



GOMBE SAVANNAH

**JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND
COMMUNICATION STUDIES (GOSAJOLLCOS)**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY**

**VOLUME 2 No. 1
October, 2021**

HANDLING THE ARTICULATION OF DENTAL FRICATIVES BY NUPE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL): IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL TEACHERS

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Abstract

The English Language in Nigeria serves as the language of unity and most importantly, the language of formal education. All the more 500 ethnic groups in Nigeria 'scramble' for the knowledge of the language so as to be perfect in various fields of knowledge broadly classified as arts, science, social science and technology. Due to the multiplicity of indigenous languages in Nigeria, teachers of ESL have a lot to do to ensure that the language is properly taught at different levels of the educational system. This is because each of the indigenous languages has its own peculiarities as far as language forms are concerned. That means, there are phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantical differences even between the indigenous Nigerian languages. This then means that, there are bound to be more differences between English and any of the indigenous languages in contact. For instance, there are many obvious phonological differences which cut across the different Nigeria languages as people learn and use the English Language. A few examples of these can be seen regionally thus: indigenous speakers from the northern part of the country have problems with the English /f, v/ due to lack of those sounds in Hausa, therefore, they substitute them with /p, b/ sounds. In the western part, Yoruba speakers have problems with /ʒ/ and thus substitute it with, /ʒ/; the Ibo in the South substitute the /ŋ/ with /g/ and also substitute /l/ with /r/ sounds. Similar problems of substitution of one sound with another can be found in several other languages, Nupe language is also not an exception. Thus, this paper highlights the problem of articulating the dental fricatives θ/ð ('th' sounds) by Nupe learners of English as second language. This is because Nupe speakers do not have dental fricatives in their language repertory and so substitute /θ/ with t and /ð/ with d or even z sounds. These are likely to constitute problems for learners, particularly when they are in metropolitan classrooms or are taught by non- Nupe teachers of English language. Some remediation measures proffered include effective teaching through repetition of the sounds, use of minimal pairs, tongue twisters, real objects, to familiarize the learners with the correct articulation of the sounds

Keywords: Dental Fricatives, L1 Interference, Voiced and Unvoiced Consonants, Minimal Pairs

Introduction

As a child acquires the language of his/her environment, the organs of speech are conditioned for the pronunciation of sounds in that language. Therefore, to learn a new language (the L2), and to be proficient in it to be able to communicate effectively, he/she must learn that language in, most cases, in a formal setting, so as to be conversant with all the aspects of the language. This means he/she should be

properly taught both the spoken and written aspects of the language so as to perform excellently. Hence, human beings' thoughts, feelings, emotions, ideas etc. are better communicated by means of verbal (written or spoken) and non-verbal communication; and since the essence of English language teaching in Nigeria is to achieve effective communication nationally and internationally, then teaching should be based on the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Every language has its own sound system though there are some similarities of some aspects of language between the languages. In the course of planning and teaching the English as a L2 language, the teacher should bear in mind that there are differences between the sound systems of the English language and that of the various mother tongues. For instance, there are a lot of sounds that do exist or are similar in English and Nupe, however, there are vowels such as /æ, ʔ, ʔ, i:, e:, u:, o:/ and consonants /θ, ð, ʔ, ʔ, ʔ, ʔ/ that are different or do not exist in Nupe language. It is widely recognized that good pronunciation is very important as bad pronunciation habits are not easily corrected. However, many language learners are faced with the challenge of proper pronunciation of English words due to, among other reasons, lack of training right at the elementary level of learning the target language. This is because while teaching English language, some teachers find it difficult to create a lesson that would focus on pronunciation practice so it is taken as an additional practice in all course books. In other words, teachers do not have enough time in their lesson to be dedicated to pronunciation, and even if there is, attention is usually given to drills which discourage students and even the teachers themselves, resulting in the desire to avoid learning and teaching pronunciation as a whole. Gilbert (2008) claims that there are two main reasons why pronunciation is neglected in classes. The first is lack of time dedicated to it and the second is psychological factors because students are not sure about their knowledge of pronunciation as they are about their grammar or lexis. Gilbert claims that most elements of speaking are deeply personal and our sense of community is bound up in the speech rhythms of our first language. He opines that these psychological factors are usually unconscious but they prevent the learners from improving their intelligibility. Therefore, (Ur 1984) advises that the aim of pronunciation improvement may not be to achieve a perfect accent or imitation of a native speaker but simply to get the learner to pronounce accurately enough so as to be easily and comfortably comprehensible to other speakers. This explains why learners still show traces of L1 features in the target language pronunciation especially where there are instances of non-existence of such features

in the L1. This paper highlights the pronunciation problems associated with the English dental fricatives (th sounds) which are absent in Nupe language and constitute intelligibility problem to Nupe learners of English as a second language. This is to enable the students to pay great attention to the Production of “th” consonants, increase students' awareness about the way they are pronounced and to provide students and teachers with opportunity to practise the production of the sounds. First, sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a particular language. So, we can talk about the distinctive sounds of English, French and other languages. In this sense, we can talk about pronunciation as the production and repetition of sounds of speech. Second, sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in context of use. Here, the code combines with other factors to make communication possible. In this sense, we can talk about pronunciation with reference to acts of speaking.

The advent of English in Nigeria was through European contacts around the 15th century through trade and missionary activities. Missionary activities helped the spread of the language to all parts of the country. Later, when Nigeria was colonized by Britain, English was entrenched as an official language. Even post-colonial and independent Nigeria continued the use of English as an official language. Thus, English has continued to play a dominant role in Nigerian socio-economic and political activities. According to Barber (1999), “In Nigeria, the most populous of Black African countries, there are three main languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa) and over four hundred local ones, but English is also an official language, and plays a major role in government and administration”.

One of the reasons why English is so central to Nigeria's educational growth is because of its significant role as a medium of knowledge delivery in Nigerian schools. English is the language of instruction in schools particularly the upper level of primary school and secondary school and beyond. Barber (1999) attests to this fact when he acknowledges that, “In Nigeria, primary schools are being built which teach the local languages, but the secondary schools and the universities predominantly use the English medium. The English Language is the instrument of communication in higher primary, post primary and higher institutions as well as the official language of the country. Therefore, students need effective English language to function properly or perform better. However, it is disheartening to note that the poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of decline in the general academic performance and standard of education in Nigeria. This is because English language is the

language of instruction that is being used to teach the other languages in schools' curricular. Therefore, if the language is not properly taught and learnt, perfecting performance in other subjects as well as national and international communication would suffer. Oluwole, (2008) was of the view that "having difficulty in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum taught in target language seem to be one of the most serious problems that English as a first language students face in their particular course of study. This might be due to their weaknesses in English language (the medium of instruction) which may have negative consequences on their overall performance. Kelly states that a learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another language to understand. This can be very frustrating for the learner who may have a good command of grammar and lexis but have difficulty in understanding and being understood by a native speaker (2002).

Pronunciation Teaching

In teaching pronunciation, different teaching methods and approaches have been used throughout the twentieth century. From Grammar-translation method, Reading-based approach, direct method, all with focus on imitation of a model in other words drill, to the arrival of notional-functional approach which focused on communicative purposes of the target language. In learning pronunciation different strategies are used in order to be comprehensible. According to Dalton and Seidlhofer there are two approaches aimed at pronunciation teaching- the bottom-up approach and top-down approach. Bottom-up approach means that learners start with learning how to pronounce individual phonemes and then they work their way to intonation (Dalton and Seidlhofer). Generally speaking, when teaching the segments of pronunciation, the suprasegmental features will take care of themselves (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994). Anderson and Lynch claim that we perceive speech by building up an interpretation in a series of separate stages, beginning by the lowest units and gradually working up to the larger units such as the utterance, from which we then derive our interpretation of the speaker's meaning (in Jenkins 2000). Based on the findings mentioned above, this approach is very similar to a structural approach used for teaching grammar and lexis. As far as the top-down approach is concerned, attention is paid to patterns of intonation at the beginning and later individual sounds are taken into focal point (Dalton and Seidlhofer). In other words, once the prosodic features of pronunciation are in place, the necessary segmental discriminations will follow of their own accord (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994).

According to Pinker, top-down process, which largely corresponds with communicative aspects of language teaching, adopts knowledge and expectancies to guess, predict, or fill in the perceived event or message (in Jenkins 2000). Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin offer another elaboration of two general approaches concerning pronunciation teaching. These are intuitive-imitative approach and analytic-linguistic approach. Intuitive-imitative approach conveys the learner's ability to listen and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information (1996). Analytic-linguistic approach, on the other hand, utilizes information and tools such as phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, chart of vocal apparatus, contrastive information, and other aids to supplement listening, imitation, and production. It explicitly informs the learner of and focuses attention on the sounds and rhythms of the target language (1996). Though these two approaches can be combined in any way, it is vital to set which approach or a combination of approaches is the most suitable for language purposes. Moreover, when teaching pronunciation teachers need to bear in minds that Pronunciation in comparison with the other aspects of learning will always be marked with personal attitudes towards the target language, learner's abilities among others; therefore, there can never be a one-to-one relationship between what is taught and what is learnt (Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994). It is therefore advised that based on the above mentioned facts, teachers should pay certain attention to *teachability–learnability* in presenting aspects of pronunciation that are teachable e.g. individual sounds and segments, and others such as intonation that are bound to certain circumstances and therefore extremely problematic to teach. Dalton and Seidlhofer point out that intonation as a part of pronunciation teaching-learning is problematic, individual sound segments are on the other hand fairly easy to be taught but not so important for communication. However, stress was identified as an area with maximum overlap of communicative importance and teachability, therefore is the most convenient focal point for any course in pronunciation (1994).

The teachers act as models of pronunciation and carry a huge responsibility in their classrooms, they influence their learners either in a positive or negative way and their main goal is to create a friendly and supportive atmosphere. On the other hand, their practical proficiency is not sufficient since the teacher can only exemplify pronunciation by his or her own speech performance, the learners are left to work out what is significant for them. Learners of a second language will not readily discern crucial phonological distinctions (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994: 67). On one hand, there are gifted learners that are able to pick up the pronunciation of the target language only by being exposed to it, but on the contrary many students, if not

majority, need as explicit explanations as possible to be able to acquire and imitate difficult sounds when speaking. On the whole students need a teacher who would draw their attention to how sounds should be pronounced and guide them in order to achieve intelligible pronunciation.

Factors influencing pronunciation learning

Apart from the mother tongue, other factors influence the teaching of pronunciation lessons which teachers need to pay attention to:

Age factor

It is widely believed that children learning second language before puberty, with adequate exposure to the target language can attain near native-like pronunciation. Kenworthy supports this assumption by claiming that if a person does not begin to learn a second language until adulthood, he/she will never have a native-like accent even as other aspects of their language such as syntax or vocabulary may be indistinguishable from those of native speakers (1990).

Based on the finding, it is important to start teaching pronunciation at the very beginning of second language learning since children can attain near native-like pronunciation with ease. The ease with which children acquire pronunciation can be explained by the critical period, which is biologically determined period of life during which maximal conditions for language acquisition exist (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996). Scovel and Krashen claim that it is nearly impossible for learners, who start learning foreign language after this critical period, to achieve natural pronunciation since the brain loses its plasticity (qtd. in Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin). Kenworthy outlines several researches concerning age related limits. In the first survey Oyama concludes that the younger the person learning a target language is the more native-like he/she will sound. In other words, it is very unlikely for adult learners to attain comprehensible pronunciation (qtd. in Kenworthy). Florez's findings claim that adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they will probably not achieve native-like pronunciation. Yet experiences with language learning and the ability to self-monitor, which come with the age, can offset these limitations to some degree (1998). This implies that attaining native-like pronunciation seems to be the only aspect of English language that can cause problems to adolescent and adult learners but the limitations can be compensated to some degree.

Motivation

Motivation is a very influential factor as far as pronunciation is concerned. Celce-Murcia and Goodwin opine that if the learner's motivation to improve is strong and if the investment of time and effort is genuine, there will be perceived improvement (qtd. in Sharkey 2003) and outlines several motivational factors that make learners work on their pronunciation to include:

- Learners want to improve themselves
- Learners want to become a part of the target language community
- Learners need their speech to be intelligible to their children's teachers
- Learners want to improve their employment prospective
- Learners want to improve their everyday communication skills.

Lukmani and Shuman (qtd. in Sharkey 2003), on the other hand, categorized learners' motivation for intelligibility into integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is defined as a desire to identify or become a member of the target language community while instrumental motivation is described as a matter of immediate desire, since the speakers are only orientated towards attaining intelligible pronunciation for their specific purposes. Therefore, integrative motivation seems to be more powerful and long lasting in comparison with instrumental motivation, since its main goal is not the interest in the target language society. Generally, motivation as a very important influential factor cannot be generalized since every learner has different views, however, identifying learners' motivation helps teachers to create a supportive classroom atmosphere as well as develop their motivation.

Learners' Attitude and Sense of Identity

In language teaching process, learners' attitude or sense of identity towards the target language can facilitate or hinder the acquisition of comprehensible articulation/pronunciation. Bolitho (qtd. in Sharkey) claims that although it is difficult for learners to find suitable balance between his/her mother tongue and the target language, since they have a kind of emotional and intellectual relationship with both languages, finding the suitable balance contributes to attaining comprehensible pronunciation. This was supported by Marques, who suggests that learners need to seek acculturation by which they adopt the new culture while maintaining the identity of the old one (qtd. in Sharkey 2003). In other words, if learners stick to socializing primarily within their community and stay attached to their native culture their ability to acquire intelligible pronunciation is very limited.

According to Florez, learners who unconsciously or consciously apply ethnicity markers into the target language will never achieve native-like pronunciation since their speech will become resistant to changes which help speakers to be intelligible. Kenworthy points out that the existence of a group affirmation factor of native speakers, suggesting that *personal commitment to a community, and a willingness to be identified with the members of that community, can be revealed through the way a person chooses to speak* (1990). The group affirmation factor can be transferred onto non-native speakers too, since their positive feelings towards the target language can contribute to the development of comprehensive pronunciation.

The Place of Mother Tongue in Teaching Pronunciation

It is widely recognized that the role of the mother tongue influences acquisition of the foreign language in children as adult learners are already accustomed to their speech in terms of the sound system of their mother tongue, therefore learning a second language may suffer from series of negative interferences. Florez (1998) says these interferences or negative transfer from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, intonation, and rhythm in the target language. Celce-Murcia and Goodwin (in Sharkey 2003) support the premises by claiming that the second language filters through the learner's first language facilitating acquisition when the target pronunciation features are similar and interfering with acquisition when the features are dissimilar or non-existent. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the phonology of their learners' mother tongue in order to help them to attain comprehensible pronunciation.

Fema (2003) was of the view that the major cause of the errors in English used by Nigerians can be attributed to the interference of mother tongue with the English language. He added that students often use their native language or mother tongue in all their interactions and English is only used within the four walls of the classrooms and ends there. Gilbert outlines several problems caused by the influence of the mother tongue. First, the inability to sound out letters, which occur at the beginning stage of learning a new language, makes it impossible for learners to pronounce sounds correctly. Another problem experienced by learners is wrong production of final consonants. In many languages, sounding final consonants are restricted and therefore, non-native speakers can have intelligibility problems. Teachers need to be aware of the phonology of their learners' mother tongue in order to help their students to attain comprehensible pronunciation.

Pronunciation as an inseparable aspect of the language has a great influence on successful communication but it is still overlooked by a large number of teachers, who rather pay attention to teaching lexis and grammar as they feel more certain

about them. In a study of causes of poor performance in English language among senior secondary students in Dutse metropolis of Jigawa State, 95% of the respondents confirmed that the influence of mother tongue is one of the main causes of poor performance in English language. In Nupe-speaking areas of Niger State of Nigeria, pronunciation of the dental fricative [θ]/ [ð] seems to be a problem to Nupe learners of English as second language. In the orthography, these sounds are presented by voiced and unvoiced 'th' as can be seen below.

Production of Voiced and Unvoiced Consonants “th”

The dental fricative consonants /ð/ and /θ/ represented in writing as “th” are produced when the tip of the tongue is placed between the upper and lower teeth and the soft palate is raised all the time. In other words, the sounds are made by putting the tongue between the teeth so that the blade is extended just forward of the teeth and the tongue is the active articulator (Pennington 1996). The consonant /ð/ is a voiced inter-dental fricative and the symbol of the Fricative is the Germanic letter eth /ð/, whereas /θ/ is a voiceless inter-dental fricative and its symbol is the Greek letter theta /θ/ (Pennington 1996). The following figure shows how the sounds are produced.

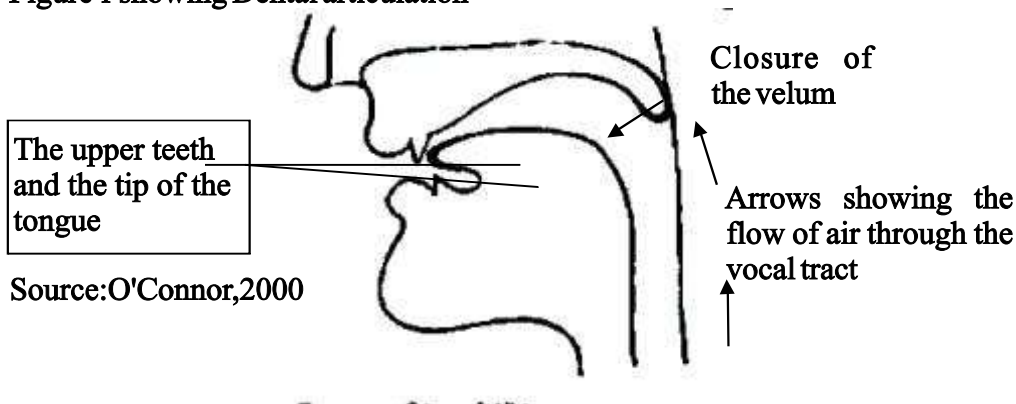
Dental Fricatives: [θ][ð]

The articulators for these sounds are the teeth and the tongue. They are formed with friction created by the flow of air passing through the narrow passage between the teeth and the tongue. Dental fricatives occur in English but do not occur in Nupe so they are frequently mispronounced by Nupe learners and users of English as second language. The following are examples of words where the sounds in question occur.

ð/: The-Then-There-Therefore-That-This

/θ/: Thank-Than-Thick-Thief-Think-Thin

Figure 1 showing Dental articulation



These sounds are pronounced just as other fricatives which have a very close place of articulation e.g. voiced /ð/ is often pronounced as /d/, /z/ or /dz/ and voiceless /θ/ usually becomes /t/, /s/ or /f/. Another important aspect of these sounds is that the consonants belong to a group of phonemes which can change the meaning of a word when mispronounced e.g. when the word think is not pronounced as /θɪŋk/ but as /sɪŋk/ students' intelligibility is disrupted completely. Teachers therefore need to focus on the explanation of how to produce them. The most important part of teaching-learning process is to highlight how the phonemes are pronounced.

Kelly (2002) suggests that teachers should ask students to put the front of their tongue against the back of their teeth so that the air passes through as they breathe out and that they should not use their voices. Hold the sound and, add the voice. With dental sounds, just use the tongue in place of the lower teeth. One can start by biting the tongue slightly with the upper teeth, and then blow out the air as with /z/ or /s/. Using the tongue makes the dental sounds quite a bit softer than /z/ or /s/.

Another technique that may help learners to pronounce the sounds is to put a finger against the lips and try to make the finger touch the tip of the tongue and then breathe out (Kelly, 2002). These two suggested ways of practice may help learners to acquire correct pronunciation of the consonants. Since according to Kenworthy, *people tend to hear the sounds of a new language in terms of the sounds of their mother tongue* (Kenworthy, 1990).

There are also several other activities that the teacher would use to facilitate the proper pronunciation of dental sounds among Nupe learners of English language. For instance, Doff (qtd. in Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994) outlines steps that are necessary to follow when new sounds are introduced to students such as:

The teacher says *the sound alone*.

- Says the sound in a word.
- Contrasts it with other sounds.
- Writes the sound on the board.
- Explains how to make the sound.
- Get students to repeat the sound in chorus.
- Get individual students to repeat the sound.

Kenworthy (1990) adds that when introducing new sounds, students need to hear them together with familiar sounds occurring in their mother tongue.

Use of Minimal Pairs

Minimal pair is a type of oral drill in which a pair of words which differ in lexical meaning based on a difference in one of the sounds (Pennington 1996; Egwuogu, 2004). In general, the objective of minimal pairs is to make a contrastive environment where a pair of words differs by one phoneme e.g. *thin* and *sin*, the words differ by the initial consonant /θ/, as in the word *thin*, and /s/, as in the word *sin*. The teacher pronounces the sounds and describes briefly how to produce them. He then writes words containing the sounds and pronounces them for the learners to repeat after him. It is very important that the teacher pronounces correctly because whatever he says is what the learners will imitate. After all, it is said that the secret of language learning is imitation. The teacher can also make the learners to carry out the drills based on sex, groups, and rows or by dividing the class into two.

Voiced Minimal Pairs in Sentences

mouse mouth: What a sweet little mouse/mouth!

sum thumb: Is this *sum/thumb*

sick thick: It's very sick/thick.

sink think: He is sinking/thinking.

pass path: there is a mountain pass/path.

/f/ /θ/

first thirst: He has got a first/thirst.

fin thin: A fin/thin soup, please.

half hearth: I'd like a half/hearth.

/t/ /θ/

tree three: It's a big tree/three.

tanks thanks: The President sends his tanks/thanks.

sheet sheath: The knife was hidden in a sheet/sheath.

Voiceless /ð/ Minimal Pairs in Sentences

/d/ /ð/

Dan than: Smith is bigger Dan/than Jones.

day they: Day/They arrived.

dare there: Jim dares/there's his friend.

doze those: Doze/Those after lunch.

Ida either: I don't know her sister Ida/either.

/z/ /ð/

close clothes: The shop sign said “Closing/Clothing”.

breeze breathe: Breeze/Breathe means air moving.

boos booth: The boos/booth echoed loudly.

size scythe: That's a large size/scythe.

Modeling

According to Egwuogu (2004) modeling is related to oral drill because it involves the imitation of good models. It is a method that makes teaching to go through demonstrated examples. The model is required to be well grounded in the use of the sounds in question. The class pays attention and imitates him/her. Recorded material can also be used.

Use of Real Objects

Egwuogu, (2004) suggests that use of real objects such as dress, book, school bag etc. provide real experiences that are concrete for the learners to talk about. The teacher should make the materials available, provide the cue and allow the learners to speak about the objects. He jots down wrong pronunciations of 'th' sounds and corrects them later so as not to disturb concentration and flow of speech.

Use of Tongue Twisters

Tongue twisters are phrases or sentences that are difficult to pronounce because of the similar sound's occurrence. Machackova(2012) opines that tongue twisters concentrate on accurate production and help students to improve their pronunciation skills. They help the students to realize how important accurate pronunciation is through enjoyable activities. The following are examples of tongue twisters in sentences with the sounds under consideration. The thirty-three thieves thought that they thrilled the throne throughout Thursday.

There those thousand thinkers were thinking how did the other three thieves go through?

- Through three cheese trees three free fleas flew.
- While these fleas flew, frenzy breeze blew.
- Frenzy breeze made these three trees freeze.
- Frenzy trees made these trees' cheese freeze.
- That's what made these three free fleas sneeze.
- Thirty-three thirsty, thundering thorough bred thumped Mr. Thurber on Thursday.

- Three short sword sheaths.
- I thought, I thought of thinking of thanking you.
- Tom threw Tim three thumbtacks.
- Then this mother soothed and bathed the other although the other didn't want to be together.
- Not these things here but those things there.
- Room three hundred and thirty-three on the third-floor rents for thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents every third Thursday.
- Three free throws. Three free throws. Three free throws.

Implications for Nupe Teachers of English as Second Language

Kenworthy (1990) offers several roles a teacher can play in pronunciation learning process which can be helpful to Nupe teachers of English as second language. They include:

Helping Learners to Hear

The role of teachers is to help their students to perceive sounds that are often misperceived because of the false similarity in learners' mother tongue. Teachers need to check whether their learners are hearing sounds according to the appropriate categories and help them to develop new categories if necessary.

Helping Learners to Produce Sounds

In this situation teachers have to explain and guide the students on how to imitate and pronounce new sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue.

Providing Feedback to Learners

Teachers need to give the students accurate and constructive feedback about what they are doing, since they are not able to judge whether their pronunciation is comprehensible or not. Not providing students with feedback could mean that students make wrong assumptions about pronunciation.

Pointing out what is going on

As speaking is unconsciously controlled, students can miss important features of conversation, and therefore teachers should always highlight the key features.

Establishing Priorities

Learners themselves are aware that their pronunciation is in some ways different in comparison with native speakers, but what they are unaware of is whether it is relevant or not. Here, the teacher guides them to determine which features they should focus on and which ones they should not.

Devising Activities

When choosing the most suitable activities that offer the best opportunities for practice, teachers need to also take into consideration students' learning styles as the ingredients of their progress.

Assessing Progress

Assessing progress is not an easy task for any teacher but providing students with information about their progress is essential for further motivation. In conclusion, during the pronunciation teaching, teachers not only serve as guides, who help their students to form necessary categories, establish priorities but also need to provide their students with appropriate exercises and relevant feedback.

Students' Role

The students also have some roles to play as far as success in pronunciation teaching is concerned. The learners' primary roles are not only to pay attention to what they are doing in the classes or to be active participants of the learning process but also they need to be able to observe their progress. In other words, what all learners need to do is respond to the teacher so as to achieve progress. Thus, the ultimate success in pronunciation depends on how much effort the learner puts into it and whether the learner is willing to take responsibility for his or her own learning (Kenworthy 1990). Though, learners' willingness to be responsible for their own learning and to take action goes hand in hand with factors such as age, motivation, attitude and sense of identity that may influence learners' pronunciation learning.

Oral reading

In order not to only practice “th” sounds in isolation, reading texts containing both “th” consonants and other sounds can be given to students to familiarize them with the sounds. The following are example passages adopted from Machackova (2012).

Passage A

If you think you are safe from thievery, think again. Most thefts occur within three miles of the victim's home. People often venture into the streets without giving their valuables a second thought. They leave things out in the open, where thieves can easily spot them. Items worth thousands of dollars can be stolen in a tenth of a second. So be thoughtful. Only you can thwart this terrible crime. Watch your things carefully. Thieves do.

Passage B

Even though my father is a weatherman, he cannot predict with absolute certainty whether it will rain or not. Neither can the other people who work with

him. There is only a thirty per cent chance of rain, and the next thing you know, it's pouring. They predict snow, and there's nothing for another five days. Then, there's a blizzard. So rather than trust my father's weather forecasts, I use a more reasonable approach. I ask my mother.

The task of the learners in the passages above is to underline the words that contain the two problematic dental fricatives and learn to be familiar with their pronunciation.

Conclusion

The paper has highlighted one of the problem areas of Nupe learners of English as second language and has proffered different measures to reduce the impact of the problem so as to enhance learners' performance. The knowledge and ability to articulate and use the English sounds correctly are very vital in general academic achievement as the English language is the language of formal education in Nigeria as it cuts across schools curricular. It is therefore hoped that, further researches would dwell on areas of English language which constitute problems to L1 learners to ease the learning and teaching of, not only, English language but other subjects of curriculum for not only Nupe students but other learners of English as second language.

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