



Research Paper

Analysing the production of ‘en’ by Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamen.

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Abstract

This paper sought to examine the rendition of ‘en’ by Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamen in view to determining how those English learners pronounce that sound sequence. It also aimed at identifying the factors that are responsible for the pronunciation of ‘en’. The approach used in this paper is Error Analysis, which was propounded by Corder (1974). To elicit data, a text has been composed with words carrying the sound sequence ‘en’. The productions of students were recorded, transcribed and compared to Received Pronunciation (RP). The data revealed that Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamen experience serious difficulties in pronouncing ‘en’. A very great majority of them, i.e. (86%) rendered it by /ã/, a pronunciation which is traced to French, the first official language of the learners. In other words, this faulty pronunciation of ‘en’ is due to the influence of French. In addition, the lack of practice of English is also another to be taken into account. For students to improve their pronunciation, they are recommended to continuously practice English and to check the pronunciation of English words in dictionaries.

Keywords: Francophone English, pronunciation, sound sequence, practice.

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I. Introduction

Good pronunciation is a fundamental element to human beings to speak every language. Successful communication implies appropriate realization of many factors like phonemes, stress, linking, rhythm, and intonation. Burnkart (1988) cited in Pardede (2019) holds that, in addition to grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation constitutes the mechanical elements of speaking skill. This means that in order to communicate successfully, the capacity to pronounce correctly linguistic productions is indispensable. Grammatical rule mastery and rich vocabulary possession alone cannot not guarantee that a speaker masters a foreign language like English. Correct pronunciation guarantees that someone has the mastery of a language. Fraser (2000: 7) argued that with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite his errors in other speaking sub-skills (vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics); with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas.

Wrong pronunciation misleads the audience and negatively affects communication. This statement found reinforcement from Thornbury (2006:185) who has it that “faulty pronunciation is one of the most common causes of misunderstanding”.

Francophone learners of English as foreign language (EFL) experience huge problems in pronunciation when learning English. Their pronunciation of English is ‘French- induced’ (Atechi, 2015), i.e. it is the same as in French, which makes their productions unintelligible.

In this paper our assignment is to examine the pronunciation of the sound sequence ‘en’ by Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamen. It equally determines the factors of wrong pronunciation of ‘en’ by the participants of this research.

II. Objectives

This paper aims at analysing the production the sound group 'en' by the students learning in the second year of English Department of the Higher Teachers' Training College of Ndjamena. It discloses the corresponding phonic representation of the sus-mentioned group of sounds by Level II-Students of English Department of the Higher Teachers' Training College of Ndjamena. This will go along with the phenomena that are responsible for the pronunciation of those students.

III. Literature review and theoretical framework

As one can observe it, this section will be subdivided in two sub-sections, i.e. literature and theoretical framework.

3.1 Literature review

This section focuses on works of scholars that have connexion with the current paper.

Ngaidandi and Apuge (2020) examining the realization of the grapheme 'er' by Level I-Students of the English Department of the University of Doba observe that those learners of English as foreign language (EFL) experience a lot difficulties in realizing the English sounds. They pronounce the grapheme 'er' as /er/. They notice that the pronunciation of 'er' as /er/ "is the expression of the spelling pronunciation system, which is one of the remarkable characteristic of French". In other words, French influences the pronunciation learning of English by the English learners of the University of Doba.

Ngaidandi and Apuge (2020) also observe that the lack of enough exposure to English is another handicap to the acquisition of appropriate pronunciation of English. French and local languages are more spoken than the English language in Doba.

Another work that has bearing with the ongoing paper is Ngaidandi (2022). This work is about the pronunciation of the letter sequence 'gn' by the First Year-Students of the English Department of the University of Ndjamena. Indeed, the rendition of the letter sequence 'gn' has been examined by Ngaidandi (2022). He notices that those francophone learners of English pronounce 'gn' in a wrong way. In fact, they render it by nasal /ɲ/, which has taken from French the official language of the population his investigation. Ngaidandi (ibid) noted that "being Francophone, the First Year-Students of the English Department of the University of Ndjamena systematically transfer the French pronunciation of 'gn' to English".

Kouega (2017) examined the renderings of the sequence -UI- by Cameroonian, Gabonese, and native French users learning English with the view to finding out whether French users speaking different L1s pronounce this sound sequence in different or similar ways. He observes that -UI- is rendered in English in at least nine (9) ways, which may be grouped into five categories, i.e. monophthongs, diphthongs, triphthongs, sequences of consonant + vowel or vowel + vowel, and yod insertion. For Kouega (2017), these groups of informants, i.e. pupils from Cameroon, Gabon, and France pronounce systematically the sequence of letters -UI- as /qi/, that is to say the sequence of the semi-consonant /q/ followed by /i/. He drew as conclusion that this pronunciation of -UI- can be traced back to the renderings of such French words as *huile* (oil), *lui* (him), and *puits* (well). He adds that from these renderings, one can claim that native French learners of English tend to draw from their L1, i.e. French when speaking English. Similarly, non-native French learners of English tend to draw from their L2 French but not from their respective L1s, when speaking English.

Atechi (2015) presents the salient characteristics of CamFE (Cameroon Francophone English). The concerned characteristics include h-dropping, h-inserting, French-induced pronunciation, and nasalisation of vowels.

Analysing the h-dropping, Atechi (2015) observes that the realization of the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ presents a lot of challenges in CamFE. For him, it should be noted that this sound is rarely attested in French, which is the language that induces CamFE the most. The sound /h/ is often silent in French and this rule is reflected onto the production of francophone speakers of English by the realizations of such sounds in the lexical items like 'habit'/abit/, 'horrible'/oribel/, history /istri/, etc.

With regard to H-insertion Atechi (2015) observes that this sound exhibits interesting characteristics in CamFE. It appears marginally in French and that may be why it is dropped in words such as 'hotel', 'husband', 'hungry', 'human', rendering these words, /otel/, /usband/, /ungry, /uman/. In this case, if consistency were something to go with, one would expect CamFE speakers to favour the English rule that drops the 'h' sound in words such as 'honour', 'honest', 'hour'. Unfortunately, CamFE speakers strangely contradict this rule and go further to insert the sound 'h' even in words that do not have any orthographic 'h' such as 'as soon as', 'air', and 'honour' rendering 'as soon as' as /has soon has/, /hair/, and /hɔnɔ/.

In terms of French-induced pronunciation in CamFE, Atechi (ibid) states that this phenomenon is not open to any debate because most CamFE words are induced by French reading rules. Words like, 'maritime', 'quality', 'rich', 'efforts', are pronounced in CamFE in a similar fashion as in French. The realization of some of

the words such as 'island', 'mayor', 'parents', etc. may bear traces of spelling pronunciation. Here is an illustration from Atechi (2015):

Word	CamE	CamFE
maritime	[maritaim]	[maritim]
quality	[kweliti]	[kaliti]
rich	[ritʃ]	[riʃ]
efforts	[ɛfɔts]	[ɛfɔ]

Atechi (ibid) observed that majority of CamFE speakers silence the plural markers, i.e. -s, -es, -es, as well as the third person singular markers. He furthermore realized that other particularities of CamFE include the rendition of the simple past and past participle morpheme 'ed'. In CamFE, the 'ed' suffix is either silent or pronounced as [ɛt] as in 'walked' walk [ɛt], 'allowed' allow [ɛt].

3.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used in this research work is Error Analysis by Corder (1974). This approach has been used because it is relevant to the topic under investigation. Indeed, Error Analysis, as a theory has helped the researcher to identify the errors committed by students learning English in the English Department of the Higher Teachers' Training College of Ndjamena. It is also helpful in classifying and describing those errors. In addition, Error Analysis has enabled the researcher to explain the errors made by the informants. Finally, it is useful in the evaluation of errors committed by the targeted population i.e. the Level II-Students learning English at the Higher Teachers' Training College of Ndjamena.

Corder (1974) identified five steps involved in conducting an error analysis. These include: (i) collection of a sample of learner language, (ii) identification of errors, (iii) description of errors, (iv) explanation of errors, and (v) evaluation of errors.

- **Collection of a sample of learner language**

According to Ellis (2012) the type of data collected can have a marked effect on the results of an Error Analysis, as a result of the different production processes which they typically involve. For example, LoCoco (1975) found differences in the number and the type of errors in samples of learner language collected by means of free composition, and picture composition. In particular, the nature and quantity of errors are likely to vary depending on whether the data consist of natural, spontaneous language use or careful elicited language use. For this reason, natural samples are generally preferred. A drawback, however, is that learners do not often produce much spontaneous data, which led Corder (1973) to argue the case for elicited data. He distinguished two kinds of elicited data. These include clinical elicitation and experimental elicitation. Clinical elicitation involves getting the informant to produce data of any sort, for example, by means of a general interview or by asking learners to write a composition. As for experimental elicitation, it involves the use of special instruments designed to elicit data containing the linguistic features, which the researcher wishes to investigate.

- **Identification of errors**

According to Corder (1967) cited in Ellis (2012), an error (in this technical use) takes place when the derivation arises as result of lack of knowledge (i.e. a lack of competence).

As far as mistakes are concerned, they are performance phenomena and are, of course, regular features of native-speaker speech, reflecting processing failures that arise as result of competing plans, memory limitations, and lack of automaticity. Corder (1967) argues that the Error Analysis should be restricted to the study of errors. However, apart from the problems of identification that this arises, it also assumes that competence is homogeneous rather than variable. Thus, if learners sometimes use a correct target form and sometimes an incorrect, non-target form, it cannot necessarily be concluded that the learner 'knows' the target form and that the use of non-target form represents a mistake. For example, a learner may have no difficulty in using the target-language form in some linguistic contexts:

'My sisters are older than me' but produce an error in others: * 'My three sister are older than me'. (cf. Ellis, 2012).

Another issue is whether the error is overt or covert (Corder 1971). An overt error is easy to identify because there is a clear deviation in form, when a learner says:

*I runned all the day.

As for covert, it is the form of error that occurs in utterances that are superficially well formed but which do not mean what the learner intended to mean. For example, the utterance (from Corder 1971):

*'It was stopped' is apparently grammatical until it became clear that 'it' refers to 'the wind'. Furthermore, a superficially correct utterance may only be correct by chance. For instance, the learner may manifest target-like control conversations in ready-made chunks such as 'I don't know' but fail to do so in created utterances (i.e. utterances that are constructed on the basis of rules the learner has internalized). The existence of covert error

led **Corder (1971 a)** to argue that 'every sentence is to be regarded as idiosyncratic until shown to be otherwise'. (p. 21).

Ellis (2012) observes that the probabilistic nature of the use of forms can only be considered if the analyst has access to a corpus of native-speaker language, which can serve as a baseline for comparing learners' choice of forms.

- **Description of errors**

The description of errors involves a comparison of the learner's idiosyncratic utterances with a reconstruction of those utterances in the target language or, with a baseline corpus of native-speaker language (Ellis 2012).

Corder's (1974) framework for describing errors is more promising. Cited in Ogah and Amos (2009), Corder (1974) distinguishes three types of errors according to their systematicity. These include (i) pre-systematic errors, (ii) systematic errors, and (iii) post-systematic errors.

Pre-systematic errors are those that are made by a learner while he is groping about to understand a new point. The learner does not know he/she has made a mistake. He would not be able to correct a systematic error but can say why he made the statement in question. In other words, this is a stage of random guessing where the learner is right at times and wrong at other times.

Systematic errors are those made when the learner has formed some conception of the point at issue, a hypothesis, which is wrong however in some way. In other words, the errors made by learners at this stage are predictable. For instance, a learner could stick to a rule and use it for all forms without the least thought that there could be restrictions. A learner could say *standed*, or *eated* because he has already conceptualized that the '-ed' inflection is added to a verb root to form the past tense.

Post-systematic are the deviant forms, which occur where previously systematic errors have been corrected. Here it comes as result of temporary loss of memory, forgetfulness or carelessness.

Type (i) occurs when the learner cannot give account of why a particular form is chosen, Type (ii) occurs when the learner is unable to correct the errors but can explain mistaken rule used, and Type (iii) occurs when the learner can explain the target-language rule that is normally used. Therefore, such a taxonomy requires that the researcher has access to the learners and that the learners are capable of providing explanations for their L2 behaviour.

- **Explanation of errors**

Explanation is concerned with establishing the source of the error, i.e. accounting for why it was made. This stage is the most important for SLA research as it involves an attempt to establish the processes responsible for L2 acquisition.

As Taylor (1986), cited in Ellis (2012), points out, the error source may be psycholinguistic, socio-linguistic, epistemic, or may reside in the discourse structure. Psycholinguistic sources concern the nature of the L2 knowledge system and the difficulties learners have using it in production. Socio-linguistic sources involve such matters as the learners' ability to adjust their language in accordance with the social context. Epistemic sources concern the learners' lack of world knowledge, while discourse structures involve problems in the organizations of information into a coherent 'context'.

Ellis (2012) observes that in general, SLA research has attended only to the first of these error sources, i.e. psycholinguistic ones. As Abott (1980: 124) puts it: "The aim of any EA is to provide with a psychological explanation".

A number of different sources or causes of psycholinguistic errors have been identified. Richards (1971) distinguishes three: (i) interference errors, (ii) intra-lingual errors, and (iii) developmental errors.

Interference errors occur as result of 'the use of elements from one language while speaking another. An example might be when a German learner of L2 English says 'I go not' because the equivalent sentence in German is 'Ichgehenicht'.

Intra-lingual errors 'reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failures to learn conditions under which rules apply'.

Developmental errors occur when the learner attempts to build up hypotheses about the target language on the basis of limited experience.

A possible source of unique errors is the instruction that learners receive.

- **Evaluating errors**

According to Ellis (2012), whereas all the preceding stages of EA have involved an examination of errors from the point of view of the learner who makes them, error evaluation involves a consideration of the effect that errors have on the persons (s) addressed. This effect can be gauged either in terms of the addressee's comprehension of the learner's meaning or in terms of the addressee's affective response to the errors.

In summary, Error Analysis initiated by Corder (1974) is an appropriate theory in the sense that it allows the researcher in this investigation to collect data, to identify, to describe, to explain, and to evaluate errors committed by students learning English at the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena.

IV. Methodology

This section presents the setting, the population, and the procedures in which this research paper has been carried out.

Indeed, this investigation has been undertaken in the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena. Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena is located within Ndjamena, the capital city of Chad. It is one of higher teaching institutions in Chad, which have English department, following the University of Ndjamena and the University of Doba.

The population of this research is mixed, male and female. They are Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena and they are one hundred (100) in number.

To collect data about the pronunciation of the sound sequence ‘en’, we have conceived a text made up of words having ‘en’ and we asked the students of second year of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena to read it. As we could not make all the students read the text, a sample of them has been drawn. In fact, fifty (50) students have been selected. The selection was done at semi-random, i.e. we considered the first twenty-five (25) and the last twenty-five (25) students of the list of the class (Level II) that we collected from the class delegate. Those students individually read the corpus text and this activity took two days as they had to attend lectures. We recorded the reading of students. At the end of this activity, we sat down to listen to each student’s reading, and transcribe their productions. Students’ productions were compared to RP (Received Pronunciation) in order to point out students’ errors. Statistics along with tables were used to quantify errors committed by those English learners.

V. Results

This section presents the data obtained by this research work. Data are displayed in tables for the sake of easier understanding. As mentioned in the previous section, the data that we are going to present come from fifty (50) students sampled from one hundred (100) students, i.e. the total number of Level II-Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena, academic year 2021-2022. These data are shown in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Rendition of ‘en’ by learners.

en	Words	RP	Learners’ pronunciation
	confidential	/ˈkɒnfɪˈdɛnʃl/	/kɔ̃fidɑ̃sial/
	envy	/ˈɛnvɪ/	/ɑ̃vi/
	encyclopaedia	/ɪnsaɪkləˈpiːdiə/	/ɑ̃siklɔ̃pɛdia/
	potentiality	/pəˈtɛnʃiˈæliːti/	/pɔ̃tɑ̃sialitɛ/
	enrich	/ɪnrɪʃ/	/ɑ̃riʃ/

In RP, the sound sequence ‘en’ is rendered in two (2) ways, i.e. /ɪn/ and /en/. In word-initial position and this is in many words, it is realized /ɪn/. This realization is perceived in such words as *enrich*, *encourage*, *encounter*, and *enquiry*. It may also be realized /en/ in word-initial position, but this is possible only in few words like *envy* and *enter* (cf. Ngaidandi, 2021).

The second realization of ‘en’, i.e. /en/ is perceptible in general in word-medial position. Here are some words as an illustration *century*, *trend*, *rental*, *experimental*, *confidential*, etc.

An exception is observed with few words like *envy*, *enter*, *enterprise*, and *entertain* whereby the grapheme ‘en’ is pronounced /en/ in word-initial position. (Ngaidandi, 2021).

As for Level-II Students of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamena, they rendered ‘en’ in a single way, i.e. /ɑ̃/ no matter the environment in which it falls. Fifty (50) students out of one hundred (100) have taken part into the reading of the text but none of them was able to pronounce correctly all the five (5) words of the focus sound sequence, i.e. ‘en’. This inappropriate realization of ‘en’ is the result of the influence of French, which is the first official language of the population of this research work. This confirms the studies of Kouega and Tao (2017) and Ngaidandi (2021). This sound sequence is also available in French and it is realized /ɑ̃/. Thus, students systematically transfer it to English.

Not only this pronunciation makes students’ productions strange, but it also poses understanding problem to listeners especially to those who do not have francophone background.

Table 4.2: Synopsis of the pronunciation of ‘en’

The table below presents the statistics of the rendition of the sound sequence ‘en’. It displays the number of words, the realization of ‘en’, the number and the percentage of students.

En	Word number	Students’ pronunciation	Students’ number	Percentage
	5	/en/	15	30 %
	4		14	28 %
	3		14	28 %
	2		4	8 %
	1		3	6 %
	0		0	0 %
Total			50	100 %

It is obvious from Table 4.2 that Level-II Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamenana have very poor performance in the pronunciation of the sound sequence ‘en’. The figures under ‘Word number’ represent the number of words in which ‘en’ is pronounced /ẽ/.

Fifteen (15) students out of fifty (50), that is (30%) of them pronounced ‘en’ as /ẽ/ in five (5), i.e. all the words proposed for reading.

Fourteen (14) students representing (28%) rendered ‘en’ by /ẽ/ in four (4) words out five (5). In the same way, there are also fourteen (14) students, i.e. (28%) of the students who read the text have realized it /ẽ/. In sum forty-three (43) students, i.e. (86%) of them rendered ‘en’ by /ẽ/ in four words out of five (5); this is in average. These figures clearly indicate that Level-II Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamenana have very poor performance in English pronunciation.

VI. Conclusion

This paper set light on the pronunciation of the sound sequence ‘en’ by students learning English in the second year of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamenana. The variable (‘en’) of this investigation was analysed through the reading of a text. That text was read by fifty (50) English learners, that is half of the total number of Level-II Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamenana. We arrived at the conclusion that those English learners have very poor performance in the pronunciation of ‘en’. In fact, (86 %) of students who have taken part into the reading of the data eliciting text, pronounced the sound group ‘en’ as /ẽ/, which is a wrong pronunciation, i.e. it is not accordance with RP model in which it is pronounced in two ways that is /in/ and /en/ (cf. Ngaidandi, 2021). This inappropriate pronunciation which is regarded as ‘French-induced pronunciation’ (Atechi, 2015) is caused by the influence of French, the first official language of the population of this research work. This influence of French on the English pronunciation confirms studies made by Safotso (2012), Atechi (2015), Kouega (2017), Kouega and Tao (2017), and Ngaidandi and Apuge (2020), and Ngaidandi (2022). Another factor that might be taken as responsible for the wrong pronunciation of ‘en’ is the lack of practice.

Therefore, Level-II Students of the English Department of the Higher Teachers’ Training College of Ndjamenana are advised to permanently practise English and to consult English dictionaries in order to improve their pronunciation of English.

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