



Bringing our Cultures Home:
FESTSCHRIFT FOR
BADE AJAYI AT 70

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A CONTRASTIVE OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH AND YORUBA CONSONANTAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This paper strives to make a contrastive analysis of English and Yoruba consonantal systems. It aims at showing areas where the two languages exhibit similar features and at the same time where they differ. Looking at the variants of consonants in English, one may conclude that the consonantal system of English is more fluid than that of Yoruba. Hence, there is the likelihood of indices of difficulty in the spoken English of typical Yoruba speakers of English. Therefore, this attempt is aimed at highlighting certain consonantal speech sounds which constitute effective spoken English hurdles to average Yoruba speakers of English. It is hoped that this effort would assist teachers of Oral English especially in making informed decisions on instructional packages and strategies. By extension, it would also provide a formidable frontier of closing the gap of the phonostructural disparities between an 'indigenized' and an 'intelligible' varieties of English.

Key words: phonology, consonantal systems, contrastive, variants

Introduction and Background

Phonology as a branch in the study of any given language deals with the system of speech sounds. It studies the way and manner in which sounds grow to form phonic patterns in a language. Sotiloye (1992:25) observes that phonological knowledge allows for knowing what sound sequence is permissible in a language and whether certain sounds are significant or not. Though, it is true that all human beings can produce sounds, it should be noted that it is not all sounds that are tenable in every language. Thus, this accounts for why a Yoruba L¹ user of English may find a particular set of sound segments difficult to render intelligibly. His learning and use of the correct form become inhibited.

So, a study as this is just an aspect of applied structural linguistics which stresses the importance of the languages in question as systems, and which investigates the place that such linguistic units like consonants have within the systems. Unlike the aspect of vowels with a peculiarly similar voice quality all through, certain consonants may pose serious problems to non-native users with respect to identification, distinction and realization of a group of alien or, to be modest, seemingly alien segments.

Since phonology deals with the basic sound rudiments from which structures and extensive discourses develop, it demands a special attention to be able to eliminate "the false start" which is likely to destroy the correct form of spoken English; most especially by the average Yoruba speakers of English in a second language situation. Also, given the fact that Yoruba is a regional language spoken by no less than forty million Nigerians; and given the intra-national and international roles of English, it becomes

necessary that English is given a good attention especially at the spoken level which is indeed primary to any user of a language.

Even though vowels, syllabic stress and intonation patterns exist alike in both English and Yoruba with slight variations, the consonantal aspect seems to be the sub-level of phonology which exhibits distinguishing features between the two languages. This is because, unlike other segmental and supra-segmental aspects of phonology, consonants exhibit a wide range of phonetic features which make it complex for users of English in L₂ situation to master and apply correctly. It should be noted at this juncture that why much emphasis is placed on the consonantal aspect over and above other sub-levels of phonology is that it is an aspect with the highest number of phonemic constituents. Thus, the constraints it imposes on the entire phonological systems of the two languages involved cannot be overemphasized.

This brings us to the rationale behind this paper which is to identify the areas of difficulties in the realization of English consonants by Yoruba speakers so that they may be helped to cross the varying predetermined hurdles of learning and production inhibitions without much ado. This is meant to assist the average Yoruba speakers of English attain, at least, variety three of Banjo's (1971) spoken English standard which gains universal acceptability.

To round this segment off, the need for a contrastive study as this is self evident considering the implication it has for language pedagogy. Speaking on "Contrastive Analysis and Interference Theory", Carroll (1965) states that learning and use of the target language can be facilitated whenever similarities exist between its systemic constituents and those of the first language. To this end, this paper is justified on the basis that it does not only aim at improving the teaching and learning of English in L₂ situation but also keeps Nigerian users of English, especially the average Yorubas, well informed and equipped about their universal medium of expression.

Contrastive Analysis and Consonants

Contrastive Analysis is popularly described as a process by which two languages are compared with the purpose of identifying the areas of similarities and differences in their linguistic systems. Tinuoye (1991) adds that though contrastive analysis attempts to study the similarities and differences between particular languages, it does not only describe certain aspects of the languages but also highlights the points of convergence and divergence in the languages concerned both for theoretical and pedagogic purposes. In other words, contrastive analysis is a process by which two or more languages are compared with a view to bringing out their systemic differences as a formidable basis of predicting areas of difficulty and ease in a language learning situation. This is envisaged in order to enable second language planners and teachers to put in place functional curricula contents and instructional strategies in a bid to proffering pragmatic solutions to the problem areas especially in a second or foreign language learning situation.

On the other hand, according to *The New Encyclopedia Britannica; Volume 3* (1992:557), a "consonant is any speech sound such as that represented by /t, f, g, or z/ that is characterized by an articulation with a closure or narrowing of the vocal tract such that a complete or partial blockage of the flow of the air is produced". Gimson (1980) describes consonants as phonetic realizations, articulations involving the obstruction or

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the narrowing which produces acoustically a noise component. Chomsky and Halle (1968:302) submit that "consonant sounds are produced with a radical obstruction of the mid-sagittal region of the vocal tract... non-consonantal sounds i.e. vowels are produced without such obstruction". In sum, consonants are speech sounds produced with partial, gradual or total constriction of the passage of the pulmonic airstream in the process of speech sound production.

Evolution of Contrastive Analysis

Since the middle of the 1940s, contrastive analysis has been the major tool of investigating language learning difficulties. Both contrastive analysis and error analysis are concerned with how monolinguals are assisted to be proficient bilinguals. Error analysis later branched off due to the new approaches in theoretical linguistics and psychology. As a part of the field of contrastive linguistics, contrastive analysis has been subjected to a serious scrutiny, revision and evaluation since its advent and date with the aim of finding an effective theoretical tool for studying the pedagogic implication of languages.

In *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*, Fries (1945) observes that the extreme difficulty we experience in learning and using the new sounds of foreign languages is a sufficient evidence of the strange rigidity that has set in for most people in the voluntary control of speech organs. Fries goes on to conclude that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture into the foreign language and culture.

Caroll (1965) adds that there may be both similarities and differences between two languages – in this case, English and Yoruba – even with variation in the hitherto similar areas. Contrastive analysis thus evolved to account for the disparities between L_1 and L_2 , so that one may be able to predict and explain areas of difficulty in the learning and use of the second language. The advocates of contrastive analysis claim that similarities make for easy learning and vice versa. Hence, more emphasis is placed on the differences between the linguistic subsystems of English and Yoruba in this paper.

When an item which has been learnt previously inhibits retention, such inhibition is retroactive. The kind of interference which bothers us is the pro-active inhibition which Carroll (1965) describes as a situation where the acquired first language habits inhibit or modify the learning of L_2 habits. In the area of phonology, King (1977) carries out a contrastive study of English and Yoruba segmental phonemes as a whole. His work aimed at showing the articulatory parameters of segmental variants in Yoruba; and how such traits are transferred into English. He concludes that such interference warrants non-standard English accent (p. 48). Using Ladefoged's "prime features" for interlingual comparison has enabled King to make certain valid predictions; for instance, he argues that the English /p/ may possibly compare with Yoruba /kp/ and since there is no wide contrast, no difficulty in learning or use is predicted. However, the English /v/ has no counterpart in Yoruba. The learners may now substitute /f/ for /v/ thereby erasing the distinction of voice quality between such pairs like:

fine – vine
life – live

Also, differences in the phonetic realization of allophones and positional variants result into wrong perception of some phonemes through confusion with others. Thus, these differences in phonological distinctions when a correlation in the target language has no equivalent in the L_2 result into error of under-differentiation; for example, the use of /d/ for /ð/. Eventually, differences in combinatorial patterns of corresponding consonants in L_1 and L_2 would naturally instigate superfluous insertion or epenthesis.

It is in the light of the apparent gaps in the foregoing studies and positions held by previous researchers that the next section presents an investigation of the similarities and differences in the systems of consonants in the two languages. In this paper, it may be imperative to include transcribed versions of words used for illustration of certain segments. This may, however, not be applicable to some other (consonantal) segments whose phonemic symbols (IPAs) are not different from their shapes in the standard orthography. It needs to be stated here that the investigation reported in this paper is autonomously generated from the standpoint of similarities and differences in the systemic phonic rudiments of both languages in question. The intention in this regard is to prepare students that have Yoruba as their L_1 for the likely challenging areas of difficulty in the pronunciation of certain English segments. This will equally motivate them positively to scale the hurdle without much ado as 'a problem identified is already half solved'. Additionally, the theoretical postulates arising from the analysis would assist teachers of oral English in making informed decision in matters relating to instructional packaging and delivery; all in a bid towards ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the learning experience.

The Contrastive Study

The Plosives

Plosives, also popularly known as stops, are consonant sounds which are produced by complete closure of the air passage and which are followed by an audible release of the air which is compressed behind the blockage. Both English and Yoruba recognize the presence of plosives in their consonantal systems. There are:

Voiceless bilabial plosive	/p/
Voiced bilabial plosive	/b/
Voiceless alveolar plosive	/t/
Voiced alveolar plosive	/d/
Voiceless velar plosive	/k/
Voiced velar plosive	/g/

This is to say that the manner of articulation of the six phonemes above is similar in terms of being plosives. However, the /p/ in Yoruba tends to be more velar at the onset of articulation to produce a likelihood of /kp/. This sound occurs in both initial and medial word positions but since Yoruba is a language with open final syllabic system, /kp/ will not occur in word final positions. On the other hand, in English, /p/ is realized in all positions, though slight variations may feature as, for instance, /p/ is aspirated in

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stressed syllable initial positions. It features medially too (not aspirated) and in final positions but with less prominence.

The voiced counterpart /b/ behaves similarly in the two languages except that /b/ does not occur finally in Yoruba. In English, /b/ is prominent initially, more prominent when it occurs intervocally but may exhibit a variant form in final positions; usually unreleased in such environment where it is preceded by the bilabial nasal /m/. In other cases, it differs in realizations where *mob*, *tab* and *job* are devoiced as /mɔ8b/, /tæ8b/ and /dʒɔ8b/ respectively in situation where /b/ is released in final positions. The table below presents both English and Yoruba plosives in word contexts.

Word positions	English /p/	Yoruba /kp/	English /b/	Yoruba /b/
Initial position	people /p ⁱ pl/	pákó [kpako]	Bag	baálẹ̀
	plight /p ^o laɪt/	páàdì [kpaadi]	book	bàtà
Medial position	apple	apárí [akpari]	ribbon	abo
	report	apẹ̀rẹ̀ [akpere]	cobbler	abẹ̀rẹ̀
Final position	camp	X	cab /kæb/	x
	tap	X	job /dʒɔb/	x

Note: Columns which are marked (x) give the implication that such features do not exist in such an environment in that language. Note also that the superscript (^h) is a diacritic mark for aspiration. In addition, in English stressed syllable initial slots, where any of the fortis /p, t, k/ is followed by a liquid consonant (e.g. /l/ and /r/), the phonetic quality of loss of aspiration ensues. This phenomenon is indicated with a superscript (^o) in narrow transcription (see *plight tractor* and *chrome* in our tables as instances of loss of aspiration of the initial /p,t,k/ elements in stressed syllables respectively).

The alveolar plosives: the voiceless /t/ and the voiced /d/ are similar in realizations in the two languages. As a fortis, /t/ is aspirated in stressed syllable initial positions as in *team* /t^hi:m/ and *tight* /t^haɪt/. But it does not occur aspiratedly in medial and final positions. The /t/ in Yoruba behaves in a different way as it eludes strong emission of air virtually in all cases as it is either unaspirated or weakly aspirated. It should be noted that it does not feature in final position. However, when foreign words are introduced into the language, a vowel completer becomes an obligation. For example:

Fasilat + u = Fasilatu
Al-Salat + i = Ali Salati

/d/ in English and Yoruba behaves wholly consonantal in all positions except that Yoruba as usual, will not take a consonantal syllabic ending. It is noteworthy that the intervocalic occurrence of /d/ is distinguishingly prominent. This can be seen in the table that follows:

Word positions	English /t/	Yoruba /t/	English /d/	Yoruba /d/
Initial	teacher	túbú	dine	dána
	t ^o ractor	tajà	dragon	dúró
Medial	cater	àpáta	cradle	adití
	litre	âtùpà	trader	àdó
Final	flirt	x	bard	x
	pest	x	bread	x

Meanwhile /t/ and /d/ can be allophonic in English especially. This depends on the vocal quality of the last phonemes to which they are attached as past tense markers. A word with voiced ending will always take /d/ as its past tense allomorph while a word with a voiceless ending will have /t/ as its past tense allomorph. For example:

pick + ed = /pɪk + t/ = /pɪkt/
 bag + ged = /bæg + d/ = /bægd/

However, this feature is completely absent in Yoruba because even in the first place, its verbs and tenses differ considerably from those of English.

The velar plosives: the voiceless /k/ and the voiced /g/ are tenable in both English and Yoruba as basic consonants. The realization of /k/ is aspirated in stressed syllable initial positions as an English fortis plosive. It occurs initially and medially in Yoruba. The voiced counterpart /g/ behaves similarly in the two languages. Nonetheless, for the fact that it is voiced, it is not aspirated in any context. Its intervocalic occurrence is highly prominent too. The velar plosives are presented in the contrastive table that follows:

Word positions	English /k/	Yoruba /k/	English /g/	Yoruba /g/
Initial	kite /kajt/	kíjipá	goat	gèèsì
	chrome /k ^o rəum/	kìnùún	galaxy	gèlè
Medial	marker	àkàrà	baggage	àga
	ticket	elékuru	dagger	dígí
Final	park	X	drag	x
	peck	X	beg	x

But because /k/ and /g/ are velar consonants, there is the tendency that the velar nasal /ŋ/ will feature in situations where /k/ or /g/ is preceded by the voiced alveolar nasal /n/. This

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is in agreement with the view expressed by Oyelaran (1970), that /ŋ/ in Yoruba is only a phonetic variant of /m/ or /n/ in certain environments. This is exemplified in the contrastive table that follows.

English	Transcription	Yoruba	Approximation
Ankle	/æŋkl/	àṅkára	/aŋkara/
Gong	/gɔŋg/	gòṅgò	/gɔŋgɔ /

Meanwhile, there exists a kind of voiced labio-velar plosive /gb/ in Yoruba which is absent in English. The rendition of the sound starts from the velar position and swiftly glides towards the labial position and drops around the coronal region. The sound is prominent in both initial and medial word positions. It does not occur in final slots.

E.g.	Initially	=	gbáàgúdá	gbígboná
	Medially	=	àgbàlagbà	àgbélébùú

Without wasting much time, it can be concluded that a Yoruba learner of English is less likely to face problem in the learning of plosives. However, the instructor should pay special attention to the areas of aspiration of /p, t, k/; and /b/ in certain unreleased environments as faulty learning of these will constitute errors which hinder the accomplishment of a fairly high level of spoken English proficiency.

The Fricatives

These are consonant sounds which are produced with audible friction when air is expelled gradually through a narrowed air passage. A close look at the number of English fricatives as compared to that of Yoruba shows a wide disparity between the two systems. There are nine (9) fricative consonants in English to just about four (4) in Yoruba. These are identified below:

Voiceless labio-dental fricative	=	/f/
Voiced labio-dental fricative	=	/v/
Voiceless interdental fricative	=	/θ/
Voiced interdental fricative	=	/ð/
Voiceless alveolar fricative	=	/s/
Voiced alveolar fricative	=	/z/
Voiceless palato-alveolar fricative	=	/ʃ/
Voiced palato-alveolar fricative	=	/ʒ/
And the velar fricative	=	/h/

Meanwhile, special attention should be paid to the teaching of these consonants. They are strange sounds to Yoruba excepting /f/, /s/, /ʃ/, and /h/. Since some prominent English fricatives are completely absent in Yoruba: sounds like /v, θ, ð, z and ʒ/, there is

the tendency for a Yoruba speaker of English to say “fan” instead of “van”, “tin” instead of “thin”, “dem” instead of “them” /ðem/, “soo” instead of “zoo” and “measure” /mɛʃɔ/ instead of /mɛʒə/. These interpolations occur as a result of an attempt to substitute English fricatives with close approximations from the typical Yoruba consonants.

At this point where the majority of English fricatives is absent in Yoruba, our attention shall not be concerned with a mere comparison par se; rather, we shall try to look into those areas where substitutions are made.

In the cases of /f/, /s/, /ʃ/ and /h/, there are less notable distinctions between the two languages as pointed out earlier since they are rendered and realized in similar ways in both systems. As consonants, fricatives do not feature in Yoruba word final positions. Below is a table showing the consonantal fricatives of Yoruba initially and medially.

Positions in Words	/f/	/s/	/ʃ/	/h/
Initial	fáwẹ̀ẹ̀ll	sàlàngbá	şadé	hílàhílo
	funfun	sùúrù	şómólú	hu
Medial	àfín	eésà	àşà	ahón
	àgùnfón	awùsá	òrìşà	ẹ̀lẹ̀hàá

/h/ can be phonetically insignificant as a Yoruba fricative. It is usually classified under the consonantal glides as it behaves like /w/ in Yoruba. This is why /h/ can successfully take the slots of /w/ in Yoruba as could be seen below:



As a glide, therefore, the superimposition of the accompanying vowel on its phonetic quality cannot be ruled out; thus, /h/ is swallowed in such cases. And where such a trait is transferred into English, one simply goes on to commit blunders as could be seen below:

*an (h)orse instead of	“a horse”
*an (h)eadmāster instead of	“a headmaster”
*an (h)ousemaid instead of	“a housemaid”

Now, we shall go on to examine the English fricatives which are not tenable in Yoruba. /f/ is likely to be mistaken for /v/ by the Yoruba speakers of English. Therefore, error of substitution abounds and this can be seen in the table that follows:

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English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
vibrate	/vaɪbreɪt/	/faɪbreɪt/
university	/juːnɪvɜːsəti/	/juːnɪfasiti/
relieve	/rɪliːv/	/rɪliːf/

In the same way, /t/ is substituted for the English /θ/ which may be misleading as it is not only by mere inappropriate substitution with reference to manner of articulation but also in terms of place of articulation. Such errors of substitution which feature therein are shown in the table below:

English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
theme	/θiːm/	/tiːm/
sixth	/sɪksθ/	/sɪkst/
warmth	/wɔːmθ/	/wɔːmt/

Also, because the voiced interdental fricative /ð/ does not feature in the Yoruba consonantal system, the possibility of making a substitution as above cannot be ruled out. This is presented in the table below where the peculiar /d/ takes the place of /ð/.

English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
their	/ðeə/	/dia/
whether	/weðə/	/weda/
scythe	/saɪð/	/said/

Moreover, because the English voiced alveolar fricative /z/ is absent in Yoruba, the tendency to replace it with its voiceless but peculiar counterpart /s/ is high. This is exemplified in the table that follows:

English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
zeal	/ziːl/	/siːl/
seize	/siːz/	/siːs/
judges	/dʒʌdʒɪz/	/dʒɔdʒɪs/
hazard	/hæzəd/	/hasad/

In the same manner, /ʃ/ and /dʒ/ are substituted for the voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/; an English consonant which is problematic to foreign speakers. The likely areas of substitution are shown in the example that follows:

English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
treasure	/trɛʒə/	/trɛʃə/
message	/mæsa:ʒ/	/masa:dʒ/
gigolo	/ʒɪgələu/	/dʒɪgələu/

In conclusion, in view of the complexities involved in the teaching of certain English fricatives, in second language situations, principally because they are strange sounds to the indigenous language sub-system (Yoruba in this case), the instructor is enjoined to employ instructional strategies like the audio-visuals, audio-oral aids and situational drills to intensify the therapy.

The Affricates

Affricates are consonant sounds which, at the onset of articulation, are totally blocked like the plosive but whose sudden release is made through a narrowed opening as we have in the articulation of the fricatives. The affricates in English are:

The voiceless palato-alveolar affricate	/tʃ/
The voiced palato-alveolar affricate	/dʒ/

Excepting the fact that /dʒ/ does not occur in Yoruba final slots, it is similar to the English rendition. However, its voiceless counterpart /tʃ/ does not feature in the Yoruba consonantal system. It occurs in all English word slots for example:

chain	/tʃeɪn/	(Initial)
teachable	/ti:tʃəbl/	(Medial)
search	/sɜ:tʃ/	(Final)

And in the cases we have just cited, a Yoruba speaker may substitute /ʃ/ for /tʃ/ as shown in the following table.

English words	Transcription	Yoruba approximation
charge	/tʃɑ:dʒ/	/ʃɑ:dʒ/
torchlight	/tɔ:tʃlaɪt/	/ tɔ:ʃlaɪt /
batch	/bætʃ/	/baʃ/

Nevertheless, the voiced counterpart /dʒ/ is obtainable in Yoruba. Even its intervocalic occurrence can be more prominent too. Here are some Yoruba words containing /dʒ/ sound initially and medially. The 'boldened' segments are instances of /dʒ/.

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jẹ̀lẹ̀nkẹ́	(easily)	jùlọ	(most)
ajere	(gauze)	Àjàlá	(name)

As usual, since the open syllabic end is not obligatory in English, /dʒ/ occurs in final English word positions like in the examples below:

merge	/mɜːdʒ/
bandage	/bændɪdʒ/

Special attention should be paid to the regular present (for third person singular) tense and regular plural inflexions which directly follow affricate endings in which case, the '-s' inflexion is changed into a variant phonetic form /-ɪz/. Thus, the learners should learn the sibilants alongside their plural allomorphs. For example:

teach	/tiːtʃ/	=	/tiːtʃɪz/
bridge	/brɪdʒ/	=	/brɪdʒɪz/

In sum, affricate consonants can be problematic in a few cases where interference is highly predominant. At the same time, there is enough phonetic impetus within the scope of Yoruba consonantal system which can readily assist Yoruba speakers in 'Received Pronunciation' rendition of the seemingly problematic /tʃ/.

The Nasal Consonants

Nasal sounds are produced by total blockage of the oral passage so that audible sound is produced in the nasal passage through where the obstructed air stream escapes. There are three prominent nasals in English with the unique quality of vocal voicing. These are:

The voiced bilabial nasal	=	/m/
The voiced alveolar nasal	=	/n/
The voiced velar nasal	=	/ŋ/

The level of nasal sounds seems to be the least energy sapping phase of the contrastive study of English and Yoruba consonantal systems. This is because all the English nasals are tenable in Yoruba as well. Awóbùlúyì (1967) recognizes just one notable nasal /m/ which is natural in the Yoruba consonantal system; and that, of course, is the bilabial nasal /m/. This means that /n/ and /ŋ/ are variants of /m/. Whether they are realized through certain phonetic conditioning or not, they are consonants in Yoruba; and should be perceived as such. The implication here is that there is little or no interlanguage problem or error. The effective teaching and application of /m/ and /n/ in open discourse is not inhibited as such. Though the teaching and application of the sound may be in an L₂ situation, they are not completely alien to the Yoruba consonantal system.

However, in a few cases, /ŋ/ poses a big problem to certain Yoruba speakers. Unlike in English where /ŋ/ is an independent consonant, the occurrence of /ŋ/ is circumstantially determined in Yoruba. Even though there are no marked differences in

the rendition of the sound in Yoruba and English, we shall examine the positions in which the segment features in each of the two languages; perhaps, that would show their area of differences.

Word position	English	Yoruba
Initial position /m/	mother, mere	màlúù, mélòó
/n/	noun, name	nítorí, nípa
/ŋ/	x x x	nkò /ŋko/ ñkan /ŋkan/
Medial position /m/	almost, admonish	omi, abàmì
/n/	tender, clearer	aláànú, onílù
/ŋ/	bangles /bæŋglz/ banks /bæŋks/	aláńkóò /alaŋkoo/ kànga /kaŋga/
Final position /m/	calm, rum	x x x
/n/	pen, return	x x x
/ŋ/	coming /kʌmɪŋ/	x x x

Adequate analysis of the nasals as presented in the table shows that it is only the position of occurrence that differentiates the nasal consonants in the two languages. While /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ do not feature in Yoruba word final positions due to its open syllabic system, they do in English. However, where /ŋ/ is not realized initially in English, it is realized in Yoruba. Notice that /ŋ/ seems not original or independent in the Yoruba consonantal system; it creeps in only where /n/ precedes the velar /k/ or /g/. And finally, there have been controversies relating to whether or not the prominent nasal /m/ and /n/ are, at the same time, vowels in Yoruba by the contemporary scholars. But for our own study, the sounds shall be considered as nasal consonants but can only be ‘vowel-like’ in situations which are similar to the syllabic /ŋ/ and /m/ in English.

The Lateral Consonant

The lateral consonant is produced by partial blockage of the central oral passage so that the air which escapes from the sides of the tongue results in an audible friction. There is just one notable consonant which is lateral in English. This is peculiar to that which is obtainable in Yoruba. It is the alveolar lateral /l/. In English, /l/ occurs initially, medially and finally in words. It is more prominent in medial positions especially where it occurs intervocalically. But in Yoruba, in adherence to the open syllabic system, /l/ does not occur finally in typical Yoruba words. The positional occurrences of /l/ in both English and Yoruba are indicated below:

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Position	English	Yoruba
Initial	lecture, luggage	lẹ̀hìn, lágbájá
Medial	ailment, challenge	Ògúnlànà, aláse
Final	bull, final	x x x

A worthwhile area of contrast here is that /l/ is released in all possible environments in Yoruba. However, there are certain instances in English where /l/ may be unreleased especially when it is preceded by a vowel sound and, prominently, when it is immediately succeeded by a bilabial nasal /m/. This feature is exemplified in the transcription that follows:

Words	Transcription
calm	/kɑ:m/
alms	/ɑ:mz/
palm	/pɑ:m/

Other related instances are where /l/ precedes /k/ and /d/; examples of which are provided as follows:

should	/ʃud/
chalk	/tʃɔ:k/
folk	/fəuk/

Overall, the rendition of the lateral /l/ should not pose problems to Yoruba students of English in an L₂ situation.

The Frictionless Continuant

This is a voiced consonant which is produced when the central portion of the oral passage is partially blocked so that the tip of the tongue, in its retracted form, vibrates against the roof of the mouth. The sound produced in this way is popularly called the post-alveolar frictionless continuant /r/. Both English and Yoruba recognize /r/ in their consonantal systems. The rendition is similar in the two languages. It occurs in both English and Yoruba initially and medially. Just as it behaves in Yoruba, /r/ does feature in English word final positions (with specific reference to non-rhotic varieties of English especially the Received Pronunciation). The slots of occurrence of /r/ in the two languages are exemplified below:

Position	English	Yoruba
Initial	ring, real	ràkúnmí, rere
Medial	cry, spring	orílẹ̀, orò
Final	x x x	x x x

To avoid misconception, it is pertinent to emphasize that this study concerns itself with the RP standard dialect of English. Other dialects of English may not perfectly fit into the shoes of the yardstick from which our contrastive study is drawn. For instance, in certain dialects of American English and in Canadian English, the rendition of /r/ in final positions may be prominent. In RP dialect however, /r/ may be phonetically realized in final position. It is conditional as such occurrence is found at word boundaries in connected speech, where the final /-r/ in a word is followed by a vowel at the initial slot of another word. This is an instance of liaison. For example:

silver and gold	/silvərən gəʊld/
more over	/mɔːrəʊvə/
for instance	/fɔːrɪnstəns/

Also, in a minority dialect of Yoruba, most especially the variety of the Lagos metropolis, some people tend to draw the sound /r/ farther backward towards the velar position so that the likelihood or similitude of /gr/ is realized. The inherent danger there is that some still go ahead to introduce the ‘abnormal’ sound into their spoken English substituting /gr/ in places of /r/ as in [ogri gregre] for “ori rere”. Thus, error ensues. Speech therapy needs to be reinforced to correct such anomalies – some of which are basically induced by affectation.

The Approximants

These are the weak consonants. Their phonetic quality defies that of pure consonants. Their manner of articulation is principally influenced by the accompanying vowel sounds (with which they occur). Some phoneticians may prefer to call them *glides* while some see them as *semi-vowels*. There are two of such phonemes in English, they are:

The bilabial approximant	/w/ and
The palatal approximant	/j/

It should be noted that the occurrences and renditions of /h/ are ‘glidal’ in Yoruba. It is looked upon in English as a fricative consonant sound. The semi-vowels – /w/ and /j/ – are obtainable in both English and Yoruba. Similarly, in almost all the cases in the two languages, they occur initially and medially. They do not occur in word final positions.

Position	English	Yoruba
Initial /w/	Water	wúrà, wípé
/j/	yes /jes/	Yétúndé, yálà
Medial /w/	require /rɪkwaɪə/ awake	àwúre, awéwàá
/j/	abusive /əbjuːsɪv/ refuse /rɪfjuːz/	iyán, ẹlẹyin
Final /w/	x x x	x x x
/j/	x x x	x x x

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The approximants /w/ and /j/ exhibit variant forms depending on the sounds, usually vowels that follow them. That is, it is the succeeding sounds that determine their quality or direction of glide. The analogy is presented in the following table:

Variants of /w/ and /j/	English	Yoruba
Glides to /i/ : wɪ-, jɪ -	where, yeast /ji:st/	wípé, àyíká
Glides to /ɔ/ : wɔ-, jɔ -	what, yonder /jɔ:ndə/	wójò, yòndà
Glides to /a/ : wa-, ja -	wad, yard /jɑ:d/	àwàdà, aya
Glides to /u/ : wu-, ju(n) -	would, you /ju:/	wúrà, yùngbà
Glides to /ɛ/ : wɛ-, jɛ -	wet, yet /jet/	wèrè, ìyèwù

Looking at the uniqueness and the wide range similarities between English and Yoruba realizations of /w/ and /j/, one can therefore conclude that it is unlikely that the sounds will pose any serious problems to Yoruba students, teachers and speakers of English in L₂ situations. This is because the rendition and realization of the approximants in all permissible phonemic slots in L₁ tally with what operates in the target language. The pedagogic implication of this is language learning facilitation / ease of use.

Concluding Remarks

It is true that human beings can produce any sound. However, it is not all sounds that are tenable or acceptable in all languages. An examination of the contrastive features of English and Yoruba consonantal system justifies the assertion. The arrangement of sounds differs from one language to another. This study has attempted an investigation of the systemic differences and similarities in the consonantal systems of English and Yoruba. For instance, a Yoruba speaker unconsciously knows that /v/, /z/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ are not in the consonantal system of his language. At the same time, an English man may find it difficult to produce /kp/ and /gb/ which are effortlessly produced by the Yoruba. Hence, the thrust of this paper so far has been a comparison of qualities of the consonantal systems of English and Yoruba. This essay reiterates the fact that an alteration or substitution of a consonant in a word can equally alter the semantic bearing or import of the entire structure completely. For example, when a Yoruba speaker realizes /faɪ/ “fie” instead of /vaɪ/ for the word “vie” or when he realizes /daɪ/ “die” instead of /ðai/ for the word “thy”, the meaning is completely altered. All of these constitute difficulty in language learning.

In view of the obstacles that confront the science of teaching English consonants in Yoruba L₁ situations, the following suggestions are made:

- The model, method and syllabus should be cultured in such a way that the pedagogically induced errors are eradicated;
- The teacher should be a good model with adequate mastery of the English sound segments. If a teacher is poor, his students cannot be better;
- There should be adequate provision of the basic essential materials as obtainable in any standard language laboratory to teach contrastive segments;

- The students should be actively involved in the lessons. The teaching technique should be fluid; such that it stimulates communicative language learning;
- There should be enough time for the students to explore variations in English consonants using their pronouncing dictionary as a guide. The use of minimal pairs can also be effective to contrast sounds which are often confused (e.g. /ʃ/ and /tʃ/, or /z/ and /ʒ/); and
- The situational strategy should be adopted. This applies when learners are made to learn in the natural environment of that language. Due to the cost impediments, an artificial creation of natural language learning situations is helpful. Here, a teacher may incorporate the model dialogues and drills which take care of the sounds concerned. Recorded voices of the native speakers on tapes can be introduced to facilitate learning. It may, however, not be possible to create an exclusively Anglophonic learning atmosphere, the use of audio visuals, e.g. video tapes which really show the actual native environment of English usage will go a long way towards correcting the seemingly fossilized faulty productions of the Yoruba speakers or learners of English.

To cap it up, there is the need for the conduciveness of the environment. The society at large needs to develop a positive view about good English speakers and give incentives to learners generally. In-service Oral English training may be given to English teachers. Workshops, seminars, and symposia will go a long way towards advocating better methodologies and approaches for teaching phonology of English as a whole.

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