

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND AWORI SUPRASEGMENTAL SYSTEMS

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the suprasegmental systems of English and Awori, a Nigerian language, with a focus on their phonological and phonetic properties. The research aims to identify similarities and differences between the two languages in terms of stress, intonation, tone, and rhythm. A comparative analysis of the suprasegmental features of both languages reveals distinct patterns and structures, shedding light on the unique characteristics of each language. The population of this study comprised the speakers of Awori in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. Fifteen informants were selected from different age grades and sexes from whom a word list of 400 Basic Items in the Awori dialect was recorded and transcribed using the International Phonetic Association symbols. The result revealed that there were certain problems associated with the learning of Phonology by Awori speakers of English as a Second language specifically and Nigerian learners in general.

**Keywords:** Suprasegmental phonology, English, Awori, Comparative linguistics, Phonetics, Phonology.

### **Introduction**

The 'pre-eminent' position of English in the daily life and linguistic repertoire of many Nigerians today is obvious. The role of English as a medium of communication in the country is also well-known. It is the language of education and officialdom, i.e. the language of administration, law, commerce, and even religion. For some people, it is the language of wider communication between different groups, and the lingua franca among many Nigerians. It is indeed the mother tongue of a few Nigerians (Nnyigide & Anyaegbu, 2020). It may be assumed that in comparison with other Nigerian languages, the English language presently occupies the position that Latin once occupied in the 16<sup>th</sup> century England relative to English itself, when the latter was regarded as barbaric and inadequate and the former as the language of officialdom and of learning and scholarship (Ikara, 1984).

Adeyanju (2002) opines that in Nigeria, English serves as a lingua franca in that it unifies all ethnic groups including those with minority languages. Hence, anyone who can neither speak nor understand the English language will remain

uncomfortable when relating to people outside his ethnic group. Thus, Ogundepo (2015) observes that English is a second language in Nigeria and Nigerian learners encounter difficulties because they learn it against the background of their mother tongue in which they have attained competence. Consequently, challenges arise in its teaching and learning. The major one is interference which can be found at the phonological, grammatical and lexical levels. Interference means the effect of transferring the habits associated with the mother tongue of the learner to the target language (the second language).

Furthermore, the teaching and learning of spoken English in second language situations such as Nigeria is usually beset with some challenges in the segmental as well as the supra-segmental features. These challenges can lead to various forms of speech deficiencies and errors of second-language speakers of English such as wrong pronunciation of sounds, insertion of vowels into a stretch of consonants and wrong placement of stress to mention but a few, which in turn adversely affect effective communication (Olowofoyeku, 2023). Additionally, Ogundepo

(2015) exposit contrastive study as a science that deals with practical applications of the findings of theoretical linguistics in such areas as language teaching, methodology, and speech therapy. Contrastive analysis has always been relevant to language teachers and language learners for effective teaching and learning of languages respectively. It is against this background that the comparative study of English and Awori suprasegmental phonological systems was investigated.

The Awori dialect is unique and associated with a dialectal speaking sub-group who had long occupied the southwestern part of coastal Yorubaland and possesses a distinctive speech which is recognisably a separate Yoruba dialect. According to classification of studies in Nigerian languages the speakers of Awori belong to Yoruba group of Kwa family in the classification of Niger-Kordofanian. There are four concentrations of the Awori: the eastern Awori have their Centre in Iseri and inhabit Ota and other villages in the present Ogun State, while the Central Awori is also found in Ogun State. The coastal or southern Awori are found in Lagos and adjoining island. The western is central around Ojo, Ijanikin and other villages westward to Badagry. Together the coastal and the western Aworis are found within the boundaries of the present Lagos State and they constitute the object of this study. Therefore, the rationale behind this study is to find out how the suprasegmental phonological systems of English and Awori are similar to and different from each other. In the process, the areas of difficulties in the realisation of English segmental phonology by Awori speakers can be identified so that they can be helped to overcome the learning and production hindrances.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to :

- i. identify and describe the suprasegmental features of English and Awori.
- ii. compare and contrast the suprasegmental systems of English and Awori.
- iii. investigate the implications of the findings for language teaching and language acquisition

### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the suprasegmental features of English and Awori?
- ii. How do the suprasegmental systems of English and Awori differ?
- iii. What are the implications of the differences and similarities between the two languages' suprasegmental systems for language teaching and acquisition?

### **Methodology**

The study was descriptive, and a qualitative contrastive approach was employed to select, analyse and interpret data. Primary data were collected from randomly selected native residents of Awori land. Data collected from different sources, that is, both primary and secondary data were processed and analysed using the Contrastive Analysis Theory and Auto-segmental Phonology. This was to show the differences and similarities between the suprasegmental phonological systems of English and Awori and the implications of the differences on ESL teacher and learner.

### **Population**

The population of this study comprised of the speakers of Awori in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. Fifteen informants were selected from different age grades and sexes from whom a word list of 400 Basic Items in the Awori dialect were recorded and transcribed using the International Phonetic Association symbols.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Contrastive Analysis Theory and Auto-Segmental Theory are the theoretical framework employed for this study.

### **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

This is also called Contrastive Theory in such recent works as (Olawe 2021). The contrastive analysis hypothesis is an area of comparative linguistics that is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes external to the analysis itself. It states that the structure of the first language affects the acquisition of the second language (Lado, 1957 & Fries, 1945). CAH is also founded on the assumption that L2 learners will tend to transfer the formal features of their L1 to their L2 utterances (Olowofoyeku, 2023).

Additionally, Lado (1957) claims that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meaning and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture.

Also, Gast (2016) opines that contrastive studies mostly deal with the comparison of languages that are “socio-culturally linked” that is languages whose speech communities overlap in some way, typically through (natural or instructed) bilingualism. This notion of “transfer” means carrying over the habits of his mother-tongue into the second language (Corder, 1974). Yali and Mei (2019) explain that contrastive linguistics, in a narrow sense, refers to the contrastive study of two or more languages in terms of phonetics, morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, and discourse. Furthermore, it is suggested that the psychological foundation of CAH is transfer theory, substituting the first language for the prior learning and the second language for the subsequent learning.

#### **Auto-Segmental Phonology Theory**

Goldsmith’s Auto-segmental phonology Theory (1976) was adopted as the theoretical frame for the phonological process analysis. This theory is involved in the analysis of syllable, tones, vowel harmony, and nasalization. Auto-segmental theory submits that tones in tonal languages are autonomous and should be treated as independent tiers just like the traditional segments (consonant and vowel) which they have been superimposed on. It attempts to supply a more adequate understanding of the phonetic side of linguistics representation. Data collected from different sources were processed and analysed using the Contrastive Analysis Theory and Auto-segmental Phonology. This was to show the differences and similarities between the segmental phonological systems of English and Awori and the implications of the differences on ESL teacher and learner.

#### **Suprasegmentals**

Interference is not limited to phonemes alone. It also happens to suprasegmentals. Stress and intonation are attested in English while tone and vowel harmony are attested in Awori. Interference occurs when a bilingual super imposes his own suprasegmental on that of the

English language. This leads to productions that are deviant from the English production. Following the definition of Pike, “a tone language is one in which contrastive pitch levels do not merely form the intonation tune of a sentence as for instance, in English but enter as distinct factors into the lexical elements of the language...”

Bamisyaye (1992) defines suprasegmentals as “secondary overlaid phonological features imposed on the primary segments.” (e.g. consonants or vowels) include stress, tone, length, variation in pitch (i.e. intonation) and vowel harmony.

#### **Awori Suprasegmentals**

Tone is a major feature of some African languages. Awori dialect is not an exception in this. Awori is a tonal dialect. Tone forms the intonation and the lexical element of the dialect.

Tone is describable as variations which can be achieved by altering the tension of the vocal cords (Ladefoged, 1982). These variations in pitch perform a language function similar to the grammatical function of stress in English.

#### **Tones in Awori**

There are three main tones in Awori. They are represented below as follows:

Low tone \

Mid tone – (or unmarked)

High tone /

Examples illustrating occurrence of each tone.

Low tone / \ /

/ogbi/ “plant”

/ru/ “stink”

Mid tone /-/

/gbo/ “look for”

/gegele/ “mountain”

High tone ///

/simisi/ “small”

/gbe/ “how”

Tone helps to distinguish the meaning of a word in a situation where the word has the same orthography, examples:

i. /igba/ “time”

ii. /igba/ “two hundred”

iii. /igba/ “calabash”

- i./gbo/                      “bark” high tone  
ii. /gbo/                     “ wash” (leaves or clothes)  
mid tone

### English Suprasegmentals

There are two English suprasegmentals: stress and intonation.

The use of pitch variation to convey syntactic information is referred to as intonation (Ladefoged, 1982). Intonation also has grammatical as well as attitudinal functions. Gimson (1989) explains that variation in pitch or intonation changes are the most efficient means of rendering prominent for a listener those parts of an utterance which the speaker intends to focus on e.g. My brother beats the man (my brother, not sister beat the man).

There are two types of tone: Static tones and kinetic tones. Kinetic tones are of five-types:

The rising tone /

The falling tone \

The rising falling tone ^

The falling rising tone ^

The rising falling rising tone

Stress is the “greater effort on a syllable or syllables in a word or longer utterance than on the other Syllable” O’Connor (1989).

### Data Analysis and Discussion

#### Suprasegmental Differences between English and Awori

Stress is not found in Awori. What is found rather is prominence (together with-it phonological counterpart accent), since Awori is a tonal language. English has two suprasegmentals namely, stress and intonation. Intonation shows the feelings of the speaker, according to O’Connor (1989) “the word does not change their meaning but this is the speaker’s feelings at the moment.” While the Awori tone depicts the speaker’s feeling by either rising or lowering of his voice.

In Awori the tone mainly belongs to the word, being part of its shape and if the tone of the word is wrong its shape is spoiled. In Awori the same sounds said with different tones may make quite different words, for example ‘o t`I’ said with a rising tone means it is straight but ‘o` t`I’ with a low tone means it urinates, an important difference! While in English the tone belongs not to the word but to the word group, if one says the

English ‘No’ with different tone it is still the same word and meaning. English intonation system allows the rising tone to ask general question but the falling tone ask ‘Wh’ question type. In Awori all questions are asked with a rising tone.

Apart from the syllable Nasals /m/, /n/ and /n`/ that bear tone and subsequently constituted a syllable on their own, consonants do not take tone marks in Awori but English allows stress on a syllable in a word, the sound that starts the syllable may be a vowel or a consonant. To emphasise a word in English language, the speaker places the stress on the desired word to be emphasised. An Awori emphasises a word by lightening the emphatic clause and adding a high or mid tone to it.

### Syllable Structure

According to Hyman (1975), the syllable is by far the most widely discussed phonological phenomenon, and that every language has its own preferred syllable structure, even loan words are modified if their syllable structured does not conform with the type of language where words are loaned. He goes further to describe syllable as consisting of three phonetic parts namely: the onset, the peak or nucleus (which is the most obligatory part of the syllable), and the coda. Also, Roach (2003) confirmed that syllables are usually described as consisting of a center which has little or no obstruction to airflow and which sounds comparatively loud; before and after this center (that is, at the beginning and end of the syllable), there will be greater obstruction to airflow and/or less loud sound. The syllable is also described by Bamisaye (1992)) as “the final representation of pronounceable unitary segment or a sequence of segments.”

### English and Awori Syllable Structures

#### English Syllable Structure

Odden, (2013) schematises the syllable structure of English as C0-3 VC0-4 that is zero to three consonant (cluster) onset, and obligatory vowel nucleus and zero to four consonant (cluster) coda. Consonant cluster is permitted though the choice of the consonant is rule governed (Bamisaye, 1995). Thus, the English syllable structure is specified as /C0-3 V C0-4/ that is, the syllable in English can have from zero to three consonant cluster onset, a mandatory vowel nucleus and from

zero to four consonant cluster coda as illustrated below:

**Open Syllables**

- i. V /ai/ I
- ii. CV /si/ see
- iii. CCV /spai/ spy
- iv. CCCV /sprei/ spray

**Closed Syllables**

- i. VC /ət/ at
- ii. VCC /ækt/ act
- iii. CVC /pæn/ pan

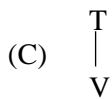
- iv. CVCC /sænd/ sand
- v. CCCVC /streit/ straight
- vi. CVCCC /leŋkθ/ length
- vii. CCCVCC /sprɪnt/ sprint
- viii. CCCVCCCC /streŋkθs/ strengths

In English, there are restrictions on some vowels and consonants in their positions in the syllables. For instance, /h, r, j, and w/ only occur at syllable onset while /ŋ/ can occur only in the final syllable. The vowels /ɪ, ε, æ, ɒ, u and ʌ/ cannot occur in stressed open syllables.

**Awori Syllable Structure**

The syllabic structure of Awori is C<sup>0-1</sup>V which does not permit a sequence of consonants (consonant clusters). The vowel maybe an oral, a nasal vowel or a syllabic nasal which like any vowel bears tone. Nasal vowels do not occur in word initial position in Awori. When the coda is present, we have a close syllable but when it is absent, the syllable is open. The vowel that bears tone is the nucleus of the syllable and in Awori, the unit within which the nucleus bears the tone is a syllable.

Pertaining to the syllable structure, Awori has only three syllable types: V, CV and N. Therefore, from these syllable types we can say that Awori has no closed syllables or consonant clusters. Awori syllable can be summed up in a formulas as follows:



Where C stands for a consonant and  $\begin{matrix} T \\ | \\ V \end{matrix}$  is a tone bearing unit. The bracket indicates that where C stands for a

consonant and  $\begin{matrix} T \\ | \\ V \end{matrix}$  is a tone bearing unit. The bracket indicates that anything inside it is optional. The syllabic

nasal occurring at  $\begin{matrix} T \\ | \\ V \end{matrix}$  is homorganic with the following consonant.

The Auto-segmental theory is employed in characterising syllable structure in Awori. The element that constitutes the syllable is either a vowel or a syllabic nasal. This is unique to Awori since English does not only operate open syllable but also closed ones.

The above syllable structure could be illustrated with examples from Awori.

The V syllable type

- i` s m` 'nose'
- `iwe + `e 'her book'

The Cv syllable type

- /gbi`/ 'sow'
- /~ni`/ 'roast'



/gu~/ 'pound'  
 The syllabic Nasal type N  
 a /ɾ`a/`n gb`a 'lizard'  
 gba /n/ gba 'open space'  
 la /m`/ b`e 'monkey'

Awori syllables are not arrested, they are open that is the table always have a vowel ending.

**The Syllabic Nasal in Awori**

Awori syllabic nasal is indicated by /N/. This is not the same with the nasality feature in that it is a segment that bears significant tone.

**The syllabic Nasal type N**

a /ɾ`a/`n gb`a 'lizard'  
 gba /n/ gba 'open space'  
 la /m`/ b`e 'monkey'

**The syllabic nasal has two allophones:**

- i. [m] bilabial syllabic nasal before voiced bilabial plosive consonant as in:  
 /ðroNbó/-----→ [ðrombó] orange
- ii. [m] bilabial syllabic nasal before voiced labial –velar plosive as in:  
 /kèNgbè/-----→ [kèngbè] small

From the data, we can conclude that /N/ is a single phoneme which has [m] as its variant. It can only co - occur with [ii]. It can be preceded by a vowel but never by a consonant. Syllabic nasal performs the same function as the vowels, as the peak of a syllable in Awori.

Based on the discussion of syllabic nasal above, one can infer that it is the presence of syllabic nasal in Awori that makes the speakers of Awori attach tones to the following English words in their pronunciation:

- i. /kəuNb/-----→ [kóm̀b̀ù] instead of /kəum/ comb
- ii. /klaɪNb/-----→ [kílám̀b̀ù] instead of /klaɪm/ climb
- iii. /bɒNb/-----→ [bóm̀b̀ù] instead of /bɒm/ bomb

**The Problematic Suprasegmentals**

Stress and intonation serve as the basic problems of suprasegmentals to the Awori. The Awori language attests only tone as its suprasegmental feature. In the area of stress, English is a stressed-timed language while Awori is a syllable-timed dialect. The way the Awori speaker of English places his stress mark might cause some misunderstanding, since, stress can also be used as a grammatical marker. By altering the accentual pattern of an utterance, the meaning has been changed. By removing the stress of ‘\insult’ from the first syllable to the second syllable ‘in’sult’ the word class changes from ‘noun’ to ‘verb.’

When it comes to intonation, we find out that almost all languages have a particular format in the realisation of their speech. What the English man uses the rising tone for, an Awori uses the falling tone.

The problems of stress are varied for the Awori speaker of English. Nouns can be distinguished from verbs through stress as exemplified by these examples:

(RP) Noun	Verb	(AR) N	V	Gloss
`object	ob`ject	`object	`object	object
`conduct	con`duct	`conduct	`conduct	conduct
`poduce	pro`duce	`produce	`produce	produce

By means of stress adjectives can equally be distinguished from verbs as exemplified by these examples:

(RP) Adj.p	Verb	(AR) N	V	Gloss
`present	pre`sent	`present	`present	Present
`absent	ab`sent	`absent	`absent	Absent
`frequent	fre`quent	`frequent	`frequent	frequent

The problem of intonation arises when asking questions, making commands and when making emphasis. These are presented in the data below:

English Rendition	Awori Rendition
/wɒt ɪz jɔ: 'neɪm/ or /wʌt ɪz juəɹ 'neɪm/ What is your `name?	/wɒt ɪz 'jɔ: neɪm/ What is 'your name?
hu: ɪz ðə 'bɔɪ/ Who is the `boy?	hu: ɪz 'ðə bɔɪ/ Who is the 'boy?
/waɪ dɪd 'ju: 'slæp 'hɜ:/ Why did you `slap `her?	waɪ dɪd 'ju: slæp 'hɜ:/ Why did 'you slap her?

Z

/wɪl aɪ bi fə'gɪvən/ Will I be 'for'given?	/wɪl aɪ 'bi fəgɪvən/ Will I 'be forgiven?
/dɪd ju: ɡoʊ tu: 'tʃɜ:tʃ/ Did you `go to church?	/dɪd ju: 'ɡoʊ tu: tʃɜ:tʃ/ Did you 'go to church?
/hæz hi ɡʌn 'həʊm/ Has he `gone home?	/hæz hi 'ɡʌn həʊm/ Has he 'gone home?

English Rendition	Awori Rendition
/ʃʌt ʌp/ Shut `up	/ʃʌt ʌp/ Shut 'up
/kʌm 'hɪə/ Come `here	/kʌm 'hɪə/ Come 'here
/doʊnt 'ʃaʊt/ Don't `shout	/doʊnt 'ʃaʊt/ Don't 'shout

/ɪt wəz 'ɡʊd/ It was `good	ɪt wəz 'ɡʊd/ it was `good
/hi: ɪz 'ʌɡli/ He is `ugly	/hi: ɪz 'ʌɡli/ He is `ugly
/ju: ɑ: 'naɪs/ You are `nice	/ju: ɑ: 'naɪs/ You are `nice

Inferring from the data presented above any syllable bearing a plosive 'p' is stressed irrespective of its word class. Due to wrong placement of stress words also lose their meanings. For instance, the verb 'ob`ject' is wrongly stress as

a noun by an Awori speaker of English as '/object.' By the way the Awori places this stress a verb is wrongly stressed changing the meaning to an adjective. For example: the verb 'pre`sented' stressed wrongly as 'present' the initial position of the

stress mark means that the word is an adjective. Intonation also pose as a problem, commands that should be articulated with a falling tone is rendered with a rising tone by an Awori speaker of English as a second language. An Awori bring in the feature of his phonology as regards emphasis, he does this by lengthening the last word and adding a high tone to it.

### **Discussion**

The main cause of the wrongly place stress and intonation is because Awori does not attest these two suprasegmentals. It has been observed that Awori man is unable to stress words properly. The Awori man uses the same stress pattern for a word irrespective of its word class. Verbs wrongly stressed rendering it as a noun and also a verb wrongly stressed changing the meaning to an adjective. It is also observed that the 'wh' questions pose as a problem for the Awori. The Awori man employs the high tone to articulate questions, in articulating the 'wh' questions he adapts this high tone while in English 'wh' questions take the falling intonation. Since Awori dialect uses the high tone for asking questions, it is easy for an Awori speaker of English to adapt to the rising intonation of English for asking auxiliary questions. Emphasis of lexical items also pose as a problem for Awori speakers of English. The Awori add a rising tone to the word to be emphasised and the last syllable is lengthened.

### **Recommendations**

The first major improvement that can be made aims at children who are still in the early state of language acquisition and learning, since it is proved that a child can acquired two language simultaneously, therefore, they should be introduced to English language at a very early age so that it is learnt side by side with their mother tongue. This paper recommends that text books, especially language text books must be specially written and graded for each educational level, and materials in each text book so progressively presented as to optimise learning. The school curriculum must also place appropriate emphasis on the use of English language in the school system and language laboratories should be provided in the schools.  
ct.

Qualified and competent English teachers should be made available to teach English language in all the schools within the various Local Government in Awori land. The teachers must therefore, be competent in their spoken English because they are the most influential model for the learners and in addition be sensitive to the type of difficulties their pupils may have.

Furthermore, Awori -English bilinguals should endeavor to use English language in it's proper form and manner. They should consult the pronouncing dictionaries for correct pronunciation of words, this is because bilinguals tend to pronounce words according to their orthography which could be misleading. Though it is rare for the English second learners, usually acquiring English in an artificial and intermittent fashion, to approach the native's receptive and productive competence. But if the above recommendations are jealously guided and followed the Awori speakers of English would be proficient in English.

### **Conclusion**

The Awori-English bilinguals should endeavour to use English language in its proper form and manner. They should consult the pronouncing dictionaries for correct pronunciation of words. This is because bilinguals tend to pronounce words according to their orthography which could be misleading. In addition, they should endeavour to listen to broadcasting stations like the British Broadcasting cooperation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) so that they can emulate them in pronunciation. The society should also stop treating those who have an acceptable mastery of English with contempt rather they should be emulated and encouraged.

Though, it is rare for the English second learners, usually acquiring English in an artificial and intermittent fashion, to approach the native's receptive and productive competence. But if the above recommendation is jealously guided and followed the Awori speakers of English would be proficient in English. This paper, does not, in the slightest sense, claim that analysis presented is phonological exhaustive but that the mechanics of the phonological problems can be exploited for further development of the dialect.



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