



Sound-letter Non-Correspondence Vis-a-vis Deviation in Spoken English among Secondary School Students in Nnewi Educational Zone

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Abstract

The English language occupies a prominent position in the nation's life. It is the language of education and by extension, the language of the classroom. Most of the subjects at the different levels of education in Nigeria are taught in English. Unfortunately, many students still perform poorly in spelling and pronunciation. The research tries to find out why students perform poorly in these aspects of spoken and written English. Three secondary schools in Nnewi North Educational zone were used for the study. Data were collected through an unobtrusive observation, spelling tests and an unstructured interview. Contrastive Analysis theory was used in the analysis of data. The findings from the study reveal that the problems were due to faulty learning, over generalization, poor foundation, lack of interest, mother tongue interference, fossilization, negative transfer and lack of motivation. The paper proffers solution on how to reduce students' problem of spelling and pronunciation errors in spoken and written English to the barest minimum.

Keywords: Interference, Language, Pronunciation, Spelling, Written.

1. Introduction

Language evolves as a result of man's need to interact and communicate with fellow humans in society. It is a means through which man socializes, actualizes, verbalizes and formulates his thoughts. Crystal (1987) clarifies the position when he says that our thinking is facilitated by language. Similarly, Okoh (2006) citing Okoh (1998) believes that language has permeated and pervaded virtually every aspect of man's life. Similarly, O' Grady *et al.* (2011) expatiate that language is not just part of us but it defines us. From the assertions, one would agree that language is an integral and basic component of man's life because through language, man is able to resolve problems that arise in human interactions/experiences. It is through language that we mirror ourselves and our society. Crystal (1987) puts it poignantly when he says that our use of language can tell our listeners or readers a great deal about ourselves. Still on the indispensable role of language in society, Wilkins (1982) comments that our entire elaborate social structure is mediated through language, and it is inconceivable that we could have constructed so complex a social interaction if we had not had spoken and, latterly, written language at our disposal.

Different scholars have defined language from different viewpoints. McArthur (1996) sees language as a system of communication which uses structured vocal sounds and can be embodied in other media such as writing, print and physical signs. In like manner, Lyons (1981) quoting Hall (1968) remarks that language is 'the institution whereby human beings communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used auditory arbitrary symbols'. On his part, Lyons (1981) holds that language is 'a pure human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. In all, language can be seen as an organized system of symbols through which humans communicate.

Language plays both general and specific functions to man. These functions range from communicating our feelings and emotions; maintaining positive relationship such as phatic communication; giving pleasures as in aesthetics in poetry; controlling of reality such as in ideational communication and to organizing our thoughts. Yule (2002) groups the functions of language into two. According to him, language plays interactional and transactional functions. The interactional role of language has to do with how humans use language to interact with each other, socially or emotionally and how they indicate friendliness, cooperation, hostility, annoyance, pain or pleasure. By transactional function, Yule sees language in terms of situations where humans use their linguistic abilities to communicate knowledge, skills and information.

1.1. The Status of English in Nigeria

The English language is the linguistic mistress of most countries in the world including Nigeria. James (1998) records that apart from the 350–450 million native speakers that about 800 million people speak it as a foreign

language. In addition to the English language, Nigerians are also used to their indigenous languages which serve their daily communicative needs even before the advent of the English language. The avalanche of languages and dialects which exist in Nigeria have been put at different figures. Jowitt (1991) puts the estimates of indigenous languages at two hundred (200) to over four hundred (400). He equally cites Hansford et al. (1976) who put the estimate of indigenous languages in Nigeria at three hundred and ninety five (395). They further maintain that the number is tentative, though it covers the distinct languages and not the dialects. The multilingual nature of Nigeria has made it possible that a neutral and a foreign language which has no ethnic affinity with any of the ethnic groups should be adopted as a lingua franca in order to maintain national stability. In the words of Emenyonu and Nta (1990) cited in Osuafor (2002) 'The choice of a national language has become a more political issue than a linguistic issue. Ethnic groups in Nigeria interpret the language as the country's lingua franca as a way of conferring political domination on that particular ethnic group'.

Obviously, the choice of English doused the tension of choosing a national language from the indigenous languages. It acts as a bridge between the diverse languages and cultures in Nigeria. Osuafor (2002) citing Ogu (1992) presents the point succinctly in these words: 'The English language brought into one linguistic umbrella people of diverse languages and ethnic groups... people found it the unobtainable linguistic unity that they so much craved for. Its non-ethnic nature provided them with a means of peaceful co-existence and communication'. No Nigerian language would have been suitable for national integration, co existence and unity than the English language. It has removed the fear of domination and distrust among the ethnic groups.

As a lingua franca, English serves as the language of education, administration, technology, media, commerce and trade. It is the language of international communication. As the language of education, it is the language used at all levels of education, and also, the medium of instruction for all subjects. It is considered a compulsory subject and a basic requirement for admission to any higher institution in Nigeria.

Despite the high-ranking and revered position that English occupies in Nigeria, many students still perform poorly in the spoken and written aspects of the language. The reason has been attributed mainly to mother tongue interference. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) capture the situation clearly when they write that interference from the mother tongue is unmistakably a major source of difficulty in second language learning. It is evident that adults learn the target language against an already existing language of communication in which they have some degree of competence in. Oftentimes, they try to transfer the deep-rooted features of the native language to the target language which affects the effective mastery of the target language especially in terms of pronunciations. The problem is worse in a situation where there is a wide gap in the structure of the native language and the target language. Lado (1957) expresses the position clearly when he writes, 'We assume the student who comes in contact with foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult'. In the same vein, Dulay et al. (1982) hold that interferences are 'those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of languages in contact'. So, when bilinguals imbibe new language structures from what they are already used to, oftentimes, the two languages get in the way of each other in actual language use. The situation hinders the effective mastery of the new language. On the other hand, Brown (1980) believes that second language learning may likely occur when there is similarity between the items to be learned and already known items than in the case of learning entirely new items. He adduces that the problem second language learners encounter is as a result of the inconsistencies in the second language itself. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) agree that the English language like other languages has the problem of illogicality in language issues. They go further to say that 'a number of phonological rules in English are apparently broken almost immediately they are made' at the morphological, syntactical and semantic levels of language analysis.

There is no gain in saying that in most native languages in Nigeria, words are pronounced exactly the way they are spelt. In Igbo language, for example, words are pronounced almost exactly the way they are spelt. If we consider these words: *aka* (hand) *imi* (nose), *nwa* (child), *ala* (land) *nri* (food), *bia* (come) *ego* (money), *ose* (pepper), *jee* (go) to mention but a few. This shows that there is a correlation between most words, their pronunciations and their spellings. Again, while Nigerian languages are syllable-timed, the English language is stress-timed. Similarly, the English language allows a cluster of consonants while the indigenous languages like Igbo do not allow a cluster of consonants. More so, in the English language, the pronunciations of words, their spellings and realizations do not always correspond. If we consider words like *quay* [ki:], *choir* [kwaiə], *quasi* [kweszi], *echo* [ekəu], *suite* [swi:t], *chaos* [keɪs], *daughter* [dɔ:tə], *bouquet* [bu:keɪ], *chasm* [kæzəm], *league* [li:g], *island* [aɪlənd], *mosque* [mɒsk], *tongue* [tʌŋ] and many others, we observe that they are pronounced differently from their spellings. The difference in the structure of the native language and the target language obviously creates a problem for learners of English as a second language especially in the areas of spellings and pronunciations. On this, Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) have this to say:

It is, thus, essential that we devote enough time to the study of the pronunciation of English. This is where proficient teachers of English are seen as prerequisites. Having been properly trained in the area of linguistic sciences and with some knowledge of the learner's mother tongue, they can detect the areas of divergence and convergence in both sound systems of the target language and the native language. The recognition of a problem, we know, is the first step towards its elimination.

1.2. Speech and Writing

While speech is the sound that we hear, writing is the mark represented on paper. O'Connor (2004) expresses the idea vividly when he says that writing consists of marks on paper which makes no noise and is taken in by the eye, whilst speaking is an organized sound taken in by the ear. Similarly, Crystal (1987) makes a distinction between speech and writing. According to him, speech and writing contrast in physical form. He goes further to say that speech uses 'phonic substance', typically in the form of air-pressure movements while writing uses 'graphic substance,' typically in the form of marks on a surface. Furthermore, Crystal agrees that speech is time-bound,

dynamic and transient because both the speaker are present but writing is space-bound, static and permanent because the producer is distant from the recipient and, often, may not even know who the recipient is. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) in their contributions, agree that spoken English differs markedly from the written form. According to them, spoken English is concerned with organized sounds, words, and sentences of a given language while writing deals with inscriptions on paper. For O' Grady *et al.* (2011) writing is the symbolic representation of language by graphic signs or symbols. Furthermore, they add that the basic difference between speech and writing is that spoken language is acquired without specific formal instruction whereas writing must be taught and learned through deliberate effort. On the contrary, their position that the spoken form is not learnt may be acceptable only in the case of native speakers. For learners of English as a second language, both the spoken and written forms are learnt through formal instruction. Also, they observe that most languages of the world do not have writing tradition even up until today. Yule (2002) corroborates their position. He remarks that a very large number of languages found in the world today are used only in the spoken form and do not have the written form. Besides, Uzoezie (1992) holds the view that phoneticians have battled for centuries with the problem of representing speech faithfully in a written form. He goes further to say that the problem has persisted until 1888 when the International Phonetic Alphabet which is based on Roman Script tried to solve the problem. Furthermore, the problem of representing speech sounds with non-phonetic symbols has continued to pose problems to second language learners of English. He further expatiates that English has only twenty-six letters of the alphabet (a-z) which are represented by forty-four sounds. He avers that the disparity between the number of sounds and the letters of the alphabet used in representing them has always constituted problems to learners of English as a second language.

From the foregoing, it is evidently clear that the inconsistency between letters and sounds in English affects learners of English in a second language situation. The inconsistency in the sound system of English often creates the irregularity in the spellings of words. For instance, in English a particular sound may represent different letters. For example, the sound /u/ can be represented differently in different words: for example,

o in woman
oo in food
ou in could

Similarly, a particular letter(s) may be represented by different sounds. For example, the letter c or cc can be represented by /k/ as in come, cut, cake, occasion, occur, accord and /s/ as in the word, cease. Also, letter e may be represented by /i/ as in evolve and /e/ as in edit. Furthermore, two letters may be represented by one sound, for example, the words, shepherd and shoe. The underlined letters are represented by just one sound /ʃ/. Also, in the word, laugh, letters g and h are represented by /f/. Equally, g and h in words like ghost, ghetto and aghast are represented by /g/. More so, in English, one alphabet can be represented by two sounds, for example, the letter u in the word, university is represented by /ju:/. Finally, there are situations where some letters are silent in some words. Examples include: honorable, crumb, spaghetti, knot, rhyme, hour, palm, column, yolk and listen.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the efforts made by teachers to teach students in various secondary schools how to spell and pronounce English words correctly, many students still find it difficult to spell and pronounce most words correctly. The students' inability to master the spellings and pronunciations of most words which students at their level should be able to spell and pronounce affect their academic performances and effective use of the English language. Although some scholars have tried to study the errors students commit in writing and pronunciation in other educational zones, much attention has not been paid to the problem in Nnewi North Educational Zone of Anambra State. The paper, therefore, tries to investigate the problem of sound-letter non-correspondence vis-a- vis deviation in spoken English among secondary school students in Nnewi Educational Zone of Anambra State.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the work is Contrastive Analysis Theory. It is one of the oldest theories used in analysing the problems of second language teaching and learning. The theory is based on the assumption that second language learners are bound to encounter problems in learning a second language due to the differences between the structure of the native language and the target language. The areas of difficulty may be contrastive speech sounds, morpho-syntactic categories, word order, lexis, lexical relations, lexical semantics or even outright interference in sentences. Proponents of Contrastive Analysis Theory hold the view that when the structural analysis of two different languages are made that it will show the areas of similarities and differences. With that, it is possible to predict areas of difficulty for the second language learner. Notwithstanding, the theory has been criticized. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) quoting Atoye have argued that some areas of difficulties predicted by contrastive analysis may not eventually manifest in the process of learning a second language. Furthermore, they argue that contrastive analysis may not be able to predict other difficulties which are based on extra lingual problems or errors resulting from external variables like mental ability and degree of motivation. Despite the few gaps observed in contrastive analysis theory, it serves the purpose of this research because the research is basically interested in core linguistic issues and the difficulty in mastering spelling and pronunciation of words in the target language which emanates as a result of contact with an already existing language and not in extra-linguistic variables.

3.1. Research Design

The design for the study is a survey design. A survey research design studies a sample and the sample is generalized to the entire population.

3.2. Area of Study

The area of study is Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The location was chosen because the researcher once lived there and that provided an easy contact with the respondents.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population of the study is all Junior Secondary School students (JSS 3) who are in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The students were chosen because they were in the Junior Certificate class. The intermediate nature of the class served the purpose of the researcher.

3.4. Sample Population

Through a random sampling, three schools were selected. These schools are:

1. New Era Model Secondary School, Uruagu (mixed)
2. Maria Regina Model Comprehensive Secondary School, Nnewichi (only girls)
3. Nnewi High School, Nnewichi (only boys)

Through a random sampling technique, a total of one hundred (100) students were purposively selected from the three schools. While forty students were selected from New Era Model Secondary School, Uruagu because it is a mixed school, thirty students each were selected from the other schools.

4. Method of Data Collection

4.1. Unobtrusive Observation Method

Data for the study were collected through an unobtrusive observation method. The observation was done surreptitiously for a period of three weeks. The students were observed during their English classes and while they were in groups during break periods. Besides, the researcher went through the class work exercise books and observed how some words were spelt.

4.2. Spelling Tests

The researcher wrote down some words which she gave to the teachers to administer to the students under her observation. The researcher later collected the sheets of paper for analysis.

4.3. Interview for Teachers

For uniformity's sake, the researcher interviewed two English teachers from each of the three schools selected for the study.

4.4. Method of Data Analysis

A simple percentage was used to show the performance of the students in the spelling test while data from the observation were simply shown if they were correctly or wrongly pronounced.

Table-1. Results from the spelling test

words	New Era Model (40)	Maria Regina Comprehensive (30)	Nnewi High School (30)
1.colonel [k3:nel]	Right: 16 (40%) Wrong:24 (60%)	Right:12 (40%) Wrong:18 (60%)	Right: 6 (20%) Wrong:24 (80)
2. condemn [kændem]	Right: 26 (65%) Wrong:14 (35%)	Right: 20 (66.7%) Wrong:10 (33.3%)	Right: 17 (56.7%) Wrong: 13(43.3%)
3. dialogue [datəlbɔg]	Right: 22 (55%) Wrong:18 (45%)	Right: 15 (50%) Wrong:15 (50%)	Right: 14 (46.7%) Wrong: 16 (53.3%)
4. calendar [kælɪndə(r)]	Right: 19 (47.5%) Wrong:21 (52.5%)	Right: 13 (43.3%) Wrong:17 (56.7%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong: 18 (60%)
5. in fact [ɪnfækt]	Right: 20 (50%) Wrong:20 (50%)	Right: 16 (53.3%) Wrong:14 (46.7%)	Right: 10 (33.3%) Wrong:20 (66.7%)
6. admission [ədmiʃn]	Right: 25 (62.5%) Wrong:15 (37.5%)	Right: 19 (63.3%) Wrong:11 (36.7%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong: 18 (60%)
7. catarrh [kətɑ:r]	Right: 6 (15%) Wrong:34 (85%)	Right: 5 (16.7%) Wrong: 25 (83.3%)	Right: 2 (6.7%) Wrong: 28 (93.3%)
8. ceiling [si:lɪŋ]	Right: 17 (42.5%) Wrong:23 (57.5%)	Right: 14 (46.7%) Wrong:16 (53.3%)	Right: 9 (30%) Wrong: 21(70%)
9. committee [kəmiti]	Right: 16 (40%) Wrong:24 (60%)	Right: 13 (43.3%) Wrong:17 (56.7%)	Right: 11 (36.7%) Wrong:19 (63.3%)
10.foolscap [fu:lʃkæp]	Right: 8 (20%) Wrong:32 (80%)	Right: 6 (20%) Wrong:24 (80%)	Right: 4 (13.3%) Wrong: 26 (86.7%)
11.equipment [ɪkwɪpmənt]	Right: 30 (75%) Wrong:10 (25%)	Right: 21 (70%) Wrong:9 (30%)	Right: 18 (60%) Wrong: 12 (40%)
12. overcrowded [əʊvəkraʊdɪd]	Right: 16 (40%) Wrong:24 (60%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong:18 (60%)	Right:10 (33.3%) Wrong:20 (66.7%)
13.schoolteacher [sku:liti:tʃə]	Right: 17 (42.5%) Wrong:23 (57.5%)	Right: 15 (50%) Wrong:15 (50%)	Right: 11 (36.7%) Wrong:19 (63.3%)
14. timetable [taɪmteɪbl]	Right: 19 (47.5%) Wrong:21 (52.5%)	Right: 17 (56.7%) Wrong:13 (43.3%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong:18 (60%)
15.science [saɪəns]	Right: 30 (75%) Wrong:10 (25%)	Right: 23 (76.7%) Wrong:7 (23.3%)	Right: 19(63.3%) Wrong:11(36.7%)
17. meantime [mi:ntaɪm]	Right: 21 (52.5%)	Right: 16 (53.3%)	Right: 18 (60%)

	Wrong: 19 (47.5%)	Wrong: 14 (46.7%)	Wrong:12 (40%)
18. separate [ˈseprət]	Right: 18 (45%) Wrong: 22 (55%)	Right: 11 (36.7%) Wrong: 19 (63.3%)	Right: 7 (23.3%) Wrong:23(76.7%)
19.oftentimes [ˈɒftntaɪmz]	Right: 21 (52.5%) Wrong: 19 (47.5%)	Right: 14 (46.7%) Wrong: 16 (53.3%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong:18 (60%)
20. printout [ˈprɪntaʊt]	Right: 26 (65%) Wrong: 14 (35%)	Right: 18 (60%) Wrong: 12 (40%)	Right: 16 (53.3%) Wrong:14 (46.7%)
21. passbook [ˈpɑːsbʊk]	Right: 22 (55%) Wrong: 18 (45%)	Right: 17 (56.7%) Wrong:13 (43.3%)	Right: 15 (50%) Wrong:15 (50%)
22.equipped [ɪkwɪpt]	Right: 21 (52.5%) Wrong: 19 (47.5%)	Right: 16 (53.3%) Wrong:14 (46.7%)	Right: 15 (50%) Wrong:15(50%)
23. luxury [ˈlʌkʃəri]	Right: 13 (32.5%) Wrong: 27 (67.5%)	Right: 9 (30%) Wrong: 21 (70%)	Right: 4 (13.3%) Wrong: 26(86.7%)
24. women [ˈwɪmɪn]	Right: 23 (57.5%) Wrong: 17 (42.5%)	Right: 19 (63.3%) Wrong: 11 (36.7%)	Right: 17 (56.7%) Wrong:13 (43.3%)
25.handiwork [ˈhændɪwɜːk]	Right: 8 (20%) Wrong: 32 (80%)	Right: 7 (23.3%) Wrong: 23 (76.7%)	Right: 4 (13.3%) Wrong:26(86.7%)
26. levy [ˈlevɪ]	Right: 34 (85%) Wrong: 6 (15%)	Right: 22 (73.3%) Wrong: 8 (26.7%)	Right: 20 (66.7%) Wrong:10 (33.3%)
27. agile[ædʒaɪl]	Right: 16 (40%) Wrong:24 (60%)	Right: 13 (43.3%) Wrong17 (56.7%)	Right: 12(40%) Wrong:18(60%)
28. accommodation [əkɒmədeɪʃn]	Right: 17 (57.5%) Wrong:23 (42.5%)	Right: 12 (40%) Wrong: 18 (60%)	Right: 10(33.3%) Wrong:20(66.7%)
29. February [ˈfebruəri]	Right: 22 (55%) Wrong:18 (45%)	Right: 17 (56.7%) Wrong: 13 (43.3%)	Right: 14 (46.7%) Wrong:16 (53.3%)
30. grammar [ˈgræmə(r)]	Right: 31(77.5%) Wrong:9 (22.5%)	Right: 24 (80%) Wrong:6 (20%)	Right: 15(50%) Wrong:15(50%)

Source: Field Research 2017

From the table, words that do not correspond with their spellings like *colonel*, *catarrh* and *foolscap* were difficult for the students to spell. Again, it was also observed that words with double letters like *admission*, *committee* and *accommodation* were a bit difficult to spell by many of the students. Also, a word like *in fact* was spelt without a space between *in* and *fact* by a good number of the students. On the other hand, words like *overcrowded*, *schoolteachers*, *oftentimes*, *printout*, *passbook* and *timetable* were mostly spelt as two words by many of them. From the research, words like *handiwork* and *February* were pronounced and spelt as **handwork* and *february*. In addition, the word, *separate* were mostly spelt as * *seperate* by many of the students. Finally, a good number of students were able to spell words like *levy*, *science* and *women* with ease.

Table-2. Showing some observed words pronounced by New Era J.S.S 3 students

Word	Result
1. tin	well pronounced
2 thin	wrongly pronounced
3 path	wrongly pronounced
4 bomb	wrongly pronounced
5 boat	well pronounced
6 both	wrongly pronounced
7 schoolbag	well pronounced
8 comb	wrongly pronounced
9 listen	wrongly pronounced
10 sword	well pronounced

Source: Field Research 2017

From the table, the students could pronounce some words with consonants like /t/ as in *tin*, but could not pronounce the correct consonant sound in a word like *both* /θ/. Again, some silent sounds like /t/ in *listen*, /b/ in *comb* were heard clearly pronounced. However, a word like *sword* was correctly pronounced because the /w/ was not pronounced.

Table-3. Showing some observed words pronounced by J.S.S 3 students of Regina Model Comprehensive Secondary School, Nnewichi

Word	Result
1. often	wrongly pronounced
2 honour	well pronounced
3 climb	wrongly pronounced
4 receipt	wrongly pronounced
5 women	wrongly pronounced
6 hymn	well pronounced
7 choir	well pronounced
8 church	wrongly pronounced
9 chapel	wrongly pronounced
10 father	well pronounced

Source: Field Research 2017

From the table, the students could pronounce few words correctly. However, the word, *chapel* [ˈtʃæpl] was pronounced as [ˈtʃæpelu] while *church* [tʃɜːtʃ] was pronounced as [tʃɒtʃ]. Again, in *honour* and *hymn* the silent sounds /h/ and /n/ were not heard in the words pronounced.

Table-4. Showing some observed words pronounced by J.S.S 3 Nnewi High School, Nnewichi

Word	Result
1. burst	wrongly pronounced
2. main	wrongly pronounced
3. men	well pronounced
4. table	wrongly pronounced
5. love	wrongly pronounced
6. get	well pronounced
7. gate	wrongly pronounced
8. walk	well pronounced
9. work	wrongly pronounced
10. police	wrongly pronounced

Source: Field Research 2017

At Nnewi High School, Nnewichi, the students did not pronounce most of the words correctly. For example the sound /ɜ:/ in *burst*, /ə/ in *police* and /ʌ/ in *love* were replaced by /ʊ/ and pronounced as [bɔrst], [pɒli:s] and [lɒv]. Similarly, the students could not differentiate between /e/ in *men* and *get* and /ei/ in *main*, *table* and *gate*. The words were pronounced with the sound /e/. More so, *walk* and *work* were pronounced with the sound /ɔ:/.

Besides, the influence of mother tongue interference was observed among the students in the pronunciation of certain words. Although the majority of the students in the schools under study try to overcome the pressure of interference, some slips were observed. These words include:

- red pronounced as led
- road pronounced as load
- lorry pronounced as roly
- Rejoice (a person's name) Lejoice
- right pronounced as light
- raining pronounced as laining
- bread pronounced as buredi
- pencil pronounced as pensulu
- bed pronounced as bade
- sorry pronounced as soli
- follow pronounced as folo

4.5. Interview

The researcher employed unstructured interview to elicit information from two English teachers in each of the schools under study. From the teachers' responses, it was gathered that factors like poor academic background, population upsurge, fossilization (a state where the learner's language use does not develop no matter how long the learner is exposed to the target language), lack of interest and indifferent attitude especially among the boys. These students tend to believe that they can pronounce words the way they like and still get the message across. Other factors responsible for faulty spellings and pronunciations among the students studied include faulty analogy (which arises from the inconsistency in the target language) and the use of non qualified teachers or graduates of other disciplines to teach the English language. Although the teachers interviewed are graduates of English language, they pointed that in some schools, graduates of other disciplines are employed to teach the English language. Finally, mother tongue interference affects the students' mastery of pronunciations and spellings. Often, the students tend to spell words exactly the way they pronounce them. This, no doubt, gives room to faulty spellings. They fail to realize that the orthography of a word is not always a sure guide to the pronunciation of the word.

5. Conclusion

From the discussions, one would agree that the inability of students to master the spellings and pronunciations of many words in English also affects them adversely in speech and writing. The consequences of their inability to master spellings and pronunciations include high rate of failures in class assessments and external examinations, poor performance in other subjects and inability to use the English language effectively in social environments. Again, from the study, it was observed that students find it difficult to handle words with incongruent and contrasting spelling and pronunciations, silent sounds, synonyms, homonyms, homographs and homophones. These aspects of lexis should be taught in a way that the students are able to differentiate between one word and another in spelling and pronunciation.

More so, for students to achieve the desirable level in spellings and pronunciations, they also need to work hard. According to **Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009)** hard work is an important virtue in learning pronunciation. To buttress the point further, they quote O'Connor (1980) who puts it poignantly in these words: 'Anyone who says that you can get a good English pronunciation without hard work is talking rubbish'.

Finally, O'Connor (1980) as quoted in **Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009)** advises students on a sure way to attain proficiency in spoken English and by extension, spellings of English words. On this, hear him:

... this is what you must do. You must hear English. But just hearing is not enough; you must listen to it, not for the meaning but for the sound of it... take one of the English sounds at a time... and concentrate on catching it, on picking it out, on hearing what it sounds like. Don't just be satisfied to hear vaguely, as it were a sound of your own language, try and pick out the Englishness of it, what makes it different from the nearest sound in your language. And when you say it in some of the words you heard, say it aloud.

6. Recommendations

The English language is an indispensable tool in Nigeria because it is the language in which bilingual Nigerians conduct their activities in, alongside, their indigenous languages. From the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Curriculum planners should endeavour to include pronunciation drills and tests in the curriculum.
2. Qualified teachers of English who are grounded in contrastive analysis should be employed to teach this aspect of the English language.
3. Students should be encouraged to listen to good sources of English pronunciations like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and recorded English tapes by foreign experts.
4. Teachers, on their parts, should give tests on spellings and pronunciations regularly to determine the level of students' improvement.
5. Inasmuch as many teachers in Nigeria also learnt English as second language learners, there is absolute need for self development so that they can be good role models for their students.
6. The students should equally be encouraged to read avidly so as to increase their vocabulary base.

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Citation | Uche Oboko (2018). Sound-letter Non-Correspondence Vis-a- vis Deviation in Spoken English among Secondary School Students in Nnewi Educational Zone. *International Journal of Social Sciences and English Literature*, 2: 20-26.

History:

Received: 5 April 2018

Revised: 9 August 2018

Accepted: 17 August 2018

Published: 5 September 2018

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Publisher: Eastern Centre of Science and Education

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Transparency: The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study was reported; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained.

Ethical: This study follows all ethical practices during writing.

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