.1. Presentation of Data

Below is a presentation of English words with their transcriptions and the Limbum articulated words and spellings used by Wimbun students when speaking English language in Dschang.

In as much as errors in articulation might occur for various reasons, this research work aimed at finding out whether pronunciation errors are related to some aspects of prosody like (intonation, stress, word pronunciation, and morphological formation. We came out with the following list of English words with their various parts of speech, standard forms with their transcriptions and mother tongue –influenced pronunciation forms with their transcriptions which are prejudiced:

3.2. Presentation of English Words and their Limbum – Influenced Pronunciations

N/	List of words	Standard English pronunciations	Parts of Speech	Pronunciations with Limbum Mother tongue – influenced
1	Alter	['ɔ:ltə (r)]	Noun	Alta [órtà]
2	Coffee	['kɒfi]	Noun	kòfi [kòfl]
3	Contract	['kɒntrækt]	Noun	Kontrák
4	Christian	['krɪstʃən]	Noun	Kristèn [krístèn]
5	Develop	dɪ veləp	Verb	Dèvélop
6	Father	fɑ:ðə (r)	Noun	Fadà [fádà]
7	Feed	[fɪ:d]	Verb	Feet [fit]
8	Handiwork	['hændɪwɜ:k]	Noun	Hanwork
9	Jesus	['dʒi:zəs]	Noun	Jisòs
10	Letter	['le:tə (r)]	Noun	Letà [létà]
11	Litre	['li:tə (r)]	Noun	Lita [lítà]
12	Pastor	[pɑ:stə (r)]	Noun	Pasto [pástò]
13	Phone	[fəʊn]	Noun	Fùn
14	Project	['prɒdʒekt]	Noun	Prujek
15	Secret	['si:krit]	Noun	Secret
16	Slipper	[slɪpə(r)]	Noun	Silípàs [sílípàs]
17	Sweater	['swetə(r)]	Noun	Swetà
18	Think	[θɪŋk]	Verb	Tiŋ
19	Tomato	[tə' mɑ:təʊ]	Noun	Tómátù [tùmátù]
20	Uncle	['ʌŋkl]	Noun	Oŋkuu

This table shows that, out of 20 words collected, and tested, only 03 were verbs and the rest 17 were nouns. This shows that majority of mispronounced words are nouns. Then those which are not transcribed, are ‘mispronounced’ whereas those which are transcribed are “NOT mispronounced”, they are correctly pronounced with respect to the sound system of Limbum language which is a natural linguistic phenomenon, (*ourconception*)

3.3. Interpretation of Findings From Data Collected

These articulation problem of English language words among Wimbun students in Dschang was mostly concerned with phonological errors, and stress in the syllables.

3.4. Phonological Errors

The phonological mistakes that students made were classified in the major domains as: wrong stress and syllabification, wrong articulation of words and, mother tongue accent linguistic background.

3.5. Issues with Wrong Stress of Words

According to [1] competent speakers of English, and especially “people from the inner and outer cycle speakers of English”, as expatiated by [2], would immediately perceive the wrongly articulated words. In order to be in line with this context, what follows is the account of what is the phonological issues in this domain? Therefore, as instant in point, the word **kòfi** [kòfɪ] when pronounced, entails a reverse of stress patterns made on the first and second syllables of the word uttered **coffee** ['kɒfi]. The stress patterns are replaced with low and high tones from Limbum language.

3.6. Issues with Wrong Pronunciation of Words

This aspect handles mainly the words used with wrong pronunciation with regards to interference from the Mother Tongue accent, that is, words are articulated following the L1 accent, which is an unavoidable phenomenon. But the confusion at the level of similar words impacts one’s pronunciation as illustrated in the word ‘**secret**’ which is pronounced as ‘**sacred**’, ‘**handiwork**’ is pronounced as ‘**handwork**’ thereby omitting the vowel sound /i/ and reducing the word form from three to two syllables.

For instance, all plural forms of nouns are formed by adding the prefix/**b**/ sound in front of the word to obtain its plural. Exceptionally, when these students converse, they add the /s/ sound to the end of the word to differentiate the singular from the plural forms of words. This portrays some kind of double affixation, that is, /b/ as prefix and /s/as suffix as seen in the table below:

Singular Forms of Limbum words as used by the Wimbun students in Dschang	Plural Forms of Limbum words as used by the Wimbun students in Dschang	Gloss
Kontrák	Bkontráks	contracts
Fùn,	Bfùns	phones
Silípàs[sílípàs]	bsilípàs	slippers
Swètà	bswètàs	sweaters

With regards to the above table, when a word ends in letter ‘s’, the plural form still takes the prefix /b/ as exemplified in the word ‘**bsilípàs**’, thus utilising double pluralisation from both Limbum and English. Also, there is an infix on the word ‘**slippers**’ where the / i/ sound is inserted in the first syllable and pronounced as **Silípàs** [sílípàs], thus increasing the number of syllables of this word from two to three syllables.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Results from Data Analyses

Results from responses show that, the Wimbun students speak the English language with Limbum language accent. They are not conscious because it is a linguistic interference which is a natural phenomenon and not deliberate. This view is in conformity with that of [2] who posits that some students of English expression are not aware of the fact they make mispronunciations, owing to the different pronunciation that they have in their native language or Mother Tongue

From the same data analysis, it was obtained that, the existence of new vocabulary which never existed in the Limbum language with respect to the sound system of the Limbum language is a contributing factor to such idiosyncrasy. The mispronunciation as observed with Wimbun students occur as a result of linguistic interference inherited from their teachers with whom they speak the same Mother Tongue. This, in accordance with the views of [4] who articulate that ‘interference may be due to the absence of a word in a language to describe a new concept as he illustrated in the word ‘**table**’ which is pronounced as ‘**tebulu**’. www.idosr.org. Also, the views of [5] and [1] are in support of this assertion.

4.2. Psychological Effects

In spite of the influence from each language on the English language, it is noted that every language user has a unique idiolect leading to particular intonation and manner of articulating different words. In this case, everyone possesses unique ways of speaking so much such that an individual’s voice can be sorted out of the voices of many during such verbal intercourse. It creates the feeling of non-self confidence in language users, thereby enhancing the negative spirit of alienation from students whose speech art has been influenced by their Mother Tongue.

This has created an atmosphere of reticence amongst language users who cannot pronounce exactly as required in pragmatics of communication. These language users are forced to shy away from the mockery that accompanies such disdained pronunciations in the midst of those who speak English with prosodic features close to native speakers.

4.3. Pronunciation and Prejudice

If language which is an aspect of culture, is threatened, then the entire culture and the various users involved are threatened. It stagnates language growth and use because speakers who are jeered at by those who have a mastery of the language might lose confidence in public speech and take tend to shun from using their language thereby promoting the spirit of otherness and in-group discrimination among students of English expression.

Worth of note is that mispronunciation creates room for the development of an inferiority complex as the inability to express one’s self in the English language makes one look to appear stupid in the midst of those who demonstrate a mastery of the language. Following this, [1] opines that the solution is for everyone to endeavour to pronounce correctly because the motive behind good pronunciation is not primarily to sound like a native speaker of English, but it is primarily needed to be properly understood by others. [5] as cited in [1], argue that good pronunciation is also needed because of Intelligibility (speakers produce sounds which are recognized as English); Comprehensibility (the listener is able to understand what is being uttered by the speaker); and Interpretability (the listener is able to comprehend the purpose of what is said).

To this effect, it should be noted that students who have been taught by teachers with whom they have shared the same Mother Tongue are bound to inherit and transfer nonstandard pronunciations to populations within which they the same natural ecosystem. From the interviews conducted, surveys and observations carried out, we gathered this information which is in line with [1] as quoted in [7] and [8], emphatically stated that teachers who taught most of these Wimbun students at their elementary education levels neglected the aspect of pronunciation during the English language lessons.

5. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, we concluded that variation in pronunciation of an individual depends highly on where he or she is born, bred, and the type of educational background and social interactions in society. Students find it difficult to respect pronunciation of some English consonant sounds like /ð/,/d/ which are articulated as /d/ and /t/ respectively, in the words ‘**fadà**’ [fádà] for **father**, and ‘**Feet**’ [fit] for **feed**. Equally, the problem of pronunciation with the English vowels / ə/, which is pronounced as /a / as exemplified in words like **alta** [órtà] for ‘alter’ and **letà** [létà] for ‘letter’

Wimbun students’ pronunciation of some English words is in direct response to the need-filling concept whereby the so-called ‘wrongly pronounced’ words are articulated as such in order to fill in the new vocabulary with words like (**phone, internet, computer**, etc) which have been introduced into the Limbum language with the advent of technology.

Finally, the sound systems of the English and Limbum languages are different, so, too the students with Limbum as their L1 are bound to speak English with influence from their source language phonology. Consequently, with every language having its unique characteristics, these linguistic specificities within the present depensation of language varieties and new Englishes overlap the discourse weather the English language from the African continent perspective should domesticated to suit national languages phonological variations s a bit to assert cultural identity and linguistic self-determination as is the case with students of the Wimbun community of the University of Dschang.

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