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GENDER DIFFERENTIATION IN THE USE OF VOICED LABIODENTAL FRICATIVE SOUND /V/ OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN A NON-NATIVE CONTEXT

OYINLOYE, COMFORT ADEBOLA

Ph.D, School of Education and Humanities, Babcock University.

FRIMPONG, DOMINICS

Ph.D, Department of Languages, St. Joseph's College of Education.

JAMES, NMA CLARION

Ph.D, School of Education and Humanities, Babcock University.

KPAROU, HANOUKOUME CYRIL

Ph.D, School of Education and Humanities, Babcock University.

Abstract

This paper investigates gender differentiation in the use of voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/ of English Language in a Non-Native Context. Sixty secondary school students (30 males and 30 females) were randomly selected as the sample. A pronunciation test was administered to the participants to read aloud. The study revealed that most participants replaced the labiodental sound /v/ with /f/ sound; and there is no significant difference between male and female students' pronunciation of labiodental sound ss/v/. It is recommended that teachers pay proper attention to the learner's linguistic background for effective communication in English language.

Keywords: Gender Differentiation, Voiced, Labiodental, Fricative, English Language

INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of language begins with the knowledge of its sounds system which falls under the branch of linguistics known as phonetics. The knowledge of the sound system becomes very important to prospective learners particularly 2nd L2 language learners whose first language L1 exhibits different sounds and features from the target L2 because this knowledge is vital in order to internalise the correct pronunciation of words. Derwing and Munro (2015: 2–3) define the term pronunciation as "the ways in which speakers use their articulatory apparatus to create speech". In pronunciation, there are so many aspects or elements to be known. In supra-segmental aspects, there are stress, intonation, and pitch.

The Segmental aspects consist of vowels, diphthongs, tripthongs, and consonants. In terms of consonants, there are the manner of articulation, the place of articulation, and the force of articulation. The English labiodental sounds are articulated by the lower lip and upper teeth (Sinurat, 2013). The sound /v/ occurs in initial, medial and final position. According to Wikipedia (2019), the features of voiced labiodental fricative are that: its manner of articulation is fricative which means it is produced by constricting air flow through a narrow channel at the

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place of articulation, causing turbulence; its place of articulation is labiodental, which means it is articulated with the lower lip and the upper teeth; its phonation is voiced, which means the vocal cords vibrate during the articulation; it is an oral consonant, which means air is allowed to escape through the mouth only; because the sound is not produced with airflow over the tongue, the central-lateral dichotomy does not apply; the airstream mechanism is pulmonic, which means it is articulated by pushing air solely with the lungs and diaphragm, as in most sounds.

Pronunciation plays an important role in communication since serious mispronunciation can hamper intelligibility. Therefore, English as Foreign Language/English as a Second Language teachers should not ignore the pronunciation problems of their students. Similarly, second-language learners should make an attempt to improve their pronunciation of the target language. A second language learner's mispronunciation can be considered problematic because, even if s/he uses correct grammar and advanced vocabulary, listeners may face difficulties understanding him/her (Tomasz, 2011).

One of the most controversial issues in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) is the role played by mother tongue (MT) in learning different components of the target language. A large body of research has demonstrated that the structure of the learners' L1 has an impact on L2 acquisition. There is also general consensus that the influence of the learners' MT is most noticeable and long-lasting in the area of pronunciation, as compared to grammar and vocabulary. There is abundance of research findings that support this view (Nosratinia & Zaker, 2014; Tsojon & Aji, 2014; Zhanmig, 2014 Sedighi, 2010).

From the researcher's observation, English labiodental sound /v/ appears excluded from the Yoruba consonant inventory. This is because Yoruba language does not have /v/ in its phonemic system and Yoruba people tend to substitute the nearest equivalents of their language in English. According to Akinlabi (2004) cited in Bamidele (2019), the Yoruba language has eleven vowels and twenty consonant sounds. The eleven vowels are /a e ɛ i o ɔ u ɛ̃ ɔ̃ ũ ã/ and twenty consonants are /b t d k g kp gb f s ʃ h m n l r j w ɟ ŋ ŋ̀/. Oshodi (2013) examined and contrasted the sound systems of Yorùbá a Niger-Congo language spoken in Nigeria to that of Malay (Peninsular variety), an Austronesian language spoken in Malaysia with emphasis on the areas of differences.

The data for this study were collected from ten participants; five native female Malay speakers who are married to Yorùbá native speakers but live in Malaysia and five Yorùbá native speakers who reside in Nigeria. The findings revealed that speakers from both sides have difficulties with sounds and features in the L2 which are not attested in their L1 and they tended to substitute them for similar ones in their L1 through transfer. This confirms the fact that asymmetry between the sound systems of L1 and L2 is a major source of error in L2 acquisition.

Abdullah (2013) investigated the production of the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ of Saudi Arabian speakers of English. Data is elicited through participants' reading of a word list with the target sound in initial and final position. The data coding was performed through spectrographic analysis and rater judgments. The analysis employs descriptive statistics, a

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dependent t-test used to compare production errors between initial and final position. The findings showed that word-final position is more difficult in pronouncing the phoneme /v/ than word-initial position. In addition, when the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is mispronounced, it is substituted with the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/. Lintunen (2014) investigated the English sound production skills of Finnish university students. The students (N=69), whose L1 was Finnish, were asked to do a self-assessment on sounds that they found most challenging in English, after which they participated in a pronunciation test that consisted of the reading out loud of a short text and a word list. The study found that most difficulties in pronunciation among the Finnish students had to do with consonants and opposition between /v/ and /w/ was found to be the most difficult one.

Keshavarz and Khamis (2017) investigated the pronunciation problems of Hausa speakers of English in Nigeria. The study used 60 native speakers of Hausa who were studying at three universities in Northern Cyprus. The participants' pronunciation problems of English were elicited by means of a pronunciation test that consisted of a word list, a short paragraph, and 15 individual sentences. Fifteen pictures were shown to the participants to name while being audio-recorded. All the test items contained English consonants and vowels with potential pronunciation difficulties for Hausa speakers of English. The collected data were then transcribed and analyzed, and percentages and frequencies of pronunciation errors were computed. The results revealed that native speakers of Hausa face problems in pronouncing certain English consonants such as (/v/). Theoretically, the findings lend support to the notion of negative transfer as all of the errors were the result of mother tongue interference.

Azizi, Jamil and Omar (2013) also conducted a study entitled 'Debunking the Nation of Nativization in the Pronunciation Variation at Segmental Level among Non-Native ESL Teachers in Sabah, Malaysia'. The subjects of the study were English language teachers of Kadazan ethnic background working in the area of Tuaran and Tamparuli in Sabah, Malaysia. The study investigated pronunciation variations. CA was used in the study in order to analyze the data gathered from the actual utterances of the subjects.

The findings of the study showed that L1 does have great influence on the pronunciation of the English language. The subjects in the study tended to substitute other sounds existing in their L1 for the target sounds of English consonants. Herman (2016) investigated the most difficult position in pronouncing the English labiodental sounds at the second grade of Senior High School of Taman Siswa Pematangsiantar. Descriptive qualitative method was used in this research. The data were taken from each English labiodental words pronounced by the students. The study found that the most difficult position in pronouncing the English labiodental sounds is final position in sound /v/.

Jehma and Phoocharoensil (2014) investigated the English fricative and stop pronunciation errors produced by Pattani-Malay learners of English. The participants, speaking L1 Malay, were recruited from fifth and sixth graders at Thamwittaya Mulniti School, Yala province, Thailand. The major research instruments used to examine the errors were the word list reading task and the sentence reading task. The findings of the research demonstrate that Pattani-Malay learners of English seemed to have difficulty in producing errors in some specific English

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fricative sounds in particular positions. The medial voiced labiodental fricative /v/ was found as the most problematic. The results of the study also revealed that the learner's problems in pronouncing English fricatives and stops are mainly attributed to first language transfer. Mousa (2014) investigated the speech of two speakers of the well-known Broad Jamaican Creole and compared with the performance of Saudi learners of English, with respect to the pronunciation of the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/.

The study found that the second/ foreign language learners and speakers of pidgin/Creole languages make use of another fricative as a transitory step before the fricative in question. The study also found that the pronunciation of [b] instead of /v/ is characteristic of the Broad Jamaican Creole, and Jamaican speakers prefer to use the bilabial fricative [β], likewise, Arab learners make use of voiceless /f/ for the voiced /v/.

Dumanig (2004) examined the phonological differences of (f) and (v) among young Filipino male and female students in relation to their social class differences. There were 30 participants in the study consisting of 15 males and females categorised as middle class from Far X Eastern University and 15 males and females categorised as lower working class from Manila High School. Both males and females from the two social classes read texts with (f) and (v) sounds, which were tape-recorded for analysis.

Findings of the study showed that most female respondents in the middle class and lower working class display a significant difference in the use of standard and non-standard pronunciation of (f) and (v) compared to the male participants in both social classes. It was also found that there are variations in the pronunciation of (f) and (v) among males as well as among females in relation to their social status.

Jahandar, Khodabandehlou, Seyedi and Abadi (2012) investigated the impact of gender on pronunciation accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners and whether male or female learners will outperform in their performance of the pronunciation accuracy of phonological characteristics in their speech production.

The pronunciation accuracy of the learners was assessed through reading aloud, a recorded oral test and learners' speech production. Fifty-three advanced EFL learners-including 21 males and 32 females were chosen randomly from among the junior undergraduate university students studying English in Rodaki Institute of Higher Education in Tonekabon, Iran participated the study. The results revealed that female outperform male subjects in producing accurate consonants, but not vowels, that it is not significantly noticeable to result in complete superiority of female over male subjects.

In this research, the researcher focuses on students' use of voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/ of English Language in a non-native context with respect to gender.

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Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the common errors made by the nonnative English speaking secondary students in Ogun State?
2. Which position is the most difficult in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/ by the non-native speakers?
3. Which of the genders finds it more problematic with the pronunciation of VLF /v/?
4. Is there difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/?
5. What pragmatic measures can be used to help save the pronunciation difficulty among the secondary students in Ogun State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 significant level:

1. There is no significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/.

Problem of the Study

When an individual whose mother tongue is Yoruba speaks English that he or she learned as a second language or acquired as a first language, there are differences in the pronunciation of some words compared to the pronunciation of native British or American speakers. This pronunciation makes such words sometimes unintelligible to the native speakers or is perceived as an accent (Banjo, 1975 cited in Bamidele, 2019). The question therefore is: Why the difference?

According to Rotimi (2014), the hypothesis is that some sounds are not present in the mother tongue of the Yoruba-English learner; therefore, the learner substitutes such sounds in English with the ones available in his/her native language. This may lead to phonological processes such as the misplacement of /v/ for /f/.

Sometimes students got confused in pronouncing the sounds /f/ and /v/. The sounds /f/ and /v/ are referred to as labiodentals sounds. The students cannot differentiate between them. For examples, they pronounced van [væn] and fan [fæn] are same, vine [vaɪn] and fine [faɪn] etc. They pronounced all of them with the same voice. Moreover, some studies have also been conducted in the Nigerian context focusing on English pronunciation problems of speakers of different Nigerian languages, e.g., Igbo (Linda, 2011), Yoruba (Akinjobi, 2009), Igala (Opanachi, 2013), Jukun (Tsojon & Aji, 2014), and Nguru (Isa, 2011). However, research on pronunciation problems of Yoruba speakers are scarce, with the exception of Akinjobi (2009). In this occasion, the researcher finds it necessary to analyze the students' pronunciation in labiodental sounds and the most difficult position in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/ at the selected secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria in terms of gender.

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Theoretical Framework

Interlanguage Theory (IL)

The term interlanguage was first introduced into the philosophy of the world by Selinker (1969, 1972) to describe the stages second language learners undergo in the process of acquisition of a target language. Selinker postulates five stages of second language learning which is based on the five cognitive processes. These stages are: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and over generalization of the target language linguistic material. However, this study focuses on the first stage of the five stages which is language transfer.

This is because this aspect of interlanguage theory will help in investigating the problems associated with pronunciation of English voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/. Interlanguage theory is based on the learners' experience with the second language which shows he has not reached the level of proficiency in the target language. As Selinker puts it, the utterances of the learners are different from that of the native speakers as a result of the existence of separate linguistic system. Interlanguages are natural languages or any human language shared by a speech community (Oluomachi, 2016). With the help of this theory, the study investigates the difficulties in pronouncing the English voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/ with respect to gender in non-native context.

METHODOLOGY

Sixty students (30 males and 30 females) were randomly selected as the sample from three selected senior secondary schools out of the 11 public secondary schools in Ondo East Local Government Area, Ondo State using descriptive survey design. A pronunciation test was used as the instruments for collecting data. The test consisted of a word list of 25 and a set of sentences all containing difficult phonemes for Yoruba speakers of English. The participants were asked to read aloud English words and sentences containing problematic English sound /v/ while being audio recorded. A computer and a microphone were used for the purposes of recording. The recorded data were then transcribed and analyzed after listening to each participant's pronunciation a few times.

A sample of the pronunciation transcriptions was also presented to and confirmed by a Yoruba-speaking professor in an English Department in Nigeria. The participants' mispronunciations were categorized and frequency of errors pronunciations were computed. Chi-square statistics was used to test the significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English voiced Labiodental sound /v/at 0.05 significant level.

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RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the common errors made by the Yoruba-English speaking secondary students in Ogun State?

Table 1: Common Error made in the pronunciation of labiodental sound /v/

s/n	Words	Wrong Pronunciation
1	Love	/lʌ**f**/
2	Have	**/hæf/**
3	Visit	/ˈ**f**ɪzɪt/
4	Drive	/draɪ**f**/
5	Heavy	/ˈhe**v**i/
6	Harvest	/ˈhɑː(r)**f**ɪst/
7	Clever	/ˈkle**f**ə(r)/
8	Heaven	/ˈhe**f**(ə)n/
9	Kelvin	/ˈkel**f**ɪn/
10	Brave	/breɪ**f**/
11	Cave	/keɪ**f**/
12	Dove	/dʌ**f**/
13	Drove	/drəʊ**f**/
14	Gave	/geɪ**f**/
15	move	/muː**f**/
16	Value	/ˈ**f**æljuː/
17	Vote	/**f**əʊt/
18	Vein	/**f**eɪn/
19	Civil	/ˈsɪ**f**(ə)l/
20	Event	/ɪˈ**f**ent/
21	Flavor	/ˈfleɪ**f**ə(r)/
22	Achieve	/əˈtʃiː**f**/
23	Carve	/kɑː(r)**v**/
24	Vacation	/**f**əˈkeɪʃ(ə)n/
25	valley	/ˈ**f**æli/

Table 1 shows that there are 25 common errors made in the pronunciation of labiodental sound /v/. The results in Table 1 reveals that the participants replaced the labiodental sound /v/ with /f/ sound most of the time during pronunciations.

Research Question Two: Which position is the most difficult in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/ by the non-native speakers?

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Table 2: Positions of the English labiodental sound /v/

S/n	Initial	Medial	Final
1	**V**isit	Har**v**est	Lo**v**e
2	**V**alue	Cle**v**er	Ha**v**e
3	**V**ote	Hea**v**en	Dri**v**e
4	**V**ein	Kel**v**in	Hea**v**y
5	**V**acation	Ci**v**il	Bra**v**e
6	**v**alley	E**v**ent	Ca**v**e
7		Fla**v**or	Do**v**e
8			Dro**v**e
9			Ga**v**e
10			Mo**v**e
11			Achie**v**e
12			Car**v**e
Total	**6**	**7**	**12**

Table 2 shows the positions of the English labiodental sound /v/ which are initial, medial and final. Table 2 reveals that out of the 25 common errors made by the participants, six (6) words are on the initial positions; seven (7) are on the medial positions, while 12 words are on final positions. This shows that the final position is the most difficult in pronouncing the English voiced labiodental sound /v/ by the non-native speakers. The data is represented in the graph below:

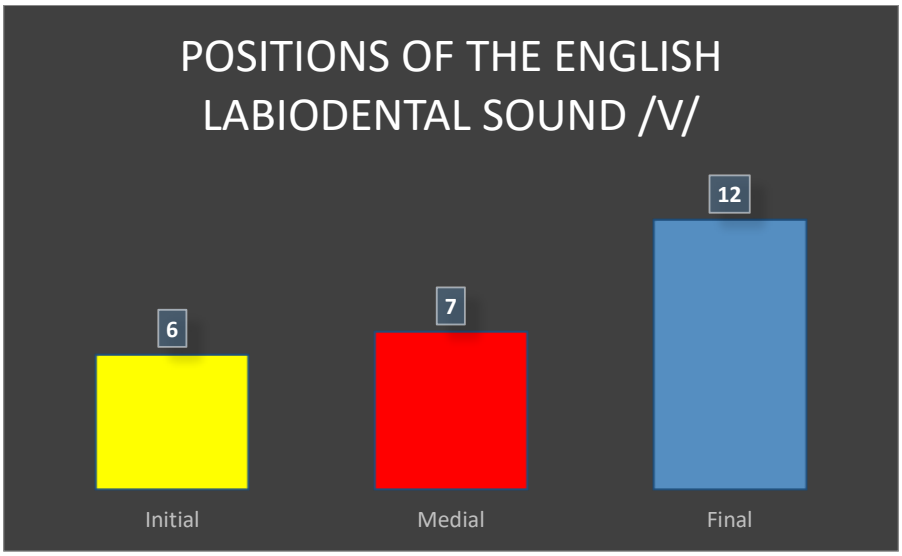

Figure 1: Positions of the English Labiodental Sound /v/

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English voiced labiodental sound /v/

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Table 3: Summary of Chi-square Analysis Showing the Significant Difference in the Total Number of Errors Made by Male and Female Students in Pronouncing the English Voiced Labiodental Sound /v/

Variable	Total number of errors	Df	Chi-square	p-value
Male	22	1	0.220	0.639
Female	19			

α= 0.05

Table 3 shows the summary of Chi-square analysis showing the significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/. Table 3 reveals that male participants made 22 errors while 19 errors were made by the female participants with chi-square value of 0.220 and p-value of 0.639. Testing the hypothesis at 0.05 significant level, the p-value (0.639) is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. This shows that there is a difference, therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/ is retained. Consequently, there is no significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one revealed that all the participants used in the study had challenges of using the voiced labiodental fricative **/v/.** The results also showed that the participants replaced the labiodental sound /v/ with /f/ sound, most of the time during pronunciations. The finding of this study is in agreement with the findings of Mousa (2014), who investigated the speech of two speakers of the well-known Broad Jamaican Creole and Saudi learners of English, with respect to the pronunciation of the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/. The study found that the second/ foreign language learners and speakers of pidgin/Creole languages make use of another fricative as a transitory step before the fricative in question and Arab learners make use of voiceless [f] for the voiced /v/.

Research question two revealed that the final position is the most difficult in pronouncing the English voiced labiodental sound /v/ by the non-native speakers. The result of this study is in line with the findings of Herman (2016), who investigated the most difficult position in pronouncing the English voiced labiodental sounds at the second grade of Senior High School of Taman Siswa Pematangsiantar and found that the most difficult position in pronouncing the English labiodental sounds is final position of sound /v/. The findings of the research question two is in agreement with the findings of Jehma and Phoocharoensil (2014), who investigated the English fricative and stop pronunciation errors produced by Pattani-Malay learners of English and found that the medial voiced labiodental fricative /v/ was found as the most problematic.

Hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant difference in the total number of errors made by male and female students in pronouncing the English labiodental sound /v/. The finding of this study is in line with the findings of Abadi (2012), who investigated the impact

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of gender on pronunciation accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners in their speech production. The results revealed that there is no significant impact of gender on pronunciation accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learner

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the labiodental fricative /v/ is usually difficult for Yoruba-English bilinguals in which the /v/ sound is replaced with /f/ sound, most of the time. This probably for the fact that /v/ sound is not in the language inventory of native language. Also, it is concluded that one's first language contributes greatly in the inhibition or mastery of second language learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusion, it is recommended that:

1. Teachers should pay proper attention to the learner's linguistic background and spot out those areas that are likely to bridge second language acquisition.
2. Students should be drilled extensively in the use of Received Pronunciation.
3. Government should ensure and facilitate the use of language laboratories in schools. This will go a long way in remedying issues in pronunciation.

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