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## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND NYIMATLI LANGUAGE SOUNDS

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### Abstract

*This study was on the comparison of English and Nyimatli sound systems. Primary data were used to investigate the similarities and differences of the sound system of English and Nyimatli languages respectively. English language has enjoyed before this academic examination, comparison with other languages in terms of sound system (Awan, Basheer and Sheeraz, Maikanti, Udondata 2017). The fundamental technique of comparative linguistics, which is the comparative method used to carry out this task. The results of the study confirmed the differences and the similarities that exist between the two languages. The differences found were obviously the reasons for the pronunciation difficulties in speaking/learning English by Nyimatli learners and speakers of English in general.*

**Keywords:** Comparative Method, Language, Nyimatli, Pronunciation, Sound System

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### Introduction

Language teaching was promoted in subsequent centuries providing the framework for the main task of linguistic scholars, which was basically to study and understand the general principles upon which all languages are built and in doing so, teach the second language learners better. Language teaching is seen as an art and not a scientific process, because it requires some necessary understanding of principles governing peculiar languages and skills to carry out the task involved in impacting a particular aspect of language learning.

The study aimed to investigate and compare the phonological features of English language and Nyimatli language focusing on their respective sound systems and examine their similarities and differences between the two languages. Thus, the paper aim to enhance our understanding of cross-linguistic sound patterns which could contribute to the field of comparative linguistics. The researcher strongly felt that Nyimatli students learning English phonology need to be examined for English sounds that are absent in their native tongue. Identifying these will go a long way to solve the Nyimatli student's pronunciation problem. English is a colonial legacy in

Nigeria, and part of its function in the country, even after political independence in 1960, is that of being a language of education in schools. The Nyimatli is the original name for Tera people and thir language. The Tera community principally lies in the Northeastern Nigeria. The Nyimatli people have embraced western education as a result of their early contact with the missionaries. The investigation of the sound system of the language in comparison to the English language is therefore, not out of place. The Received Pronunciation variety of English, a variety used for teaching purposes in Nigerian schools has 44 sounds. While the Nyimatli has 54 sounds Tench (2007). The study investigated and observed secondary school students in Yamaltu-Deba Local Government Area of Gombe State, Nigeria; an area where Nyimatli/Tera language is mostly spoken.

A lot has been written on Tera or Nyimatli (Newman 1964, 1968, 1970, 1980); Odden (2005); International Phonetic Alphabet (Tench 2007) among others. No research exists to compare the sound systems of the Nyimatli language to that of English. There are challenges faced by Nyimatli students and by extension other users of the language in

the pronunciation of certain English sounds. These students suffered from Mother-Tongue interference whenever many of them are using the spoken form of English language. The study therefore sets out to address these gaps in Nyimatli study by doing a comparative study of the sounds from the two languages in order to gain insights into the linguistic impact and the cause for the potential difficulties encountered by the speakers in adapting to the communication norm and practice of the foreign language (English).

The aim of the study is to examine and compare the differences and similarities between English and Nyimatli language sound systems. The specific objectives of the study is to identify the differences and similarities in terms of the segmental sounds of the English and Nyimatli languages respectively and as well investigate the implication of the similarities and differences within the two languages under study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will adapt the comparative method in linguistics by Veliyeva Susanna Raipovna (2021). The comparative method in linguistics is chosen because it deals with the technique for studying the development of languages by performing a feature-by-feature comparison of two or more languages, and the current study sets out to address comparative study of the sounds of the two languages (Nyimatli/Tera and English) in order to gain insights into the linguistic impact and the cause for the potential difficulties encountered by the speakers in adapting to the communication norm and practice of the foreign language (English).

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Goal of English Language Teaching**

Following this point, Liu (2003) believes that the ultimate goal of English language teaching is to equip learners with the viable language for communication. This reasonably explains why the four macro language skills (listening,

speaking, reading and writing) fall into the two categories: vocal and written communication. Listening and speaking are the most important forms of vocal communication, whereas reading and writing are the most important forms of written communication.

Oyetunde (2013) explains further that “for a Nigerian child to be educated in the modern sense of the world, an all-round proficiency in English is a necessity.” Therefore, English at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels should be taught for communicative competence to enhance its effective use in performing communicative functions. He also averred that, mastery of the language of instruction is a pre-requisite for effective learning and success of education generally.

The English language, most probably due to its vantage position as the language of education in many countries of the world, has had its sound system compared with those of many languages of the world. Maikanti (2020) tried to find out the in spite differences between Hausa and English, the two languages do not share some phonological features, vowels in particular, in common. He found that they share some sounds in common. Oti-Owom (2021) did a contrastive study of the sound systems of English, Yoruba and Igbo. Apart from ascertaining their similarities and differences, he also tried to find out the influences of these languages on L2 teaching, learning and acquisition. At the end he provided solutions to where negative interference applies. Awan, Bashir and Sheeraz (2012) compared the phonetics of Saraki, a language widely used in many places within Pakistan and English. As native speakers of the Saraki language, the study claimed that earlier researches were wrought with gaps and problems. So, they compared the languages in terms of their segmental and supra-segmental phonological features.

### **The Historical Overview of Nyimatli**

It was acclaimed by the people that Nyimatli tribe migrated from Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula together with other tribes. They sojourned through the route of Lake Chad Basin down to Buma on the Hawul River that joined the Gongola River Valley. They moved northwards and left some of their kits and kin at other places on the way and settled at Shinga (Isioma, 2004). While some of them settled on the way during the journey, others proceeded in search for greener pasture for their livestock, farmland and possibly a habitable place to practice their cultural heritage. It was gathered that some Nyimatli groups dispersed along several routes; some moved eastwards to Wade, some northwards to establish Bage, Kwali, Gwani, Kwami, Liji, Kwadon, Difa, Kalshingi, Lubo and Dokho, while some moved southwards to establish Deba, Hina, Kurba, Jagali, Kinafa, Zambuk, Panda and Panta to settle at different places of their choice.

A historical finding shows that Nyimatli people first stayed at Lake Chad Basin and prior to the encroachment of the Sahara Desert. This area was a melting-pot of all the ethnic groups that migrated from Yemen. It was conducive and habitual for human survival. The migration was more associated with political instability as well as ecological changes encountered within the Lake than agriculture (traditional rulers of Deba emirate council explains).

History has it that, when some Nyimatli tribes already mentioned came to the mountain, some of them climbed the mountain via a cave to ascertain its safety. After they inspected the cave, they invited others to enter which means 'Vima' in Nyimatli language and that became the name of the Hill 'Dleng Vima' meaning Mountain Enter. With the coming of other tribes, notably, the Hausas and other tribes to the land, they found it difficult to pronounce the sound 'v' and therefore substituted it with /b/. That is why it is now called Bima rather than Vima (Isioma, 2004).

Their movement to these areas dated back to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century living as separate entities having no overlord chief among the Nyimatli groups. Later on, among the Nyimatli groups that went to the Bima Hill were three brothers who later became the chiefs of Kurba, Njeba (Deba), and Ghuna (Hina) and they are now considered as the Head towns. The traditional ruler of Deba emirate council explains that the words 'Ghuna' and 'Njeba' are Nyimatli words. They were changed to 'Hina' and 'Deba' respectively due to the pronunciation problem faced by the colonialists and other tribes in the land.

### **The Problems Encountered by Nyimatli Secondary School Students**

In senior secondary schools all over Nigeria, use of English is inevitable throughout the three years period of study. Upon all that, the teachers of English language in secondary schools were yet to evolve. As it is ascertained by Oyetunde (2013) that most teachers neither put into practice what is expected of them, nor demands of their classrooms. He also admits that teachers were yet to evolve a standard method of teaching English.

A myriad of variables affects the way in which two or more people verbally communicate. Elements such as the social distance between interlocutors (e.g., formal vs. informal relationships), the subject matter under discussion (e.g., having or not having knowledge of a given topic), and the context of the situation (e.g., face-to-face discussions in a language classroom, all affect the ways in which oral discourse begins, develops, and comes to a close. These components, when taken together, indicate that speaking in one's first language is a complicated, multifaceted task Nguyen Warren and Fehring (2014).

Absence of books written in mother tongue contributed to the problems of Nyimatli student learning English as it is averred by Snyder (2014). That, this is the condition of



having no enough text books, pronunciation dictionaries and dictionaries of English language in the mother tongue that are needed to accommodate the needs of the learners. Although one of the strategies in implementing effective teaching and learning is the improvisation of instructional materials written in the target language and in mother tongue, still teachers need books that are accurate and reliable.

Absence of books written in first language affects the teaching specifically when translating since their pupils are speakers of different languages. Books are one of the most needed materials in the learning process of the pupils. Teaching and learning cannot be effective without adequate and relevant use of instructional materials. Lack of vocabulary is considered to be the dearth of words to use when delivering a message or information. There is no wide range of the words or phrases used in discussing the lesson. Therefore, it is considered as one of the problems being encountered by the teachers. And not all pupils really understand English, although there are some who can but have low level of understanding of the language, Snyder (2014).

Lack of training and seminars for teachers regularly and academic support from the specialist on various issues of English language teaching is also required. Pupils are having a hard time because it is very evident that the teachers are not prepared and do not undergone any training regarding what they are assigned to teach the English language learners as a new and homogenous population. Actually ELLs are a highly heterogeneous and complex group of students, with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) as presented by Linquanti and Cook (2013). Most of the ELL students come from homes in which English is not spoken, others have been exposed to or use multiple languages. Some are stigmatised for speaking English. Some

feel capable in school while others are alienated from schooling.

### **English versus Nyimatli Sounds**

There are about 6000 languages in the world today. Almost certainly, no two of them have the same sound structure: they vary widely in the number of consonants and vowels they have, in their use of tonal contrasts, in their stress patterns, in the shape of their syllables, and so on. At the same time, all these languages show striking similarities in the way they structure their sound systems. Phonology is a thriving field of linguistic research that strives to understand the structure behind these systems, Gussenhoven and Jacobs (2011).

Vowel sounds are sounds that in their pronunciation or production there is a free flow of air from the lungs. The air stream comes out from the lungs without obstruction from the organs of speech. The position of the jaw in producing the sounds could either be close, open, partially close or partially open, in some cases ghlotalised. Whereas, consonant sounds are sounds that are obstructed by the organs of speech during production. The definitions of vowels and consonant sounds could be applicable to the sounds of the two languages (English and Nyimatli) in comparison Longman (2007).

The English vowel sounds are twenty, pure vowels and diphthongs. While Nyimatli vowel sounds are nine both pure vowels and diphthongs. That is, 12 pure vowels in English language and 6 in Nyimatli language Isioma, (2004). In which some of the pure vowels are short while some are long. A vowel sound is a sound that has a free flow of air during its production. A diphthong refers to a vowel that has double sounds, one quality of a vowel sound gliding into another quality of a vowel in their production. They change their quality in the process of their production such as: /ei/, /ai/, /au/ among others. The table in (Appendix: 5) shows that there are eight diphthongs in English alphabet and three in

Nyimatli alphabet Isioma (2004). Furthermore, while English language has 24 consonant sounds, Nyimatli has 33 consonants. Nyimatli is a tonal language, distinguishing high, mid and low tone. Tone is not indicated orthographically since no minimal trios exist; minimal pairs can be distinguished by context (Tench, 2007).

### Methodology

This research design is qualitative. The research instrument used for data collection were Primary and secondary sources, where the sound system of the two languages were sourced through literatures and interview via use of Language Achievement Test (LAT) treatment and control for the test; there were

two sets of multiple choice questions were given for pretest and post-test. The researcher considered the missing sounds of English in Nyimatli sounds in the choice of the words to be used in the language achievement test items.

### Results/Findings

**Research Question One:** What are the similarities and differences between English and Nyimatli sounds systems?

In comparison, based on the literature reviewed, English and Nyimatli consonants have similarities and differences of sounds as presented in the Table below

**A Table Comparing English and Nyimatli Sound Symbols**

Consonants		Vowels		Diphthongs	
English - Nyimatli		English - Nyimatli		English - Nyimatli	
/p/	/b/	/i/	/a/	/ei/	/ai/
/b/	/b/	/i:/	/e/	/ɔi/	/au/
/t/	/dʒ/	/e/	/i/	/ai/	/ɔi/
/d/	/d'/	/æ/	/ɔ/	/au/	
/f/	/c/	/u/	/u/	/eə/	
/g/	/d/	/u:/	/u/	/iə/	
/k/	/dl/	/a:/		/uə/	
/tʃ/	/d'y/	/ɜ:/		/əu/	
/l/	/f/	/ɔ:/			
/m/	/g/	/ɔ/			
/n/	/gh/	/ʌ/			
/ŋ/	/k/	/ə/			
/s/	/kh				
/ʃ/	/kw/				
/v/	/l/				
/w/	/m/				
/dʒ/	/mb/				
/ʒ/	/n/				
/θ/	/n/				
/h/	/ng/				
/j/	/ny/				
/x/	/p/				
/r/	/r/				
/z/	/s/				
	/f/				
	/t/				
	/tl/				
	/v/				

/w/  
 /z/  
 /zh/  
 /q/  
 /j/

A vowel sound is a sound that has a free flow of air during its production. It is shown in the table above that English vowel sounds are twenty; pure vowels and diphthongs. In contrast, the Nyimatli vowel sounds are nine both pure vowels and diphthongs. The pure vowels are 12 for English language and 6 pure for Nyimatli language, in which some of the pure vowels are short while some are long. A vowel sound is a sound that has a free flow of air during its production.

A diphthong refers to a vowel that has double sounds, one quality of a vowel sound gliding in to another quality of a vowel in their production. They change their quality in the process of their production such as: /ei/, /ai/, /au/ etc. The table shows that there are eight diphthongs in English alphabet and three in Nyimatli alphabet. Furthermore, while English language has 24 consonant sounds, Nyimatli has 33 consonants. It is also indicated that there are similarities of 5 pure vowels ( /i/, /e/, /u/, a:/ and / ɔ/ ) and differences of 8, one ( /ʊ/ ) from Nyimatli and 7 ( /u:/, /i:/, /ɜ:/, /æ/, /ɔ:/, /ʌ/ and /ə/ from English.

**Research Question Two:** What are the implications of the similarities and the differences?

Our investigation found that all the secondary students who were the research subjects on this phenomenon find it difficult to pronounce some English words correctly. This inability is attributed to the phonetic reality that the two languages do not share the same sounds but only a certain number of sounds. In fact, the Nyimatli has more speech sounds than the variety of English used in Nigeria for instructional purposes. Consequently, the students who are speakers of Nyimalti and users of English found some

sounds in the pronunciation of words are used interchangeably with the familiar sounds in Nyimalti.

### Discussion

In comparison, based on the literature reviewed, English and Nyimatli consonants have some similar letters and differences as presented in Table 2. It is shown in table that English vowel sounds are twenty, pure vowels and diphthongs. While Nyimatli vowel sounds are nine both pure vowels and diphthongs; 12 pure vowels of English language and 6 in Nyimatli language. In which some of the pure vowels are short while some are long. The table shows that there are eight diphthongs in English alphabet and three in Nyimatli alphabet. Furthermore, while English language has 24 consonant sounds, Nyimatli has 33 consonants. It is also indicated that there are similarities of 5 pure vowels ( /i/, /e/, /u/, a:/ and / ɔ/ ) and differences of 8, one ( /ʊ/ ) from Nyimatli and 7 ( /u:/, /i:/, /ɜ:/, /æ/, /ɔ:/, /ʌ/ and /ə/ from English.

### Conclusion

This study focused on the comparative analysis of English and Nyimatli languages and the difficulties encountered with the pronunciation and use of spoken English among Nyimatli students. It is inferred that the pronunciation difficulties in producing some sounds in English words by Nyimatli students is as a result of the differences that manifest between the two languages.

### Recommendation(s)

This study is restricted to 'A comparative analysis of Nyimatli language and that of English language'. Moreover, only secondary school students at Gombe, Yamaltu Deba Local Government Area were observed. The researchers suggest that similar study should

be replicated using wider areas and LGAs which could be better representative and more understanding for scholarly comparative analysis of implications in teaching English phonology among language learners of English. Teachers of English need to be linguist and/ or polyglot in order to address the needs of the pupils. This makes their learning interactive and meaningful.

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