# A Contrastive Analysis of English and Tiv Segmental Phonemes: Implications in ESL Learning

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**ABSTRACT**
The goal of contrastive study is to examine the differences that exist between languages and the challenges they pose to second language learners. This paper focuses on a contrastive analysis of the segmental phonemes of the Tiv and English languages with emphasis on the implication of the differences in the learning of English as a second language by people whose first language is Tiv. The study reveals that while Tiv language has more consonants than the English language, both languages have the same number of vowels, but Tiv vowels /a/ and /o/ are not found in English, just as English vowels /∂/ and /æ/ are not present in Tiv. Herein lies the dilemma of the Tiv learner of English language. The work ends with some suggestions on how to eradicate or at least grossly minimize the resultant interference.
**Keywords**: Contrastive analysis, Segmental, Tiv, ESL.

**INTRODUCTION**
Contrastive analysis, as a branch of applied linguistics, aims at systematically comparing two or more languages to determine their areas of similarities and differences with their implication on language learning and teaching. Theoretically, contrastive analysis is based on structural linguistics and behavioral psychology. Allan G.H. Bloom (1977) states that current linguistics and pedagogic theories have come up with two different approaches to language errors, namely: contrastive analysis and error analysis. The focus of this study is contrastive analysis, whose goal is to examine the differences that exist between languages and the difficulties they pose to second language learning.

The concern of this paper is a contrastive study of the segmental phonemes of English and Tiv languages, beaming searchlight especially on the implication of the differences in the learning of English language by people whose first language is Tiv. Tiv is a language spoken by the Tiv people, an ethno-linguistic group nation in West Africa. The Tiv came into contact with European culture during the colonial period. The geographical position of Tiv is between $60^030'$ and $8^010'$ north latitude and $8^0$ and $1^0$ east latitude.

The Tiv share borders with the Chamba and Jukun of Taraba state in the north-east; with the Igede (Benue), Igala, Caleem and Obudu of Cross River state in the south -south; and the Idoma of Benue state to the south. There is also an international boundary between the Tiv and the Republic of Cameroun at south-eastern angle of the ethnic group's location. They are among the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. Numbering about 2.5 million individuals, according to the 1991 Nigerian Population census, they occupy the middle Belt states of Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, and Plateau. A few Tiv are also found in Cross River and Adamawa states.

There are many segmental features of the English language that are not found in many African languages, just as many in African languages are missing in the English. As a result, African learners

of English face a lot of challenges in achieving proficiency in the language. This is because the corollary of the obvious differences between the African and English languages is the emergence of errors.

Tiv language lacks certain consonant sounds, which the English language has and this makes it very difficult for a Tiv learner of English language. This paper aims at exploring the phonological differences between Tiv and English language, especially at the segmental level; highlighting the consequent difficulties encountered by Tiv learners of English and proffering solutions on the way out of the problems.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

Adegbija (1994) states that the issue of the number of languages in Nigeria has been subjected to guessing: some scholars put it at 250, others says 300, 394 and 400 respectively. Whichever is correct, the fact remains that the Nigerian speech community is multilingual but most of the researches have concentrated on the three main languages- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This situation not only creates imbalance but also endangers the rest of the languages. This is where this research comes in to fill the existing vacuum not only by itself but by the numerous other works it will provoke. This work, therefore, sets out to find out the influence of Tiv language on the segmental phonology of English and its implication on learning English a second language.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Not many works have been done on contrastive analysis of English and Tiv phonology. Udu, T. (2009) in his Study of Tiv Language attempts an in-depth description of Tiv phonemes but he falls short of a contrastive analysis of the phonemes of Tiv and those of other languages. Jija, T. (2012) carried out a study on Aspects of Tiv Pluralisation but his emphasis is on the morpho-syntactic and morpho-phonological structures of the Tiv noun pluralisation. Ikima, M.N. (2012) studied the syllable errors of Tiv Speakers of English as a second language. Using the Markedness approach to syllable errors, she explores how Tiv speakers deal with complex syllables and her findings indicate that much of the errors committed by Tiv speakers of English as a second language can be attributed to the differences in the syllable structure of both languages.

Examining the Tiv language orthography, Sar (2012) establishes the reality of diphthongs as part of the phonemic inventory of the Tiv language and disproves the notion that diphthongs do not exist in Tiv. She encourages more research in various aspects of the language so as to enable it develop like any other local language. Mbah and Waya (2014) observe that Tiv speakers of the English language realize phonotactics of English words differently. They opine that the speaker violates the phonotactic rules of the English language in realizing consonant clusters and vowel harmony. They also state that Tiv learners experience difficulties in realizing English syllabic pattern with consonant cluster and find it difficult to pronounce English words with consonant clusters without inserting a vowel sound, thereby transferring the feature from their language to the second language.

Waya and Kwambehar (2014), on carrying out a phonemic contrastive analysis of Tiv and English segmental, made the following observations: That Tiv language has more phonemic consonants than the English language; both languages exhibit equal number of vowels; vowels /ə/ and /æ/ are present in English but not in Tiv and; tone plays a vital role in the use of vowels in Tiv while English marks vowel differences in intonations.

Kaan, A.T. and Yoo, A.S. (2014) examined the Applicability of the Theory of Phonology to the Sound System of Tiv using the phoneme theory, the distinctive features theory and the tone/pitch contours theory. Their study which is not expressly devoted to segmental of Tiv phonology reveals that phonemes of the Tiv language, like any other language are contrastive units of sounds and meaning, just as tone determines differences in meaning in Tiv.

While all the works cited here have their focus on the phonological differences between the English and Tiv languages, this research stresses the pedagogic implication of the phonological differences.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work hinges on the contrastive analysis hypothesis of Lado (1957). He states that "… in the comparison between native, and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning". He outlines methods for comparing two systems of sound, grammar, vocabulary, writing

and culture. He and Charles C. Fries in their contrastive hypothesis posit that difficulties in learning a language can be predicted on the bases of a systematic comparison of the system of the learner's first language (its grammar, phonology and lexicon) with the system of a second language.

Contrastive analysis therefore, is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. It has been used to establish language genealogies and was used in the field of Second language Acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and early 1970s, as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. Using this theory, the researchers will compare and contrast the segmental phonemes of English and Tiv languages with a view to identifying their similarities and differences and drawing conclusions on their implication on the learning of English language by a Tiv.

**SEGMENTAL PHONEMES**

Sounds and phonemes in a language are referred to as Segmentals. Jones (1967) sees phonemes as "a family of sounds in a given language which are related in character and are used in such a way that no member ever occurs in a word in the same phonetic context as any other member." Phonemes are distinct segments that make up the total inventory of sounds. A phoneme is the smallest linguistic unit of a language. Vowels and consonants make up the phonetic inventory of all human languages. These are also attested to in the Tiv language.

While there are 20 vowels in both English and Tiv vowel systems, some vowels in Tiv language are not found in English, just as some of the vowels in English do not exist in Tiv. The English phonological system is made up of twenty-four consonants, whereas Udu (2009) identifies thirty-three consonants in Tiv language.

### Table 1. English and Tiv Vowels

| English language vowels | Words found | Tiv Vowels | Words | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| i | Pit | i | Iv | Full |
| e | Pet | e | Ember | Joy |
| æ | Pat | - | - | - |
| ɒ | Pot | - | - | |
| u | Put | u | Bugh | Open |
| ʌ | Son | - | - | - |
| ə | About | - | - | - |
| i: | Key | i: | Ii | Bury |
| a: | Car | a: | Vaa | Cry |
| ɔ: | Core | ô: | Alôm | Rabbit |
| u: | Cool | u: | Tuugh | Night |
| ʒ: | Cur | - | - | - |
| | | a | ato | buttocks |
| | | o | or | Person |
| | | e: | teetee | Slowly |
| | | o: | doo | Good |
| | | ô | tôôgh | Wait |

**Table 2. English and Tiv diphthongs**

| English Diphthongs | Words | Tiv Diphthongs | Words | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| iə | beard | ia | hia | Burnt |
| eə | scarce | ie | ier | a lie |
| uə | tour | - | - | - |
| ei | paid | ei | ei | No |
| ai | time | - | - | - |
| ɔi | void | - | - | - |
| əu | home | - | - | - |
| au | gown | - | - | - |
| - | - | ua | wuah | guinea corn |
| - | - | io | ior | People |
| | | ue | due | Out |
| | | ae | aertso/aende | later/to cut |
| | | ou | mough | wool/stand |

**Table 3. English and Tiv Consonants**

| English consonants | Words | Tiv Consonants | Words | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| p | pea | p | pande | Reduce |
| b | bee | b | bua | Cow |
| t | toe | t | tondo | Cut |
| d | doe | d | daan | Useless |
| k | kid | k | kasnhio | Unable |
| g | gap | g | gôgônan | Long |
| - | - | kp | kposo | Different |
| - | - | gb | gbenda | Road |
| - | - | kj | kyau | Load |
| - | - | gj | gyar | Fence |
| - | - | mb | mban | this ones |
| - | - | nd | nder | wake up |
| f | fat | f | fa | know |
| v | van | v | va | Come |
| θ | thing | - | - | - |
| ð | this | - | - | - |
| s | sip | s | sar | Lost |
| z | zip | z | zoho | quarrel |
| ʃ | shop | ʃ | shie | Time |
| ʒ | treasure | y | kwagh | Something |
| h | hat | h | hôm | Funny |
| m | map | m | mo | Me |
| l | led | l | loho/laha | message/insult |
| n | nap | n | nam | give me |
| r | red | r | ruam | Fufu |
| ŋ | hang | ŋ | mngerem | Water |
| j | you | J | iyou | yam |
| w | wet | w | wan | Child |
| tʃ | chin | tʃ | Tsorun | Forever |
| - | - | ts | Tsar | Bridge |
| dʒ | John | dʒ | Dzwa | Mouth |
| - | - | nz | nzeiyol | Problem |
| - | - | π | nyoriyol | Tiredness |
| - | - | kw | Kwav | Mate |
| | | gw | gwariche | strand of hair |

## FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

This analysis shows that we have equal number of vowels in both languages, except that there are some vowels in Tiv that are not present in English language. In Tiv Language, there are /a/ and /o/ vowels which are not found in English language, while /∂/, /æ/ and /ʌ/ are not present in Tiv language. Tone plays an important role in the use of Tiv vowels in that one Tiv vowel sound can give different meanings to different words which can only be distinguished in writing through the use of tone marking. Such a situation cannot be found in English language. E.g. :Tór which means{ pestle}, Tōr which means{ roof} ,Tòr which means{ king}, kpér means{yesterday}, Kpèr means {net}. Another contrast is that vowel length can be tense and lax in English, e,g heat /hi:t/,hut/hʌt/ whereas in Tiv language, it is lexical e.g. – ma means {drink}, maa means{build}. Also, there is free variation in English which can be seen in pronunciation. E.g. data /deita/, /data/. In Tiv, there is free variation orthographically but it may be dialectal.

In terms of the consonants, Tiv language has more constants than English language. While there are thirty-three consonant sounds in Tiv, English has twenty four. It is obvious from the analysis that the two dental fricatives /ɵ/ and / ð / are absent in Tiv language and tend to be substituted for the alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ respectively.

While there are differences between the lateral /l/ and liquid /r/ in English consonants, Tiv language does not recognize these differences as /l/ and /r/ are used interchangeably without altering the meaning. For instance, 'load' and 'road' are two different words in English whereas 'lumun' and 'rumun' have the same meaning as (accept) in Tiv language.

The following consonants in Tiv do not exist in English /kp/ - kpan (slave), /gb/ - gbande /plate/, /gw/ - gwar (strand), /kw/ - kwav (mate), /ts/ - tso (canoe), /y/ - kwagh (something), /π/nyor - enter, /gj/ - gyar (fence), /kj/ kyav (load).The fricative alveolar consonants /s/, /z/ occur only at initial and middle positions of words in Tiv, whereas they appear at the initial, middle and word final positions in English. Similarly, the velar sound /y/ in Tiv does not occur at the word initial position except at the middle and final positions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL LEARNING

The importance of mother-tongue or L1 in the learning of English as second language cannot be overemphasized, but it is necessary to tackle the issue of interference from mother-tongue in the learning of English. In as much as the second language learning environment encompasses everything the language learner hears and sees in the new language, the learner's goal is the mastery of the target language. The learner begins the task of learning a second language from point zero, and through the steady accumulation of the mustered entities of the target language, eventually attains a particular level of proficiency.

Phonological errors may occur due to the fact that some of the English sounds are not found in the Tiv language. For instance, /ə/, /æ/ and /ʌ/ are not present in Tiv and many Tiv learners of English find it difficult to pronounce /ʌ/.They realize it as /ô/ such as in cut /kʌt/ pronounced as/kôt/. Also ban /bæn/ is pronounced /ba:n/ thereby realizing /æ/ as /a:/.Tiv language speakers of English may tend to force certain Tiv vowel sounds that do not exist in English on the English sound system.

The absence of the dental fricatives /ɵ/ and /δ/ in the phonemic inventory of Tiv language has far-reaching implications on learning the English sounds. Where words like 'thin' and pith occur in a sentence, many Tiv learners of English tend to pronounce them as 'tin' and 'pit' respectively. While the voiceless dental fricative/ɵ/is substituted for the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/, the voiced dental fricative / ð / is substituted for the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ by Tiv learners of English. The lack of differentiation between lateral /l/ and the liquid /r/ consonants in Tiv language tends to result to the inability of some Tiv speakers of English to differentiate the sounds in English. For instance ruler, road and radio are pronounced as /lula/, /lod/ and /ledio/ respectively.

On the whole, the implications of L1 on learning a second language need to be highlighted here especially in respect of segmental phonemes. It should not be taken for granted that teachers of English are aware of their responsibilities in the teaching and learning of English as it relates to instructional goals.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Learners' cultural background can either enhance or impede the learning of a second language. When the L1 and L2 cultures share similar features, the assumptions made contribute to learning. However, when both cultures differ in so many aspects, learning becomes difficult. It is our suggestion that teachers of Phonology of English take into cognizance the linguistic backgrounds of second language learners.

Teachers must spot and highlight those shared features that may contribute to second language learning. Again, pronunciation correction practice is essential and teachers must be cautious in error corrections because errors in pronunciation may be the result of negative language transfer or incorrect assumption held about the second language. Such teaching strategies as isolating the problematic sound segments for remedy, the use of minimal pairs to contrast confusing sounds and the use of sounds in sentences can be adopted by the teacher for the correction of pronunciation errors.

Teachers of ESL should also make use of language laboratories in teaching phonology. This will go a long way in correcting errors in pronunciation.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it can be deduced from the above analysis that phonologically, Tiv language differs to a large extent from English language. Due to the differences that exist in the vowels and consonants of the two languages, there are certain predictions of errors that a Tiv learner of English is bound to make. As for consonants, there are more consonants in Tiv language than we have in English but we have the same number of vowels in both languages, the only difference being that there are some vowels in English that are not found in Tiv language, just as there are some in Tiv that are not found in English language. It is therefore expedient that both Tiv learners of English and teachers of the English take advantage of the exposition made in this study to actualize the desired goal of teaching/learning English as a second language.

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