

# Contrastive Analysis of English Language and Igbomina Dialect Consonant Phonemes: A Panacea for Interference

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## Abstract

*Most Igbomina speakers have problems with pronouncing some English consonant phonemes correctly. This makes intelligibility difficult, especially when communicating with English L1 speakers. This paper, therefore, aims at showing the consonant sounds that are not common to the English language and Igbomina dialect of the Yoruba language. This is aimed at assisting oral English teachers of Igbomina speakers to prepare appropriate instructional materials and teaching methodology to help such Igbomina speakers overcome their pronunciation problems such that they can be understood better by English L1 speakers. The SIL Comparative African Wordlist (SILCAWL) was used in collecting data in Igbomina dialect. It was observed from the data collected that Igbomina dialect has lesser number of consonant phonemes than the Yoruba language which also has lesser number than English. These alien consonants are the ones many of the users, especially the adults, find difficult to pronounce correctly no matter how hard they try. It is suggested that there would be solution to such problems if adequate preparations are made by the oral English language teachers before interacting with the Igbomina learners of English. This will make for mutual intelligibility between Igbomina speakers and English-native speakers, especially in this dispensation of globalization.*

*Keywords:* consonants, contrastive, dialect, intelligibility, phonology

## Introduction

English, the official language of Nigeria, has a very high premium placed on it. It is the language of education, trade, social integration and status. English is a major tool a job seeker must possess; it is the major medium for interethnic communication and it is needed to communicate with foreigners. Without a good pass in the language, the student's progress and the worker's upward movement is hindered. This is why it is important to have a good grasp of English. However, many users of this "all-important" language have difficulties with various aspects—phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics sometimes caused by the differences in the structures of the users' L1 and the English language.

The basis of this paper is on the need to help users; especially Igbomina dialect speakers, have a good grasp of the rudiments of English. Igbomina is one of the dialects of Yoruba language spoken in parts of Kwara, Osun and Ekiti states

of Nigeria, with a population of above half a million (Bamgbade, 2002). The focus here is on the consonant sounds which could constitute some sore points for users. In other words, the paper is restricted to the study of the phonemics (phonetics and phonology) of the two speech forms. Phonetics is the branch of linguistics that studies the sound systems of human languages, while phonology is the classification of the sounds within particular language systems. Phonetics specializes in the study of sounds, how they are pronounced (articulatory), how they sound to others and are perceived by them (auditory). The objective of this research is to find out how the Igbomina speaker pronounces and perceives the sounds of English, identify challenges in the process, and proffer solutions. This is achieved by contrasting the sound system of the Igbomina dialect with that of English.

Contrastive linguistics study can be carried out at various language-study levels: phonology, morphology, and syntax. The focus of comparison in this paper is phonology as it concerns a thorough knowledge of the consonant systems of the English language and the Igbomina dialect of Yoruba language. The knowledge of phonology allows us to know what sounds or sequences of sounds are permissible in a language and those sounds that are significant in the language under study. Phonology is the branch of linguistics which studies the systems and patterns of speech sounds—the way sounds form systems and patterns in languages (Sotiloye 1999:35). Fromkin and Rodman (1978: 101) also define phonology as the study of sound patterns found in human language; it is also the term used to refer to the kind of knowledge that speakers have about the sound patterns of their particular language. It is assumed that every speaker has the knowledge of the phonology of his language, unknowingly to him.

Scholars have concentrated more on linguistic study of languages than on dialects. It is therefore perceived that studies on various dialects would also be necessary to help the speakers of such dialects. It is of note that there are more speakers of various dialects than the standard form of Yoruba language. Dialects are found to perform basic function of communication, just as the standard form. More so, users of both the standard Yoruba and the dialects run the same-school syllabus and write the same examination.

In this paper, a study of the English language and Igbomina dialect is made based on the proven fact that the study of foreign and native languages provides educational guide in foreign-language learning. Moreover, studies in the area of bilingualism, and languages in contact have made it clear that distortions in the speeches of bilinguals are attributable to differences in the systems of the languages involved (Weinreich 1953; Lado 1957). Features of the languages are compared and contrasted to bring out areas of similarities and differences. This type of study would assist the teacher in concentrating effort on the differences while building on the similarities in which learners are more

comfortable. The focus of the paper on the sounds of English and those of the Igbomina dialect will aid performance of students in oral examinations and in their communication with English-native speakers.

### **Contrastive Analysis (CA)**

The term “contrastive study” which had earlier been called “contrastive linguistics” (CL) or comparative studies, is reported to have been coined by Whorf in 1941 (Fisiak 1981). This was an offshoot of the activities of linguists who were concerned with the relationship between the languages people came in contact with around World War II. The main concern of linguists then was to predict learning difficulties encountered by bilinguals on the basis of comparing the native language with the foreign language being learned. The belief was that, drawing attention to the similarities of the two languages in contact would make the learning process easier for learners. CL was also very useful at that time when linguists were preoccupied essentially with the comparison of language features for the purpose of establishing language families.

Contrastive analysis (CA), which was extensively used in the 1960s and 1970s, is the systematic study of a pair of languages. It is a subdiscipline of contrastive study and had its theoretical foundations in Robert Lado’s (1957) contrastive analysis hypothesis. (Lado, as a Spanish speaker learning the English language, had a firsthand experience of languages in contact). The language learning theory rests on the assumption that patterns that can cause difficulty in learning, and those that would not, can be learned with the native language and culture of the learner. The learner who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some of its features very easy and others extremely difficult. The elements similar to his native language will be simple for him while those that are different will be difficult.

Contrastive analysis, according to Banathay (1969), is a process by which two languages are compared with the purpose of identifying the differences in their linguistic systems. The knowledge of these differences would also help provide better description and better teaching materials for language learners. Banjo (2000) observes that the desire to evolve a more effective methodology of language teaching was the motivation for Lado’s 1957 book, *Linguistics across Cultures*. Banjo further notes that the view of contrastive linguistics is that, since a second language is learned in the context of the mother tongue (and subsequent languages in the context of all previously acquired and learned languages), a good methodology must be based on a careful examination of the grammars of the mother tongue and the target language. The hypothesis had been criticized for its inability to distinguish between language difficulty and learner’s error as well as its assumption that errors derive exclusively from first-language interference, especially in relation to morphology, syntax, lexis and dis-

course. The model, however, works perfectly in predicting phonological error (Lennon 2008, Rustipa 2011).

After individual studies of the languages involved, CA would identify the common and different sounds, and then predict areas of difficulty and ease in language teaching and learning. This would help L2 instructors to adequately prepare the needful materials for effective teaching and learning. As pointed out by Carroll (1965), the acquired first-language habits tend to modify the learning of L2 habits. The L1 speaker automatically has no problems with the sounds which are common to those of his L2 and he tends to substitute those alien sounds for those in his language or dialect.

Human beings are capable of producing any sound even those not attested in their own mother tongues, but not all sounds are used in every language and the arrangement of these sounds differ from language to language and even dialect to dialect. This is why the number of sounds in languages differs. Some dialects have more number of sounds than their mother language or standard form and others have lesser number. For instance, Owe (spoken in the Ijumu area of Kogi) and Igbomina are dialects of Yoruba language. Owe has more consonant sounds (19) than standard Yoruba (18), whereas Igbomina has fewer (17).

### Consonant Sounds

Our focus is on consonants, which are sounds produced with little or no obstruction/or closure to the airstream, with particular reference to the English language and Igbomina dialect consonants below.

#### The contrastive study

Below are the consonant charts of both Igbomina dialect and English. This is done for easy accessibility during discourse.

**Table 1: Igbomina consonant chart**

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t d			k g	kpgb	
Fricative		f	s					h
Affricate				dʒ				
Lateral			l					
Nasal	m		n					
Trill			r					
Approximant	w				j			

*Adapted from <http://phonphon.pbworks.com/w/page/16499746/IPA>*

**Table 2: English consonant chart**

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Lateral				l				
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Trill				r				
Approximant	w					j		

*Adapted from <http://phonphon.pbworks.com/w/page/16499746/IPA>*

The consonant charts, diagrams 1 and 2 of Igbomina dialect and English above, reveal 15 common consonants: /b, t, d, k, g, f, s, dʒ, m, n, h, l, r, w, j/, English has nine: /p, v, z, θ, ð, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, ŋ/, while Igbomina boasts of two, /kp, gb/, that are peculiar to it. We shall examine them systematically.

**The plosives/p, b, t, d, k, g, kp, gb/**

These are sounds made by a complete obstruction of the airflow and a sudden release of the relevant articulators. The voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ is not attested in Igbomina dialect while the labiovelar plosives /kp, gb/ which are attested in Igbomina dialect are not native to English. The implication of this is that Igbomina speakers learning English would find it difficult to pronounce the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/. The tendency is for such a learner to want to substitute this sound with the voiceless labiovelar plosive /kp/ which may result in mutual unintelligibility. For instance, an Igbomina speaker would pronounce /p/ in word initial position of the following English words as follows:

**Data 1**

/pət/	as	/kpət/	“pot”
/preər/	as	/kpreya/	“prayer”
/pɑ:lər/	as	/kpaɔ/	“parlor”
/pɪlər/	as	/kpɪla/	“pilar”
/pətɪkjələr/	as	/kpatikula/	“particular”

*(Note that the vowel sounds are not of particular interest to us in this paper).*

The Igbomina speaker substitutes the sound /p/ which is alien to him with /kp/, which is present in his dialect. In some cases when the same sound appears in word-medial position, the Igbomina speaker pronounces it as voiceless labio-

dental fricative, /f/ as in /ka:penta:/ as /ka:ʃɪnnta/ “capenter.” This makes mutual intelligibility between him and an English L1 speaker difficult if not impossible, thereby defeating the purpose of communication. The Igbomina speaker has no problem with other English plosives since they are attested in his dialect as revealed in data 2 below. The examples show that the plosives are attested in English and Igbomina dialect in word-initial and -medial positions. What the Igbomina speaker does is to transfer the already acquired knowledge to his L2.

**Data 2:**

	<b>English</b>	<b>Igbomina</b>	
/b/→	bell	bẹ	“beg”
	borrow	bọ	“worship”
	dabble	ẹbọ	“sacrifice”
	robe	rọba	“rubber”
	bubble	elubọ	“yam flour”
/t/→	towel	takute	“trap”
	toilet	ta	“sell”
	football	itakun	“root”
	letter	mẹta	“three”
	lantern	atukpa	“lantern”
/k/→	calendar	ka	“count”
	key	kọkọrọ	“key”
	kettle	kabiyesi	king”
	anchor	ẹkun	“lion”
/g/→	girl	gaari	“cassava flakes”
	ghost	garawa	“bucket”
	eager	ẹgẹ	“cassava”
	hunger	ogi	“custard”

*(Note that Igbomina, like Yoruba, does not attest word-final consonants).*

**The fricatives /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/**

These sounds are produced with little or no obstruction to the airstream. There are nine fricative sounds /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/ in the English language, but there are only three, /f, s, h/ in Igbomina dialect. The Igbomina speaker does not have problems pronouncing /f, s, h/ in any position in the English word.

Here are some examples showing that they are attested in English and Igbomina dialect:

**Data 3**

	<b>English</b>	<b>Igbomina</b>	
/f/→	fine	feran	“like”
	fork	fa	“pull”
	father	fẹ	“wide”
	defend	ifẹ	“love”
	suffer	ẹfọn	“mosquito”
/s/→	spoon	sibi	“spoon”
	safe	sigá	“cigarette”
	such	asẹ	“sieve” (N)
	secure	sunkun	“to weep”
	speak	orisi	“type”
/h/→	high	halẹ	“threaten”
	height	iha	“side”
	has	ahere	“hut”
	behave	hun	“weave”

The tendency is that the Igbomina speaker, as depicted in the data below, is not likely to pronounce the missing fricatives /v, θ, ð, z, ʒ/ correctly since they are alien to him.

**Data 4**

English	Igbomina	
/veri/	/fəri/	very
/evri/	/ɛfri/	every
/frikeitiv/	/friketif/	fricative
/sevɪn/	/semiin/	seven
/gʌvnə/	/gomina/	governor
/θɪŋ/	/tin/	thing
/θɪŋk/	/tink/	think
/ðem/	/dɛm/	them
/ʌðə/	/ɔda/	other

English	Igbomina	
/ʃaut/	Saot	shout
/pɛrɪʃ/	/pɛris/	perish
/puʃ/	/pus/	push
/viʒn/	/fisɔn/	vision
/mɛʒə/	/mesɔ	measure
/plɛʒə/	/plesɔ	pleasure
/zip/	/sip/	zip
/zu:/	/su:/	zoo
/reizʌ/	/resɔ/	razor

The “problematic” six phonemes are reduced to four /f, t, d, s/ with /θ, ð/ represented as plosives /t, d/, and /z, ʒ, ʒ/ as /s/. Take note that, in intervocalic position, /v/ is realized as [m], a feature which is prominent even amongst the highly educated.

**The affricates /tʃ, dʒ/**

These are sounds produced with total blockage at the onset, like in the production of plosives, but their sudden release is made through a narrowed opening, as in the production of the fricative sounds. Diagrams 1 and 2 show that Igbomina attests only the voiced affricate, unlike the English language which features both the voiceless and voiced forms. This implies that the Igbomina speaker is not likely to be able to produce the voiceless affricate which is alien to him.

Below are some examples indicating the presence of the voiced affricate in English and Igbomina dialect:

**Data 5**

	English	Igbomina	
/dʒ/→	judge [dʒʌdʒ]	jijan [dʒijã]	“to argue”
	Joy [dʒɔi]	juwɔ [dʒuwɔ]	“to wave”
	adjourn [ədʒʌn]	ajá [adʒa]	“dog”
	reject [ri:dʒekt]	ejo [edʒɔ]	“case”
	germane [dʒəmein]	oju [odʒu]	“eye”
	village [vileidʒ]	jɛun [dʒɛũ]	“to eat”

/dʒ/which is common to both speech forms occurs in word-initial, -medial and -final positions in English but expectedly as in Yoruba language, only in word-initial and -medial positions in the Igbomina dialect. Due to the absence of the



voiceless affricate /tʃ/ in Igbomina, the Igbomina speaker would hypothetically pronounce:

<b>Data 6</b>		
[tʃʌtʃ]	as [sɔɔsi]	“church”
[bɛntʃ]	as [bɛnsi]	“bench”
[titʃə]	as [tisa]	“teacher”
[tʃɛk]	as [sɛɛki]	“check”
[tʃildrɪn]	as [sidrɛn]	“children”

These wrong pronunciations would result in mutual unintelligibility in conversation with an English L1 speaker. This is another sound that the oral English teacher taking Igbomina speakers needs to give attention to in the course of teaching.

### **The nasals /m, n, ŋ/**

These are sounds produced when there is velic opening so that air passes through the nose as the velum is lowered. It is discovered that only the bilabial and alveolar nasals are phonemic in Igbomina as it operates in Yoruba. The velar nasal/ŋ/manifests phonetically in the environment of velar stops [k, g]. It is therefore envisaged that Igbomina speaker, would not have problems pronouncing the sounds correctly, as found in English words.

### **The lateral/l/**

This sound is produced when the central portion of the oral cavity is blocked by the tongue such that air passes by the sides of the blade of the tongue. The only one found in both English and Igbomina is the voiced alveolar lateral, /l/. The oral English teacher may not have much to worry about in the pronunciation of the sound except when it is word-final in which case it is syllabic. This requires that the teacher has knowledge of the English syllable patterns.

### **The trill/r/**

This is produced with narrowed flow of air at the alveolar region. The sound, /r/ is common to both English and Igbomina and occurs in word-initial and -medial positions. The Igbomina L1 speaker would not have problems pronouncing the sound.

### **The approximants/w, j/**

These are sounds produced with partial closure at some point – the lips and velum for /w/, and the palate for /j/. The sounds occur in both speech forms and should not pose any problem.

## The Challenges

It can be adduced from the foregoing discussion that the Igbomina L1 learner of English would find the distinction between the voiceless and voiced labiodental fricatives /f, v/ problematic as these are pronounced as voiceless /f/; and its voiced one /v/ as /m/ in intervocalic positions. The voiced alveolar plosive, /d/ and the voiced labiodental fricative /ð/ are both pronounced as /d/, and the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ and the voiceless labiodental fricative /θ/ are both pronounced as /t/. Moreover, the voiceless and voiced palatal fricatives /ç, ʒ/, the voiceless and voiced alveolar fricatives /s, z/, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ are all pronounced as the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. Inability to distinctly pronounce five sounds would render mutual intelligibility between an Igbomina speaker and an English L1 speaker impossible, thus defeating the purpose of communication.

## Way out of the Challenges

The main use of language is for communication, which is possible by mutual intelligibility. We have been able to point out some consonant sounds which are alien to the Igbomina speaker of English which hinders him from fulfilling the primary use of language, mutual intelligibility. The area of difference is more in the fricatives as we have demonstrated above. It is therefore suggested that the oral English teacher pays extra attention to the teaching of these consonants which are alien to the Igbomina dialect English learner. The Oral English teacher would need diagrams such as those below to explain and practice pronouncing the problematic sounds in an interesting manner.

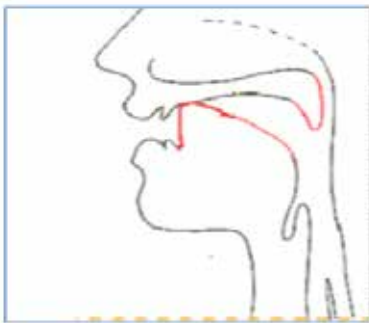


Fig. 3: /t, d/



Fig. 4: /θ, ð/

*Adapted from: [https://www2.leeward.hawaii.edu/hurley/Ling102web/mod3\\_speaking/3mod3.5.2\\_place.htm](https://www2.leeward.hawaii.edu/hurley/Ling102web/mod3_speaking/3mod3.5.2_place.htm)*

Diagram 3 shows the place of articulation of the sounds that are familiar to the Igbomina speaker while diagram 4 shows the place of articulation of sounds

that are alien to him. The oral English teacher would have to emphasize the difference in the places and manners of articulation of these two sets of sounds and then give many sample words, going from known to the unknown. He needs to encourage the learners to pronounce the sounds after him, and later alternatively as in the following minimal pairs:

**Data 7**

/tin/	tin	/θin/	thin
/klʌt/	clot	/klʌθ/	cloth
/dʌt/	dot	/dʌθ/	doth
/tæi/	tie	/θæi/	thigh

Diagrams 5 and 6 will be appropriate in teaching the next set of sounds /s, z/, paying attention to the voicing in /z/.

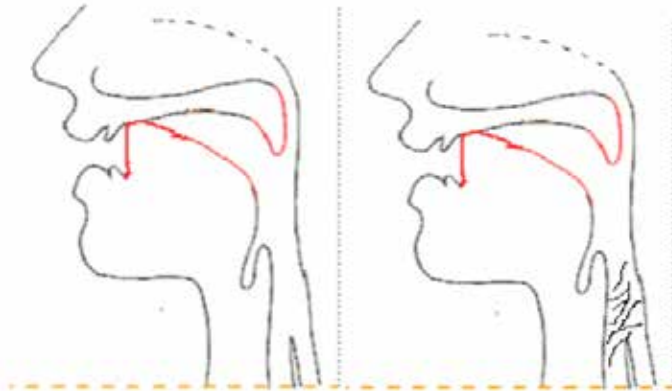


Fig. 5:/s/

Fig. 6:/z/

Adapted from: [https://www2.leeward.hawaii.edu/hurley/Ling102web/mod3\\_speaking/3mod3.5.2\\_place.htm](https://www2.leeward.hawaii.edu/hurley/Ling102web/mod3_speaking/3mod3.5.2_place.htm)

After the teacher has explained the diagrams showing the organs of production of the two sounds concerned, going from the familiar /s/ (voiceless alveolar fricative) to its voiced counterpart, he then finds sample words containing the two sounds; makes learners pronounce after him first and then on their own. Learners can be made to recognize a sound pronounced by the teacher or learners can be paired to alternately pronounce and recognize the sounds. This will

arouse the learner's interest to learn all the sounds they would have otherwise found difficult.

**Data 8**

/su:/'	sue	/zu:/'	zoo
/sil/'	seal	/zil/'	zeal
/sɪŋk/'	sink	/zɪŋk/'	zinc
/sɪp/'	sip	/zɪp/'	zip

Learner-friendly measures as advocated by Aduradola et al (2015) can be adopted in teaching the sounds. It must be mentioned that the oral English teacher needs numerous examples at various word positions (initial, medial and final). The teacher might need many examples in one position to practice with and later alternate two of the positions and later alternate the three positions. Furthermore, the teacher may need to test the perception of the learners by pronouncing some of these problematic sounds randomly and asking the learner to identify the right one. We believe that with rigorous practice, the Igbomina L1 learner of English would overcome his pronunciation problems and would be able to communicate better with a native speaker of English.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

After a contrastive analysis of the sounds of Igbomina dialect and English, it is established that the two speech forms do not manifest the same number of consonants. While the English language has (24) consonants, Igbomina has (17). The Igbomina speaker of English tends to substitute the missing sounds, especially the fricatives, with some other perceived to be similar. This results in errors in use and sometimes mutual intelligibility is disrupted. The Igbomina speaker cannot afford to be incompetent in English, which determines his upward movement in life. This study, therefore, recommends that the attention of the Igbomina speaker be drawn, as early as possible, to the English consonants which may prove a bit difficult for him to pronounce. He is also encouraged to engage in frequent practice which will help alleviate his challenges.

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