

# Turkish EFL Learners' Source of Errors in the Articulation of English Long Vowel Sounds: A Case of Nile University of Nigeria

Bello Yekeen and Alpaslan Toker\*

**Abstract:** This study looks at the development of cross-linguistic knowledge in articulating the English long vowel sounds by Turkish EFL learners. The population for this descriptive research consisted of all the 49 Turkish EFL learners studying at the Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja. The instrument used is a 20-item researcher-designed minimal pair of both long and short English vowel sounds as well as long and short English vowel sounds at the sentence level. The instrument was given to experts in the Arts Education department for its content validity while, its reliability was ascertained via a test re-test statistical means, thus yielding a reliability index of 0.56 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Frequency counts and percentage distribution were used to analyze the data. The findings in Section A indicate that greater respondents ranging between 46 and 49 (representing 93.88%, 97.96%, and 100% respectively) were unable to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Averagely, 21 and 26 respondents representing 42.86% and 53.06% respectively were unable to distinctively distinguish between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 9 and 10, while only 11 and 14 respondents (representing 22.45% and 28.57 were able to correctly and distinctively differentiate between long and short vowels in instrument items 8 and 7 respectively. At the sentence level, the findings in Table 3 show that greater respondents ranging between 43 and 49 (representing 87.76%, 95.92%, and 100% respectively) were unable to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 10, an indication that the colon (:) is not instrumental to the long stretch of /a:/, among other findings. It was concluded that the majority of them were affected by mother

---

\* Bello Yekeen (✉)

Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria  
email:belight1010@gmail.com

Alpaslan Toker (✉)

Department of English Language Teaching, Tishk International University, KRG, Iraq  
e-mail: alpaslan.toker@tiu.edu.iq (corresponding author)

tongue interference. It is recommended among other things that, teachers of language (English by implication) should systematically employ the use of drills with minimal pairs and allow active participation of students.

**Keywords:** Turkish EFL learners, errors, English long and short vowel sounds, Nile University of Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

English language teaching, like many other professions and disciplines, is almost overwhelmed by acronyms and initials. For instance, Harmer (2007) and Awodele (2013) submit that we talk about ESP (English for specific purposes such as English for specialties like nursing or fishery or technology or banking or transportation) to differentiate it from general English i.e. the English taught in most schools and private language institutions. Also, Harmer posits that we use EAP (English for academic purposes) to describe courses and materials designed specially to help people who want to use their English in academic contexts. Similarly, we have EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a second language). Jenkins (2004) and Babalola (2012) also posit that EFL describes situations when students are learning English to use it with any other English speakers in the world when the students might be tourists or businesspeople. Students often study EFL in their own country, or sometimes on short courses in Britain, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, etc. ESL students, on the other hand, are described as usually living in a target language community such as Britain, the United States of America, etc., and indeed the target language (English) to survive and prosper in that community, to enable them to do such things as renting apartments, community with the local people, among other things.

Based on the above, it follows from this separation that the language studied in EFL lessons will be different from the language ESL students concentrate on. This distinction has become difficult to sustain, however, for two reasons. Firstly, many communities whether in English or non-English-speaking countries are now multilingual and English is a language of communication. Does that make it a foreign or a second language? Secondly, however, many students of EFL use English in a global context. As such, using English for international communication, especially on the internet means that students are part of a global target-language community (the target language being not British or American English, but as we have seen, some form of world

English). In another development, a concept, known as ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) such as this study, does not mean that we should ignore the context in which language learning takes place, rather, it does affect a more multilingual global reality (Harmer 2007).

Similarly, Seidhofer (2004) and Ohran (2014) firm that the global reality or world English(es) has caused some people to become very interested in what happens when it is used as lingua franca between two people who do not share the same language and for whom English is not their mother tongue i.e., ELF (English as Lingua Franca). Jenkins (2006) argues that the evidence of EFL suggests that we should change what we teach, instead of conforming to a native standard such as British English (BrE), learners need to learn not (a variety of) English, but about Englishes, their similarities and differences, issues involved in intelligibility, the strong links between language and identify, among several other issues in a similar vein, Jenkins (2004) wonders whether or not we should cease to correct developing language in the classroom and concentrate instead on helping students to accommodate more. She asserts via her research that some allophonic variation is not evident in ELF conversations e.g., ELF speakers do not differentiate between strong and weak forms; they substitute voiced and voiceless 'th' /ð/ and /θ/ with /t/, /s/ and /d/, thus *think* becomes *sink* or *tink* as the case may be. Based on this and many more, Jenkins suggests more concentration on the study of phonology as well as avoiding idiomatic expressions in lexis teaching because ELF speakers do not mostly use idiomatic expressions. On the contrary, Timmis (2002) and Eze (2016) think that students, for whatever reason, often want to conform to native speakers' norms, while teachers, on the contrary, seem to be moving away from a position. Eze suggests further that we should not force native speaker-norms on students who neither want nor need them, but "it is scarcely more appropriate to offer students a target which manifestly does not meet their aspirations."

Still, on the contrary, Kuo (2006) argues strongly against the view that native-speakers are irrelevant or that native-speakers varieties have little or no relevance. Kuo further opines that different varieties of Englishes exhibit different grammar, lexis, and pronunciation, as this is evident when we look at the two most analyzed varieties of inner circle English, that is, British and American Englishes. This is rightly pointed out in Oscar Wilde's 1887 story *The Canterville Ghost*,

in which one of the British characters says, “we have really everything in common with American nowadays, except, of course, language”.

The differences between British and American Englishes, according to Kuo (2006) are well documented. For instance, British English (BrE) speakers regularly use the phrase ‘have got’ in utterances such as ‘I’ve got a book about it or have you got the time?’ when American English (AmE) speakers are more likely to say ‘I have a book or do you have the time?’, etc.

But there is damage in referring to a variety of English by the name of a country since in so doing we will fail to take account of regional variety. If we considered BrE for example, it only takes a moment’s thought to realize that there are many varieties of English with the British Isles, each having its vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. For example, while a Londoner might get a ‘takeaway’ meal to eat at home, a Scottish person would order a ‘carry-out’, also, while an East-end Londoner might talk about having a ‘barf’/ba:f/, a Yorkshire man talks about having a ‘bath’ /ba:θ/.

In addition to geography, other factors such as social class, ethnic grouping, and sex do affect the language being spoken or used and as such, influence how listeners judge speakers. Until comparatively recently in Britain, it was customary for people to talk about BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) English to describe an accent which derived from the received pronunciation (RP) recorded by phonetician Daniel Jones in the first half of the twentieth century, and which was considered a sign of status. In Britain, while some accents are admired such as the BBC English and some Scottish varieties, others such as the Birmingham accent are still seen by many as less attractive. It is however true that such attitude diminished towards the end of the twentieth century and some accents, such as Cockney and Geordie became widely admired particularly in broadcast media — it is still the case that many British people ascribe status, educational background, and social position to a person largely based on accent.

In furtherance of the above, Malan (2014) is of the view that concentrating on British and American varieties of English ignores the many other inner-circle varieties, offers, such as Canadian, Australian or Irish, all of which have variations of their own special lexical, grammatical and phonological identities, and all of which have variations of their own. In line with all the submissions above, it is then believed that errors in foreign language learning are difficult to avoid. Language scholars have always been interested in errors caused

by EFL learners, either in their oral pronunciation or writing form, or both. Based on this, Dessouky (1990) posits that learners' errors have been the subject of extensive investigation and heated controversy for quite some time. Over the years, Mahmoud (2011) affirms that error analysis (EA) is a non-stop aspect of educational research because learners of the language process often commit errors. In the light of this, one can summarize that EA as a language diagnostic tool, is of very significance to language pedagogy, thus providing answers to questions and proffering solutions regarding language pedagogy. The systematic analysis of learners' errors makes it possible to identify problematic areas and proffer solutions to enhance language learning.

The analysis of EFL learners' errors writing performance plays a great role for teachers to become aware of both types and sources of these errors to use more professional teaching methods and techniques so that EFL learners can acquire the English language better and enhance their language production competence. To language teachers and linguists, errors in language learning have been considered as evidence of language transfer and interference and seen as the result of the language learning phenomenon. In support of the above, Khodabandeh (2007) indicates that errors are regarded as evidence of language transfer and are seen as the result of ineffective language learning and their elimination to the bearable level or minimum become the intention of linguists and language teachers. In this instance, Elmahdi (2015) affirms that when considering the various sources of EFL learners' errors, it is very noticeable to come across why, when, where, and how those errors are committed, and as such, it, therefore, assumed that it is not at all easy to treat EFL learners' errors without detecting or identifying sources of such errors. Owing to the above, Elmahdi (2015) believes that an appropriate EA can help facilitate the achievement of the goals and expectations of tertiary-level programs. The concept of error analysis (EA) is an embodiment of contrastive analysis (CA). By contrastive analysis, it is the comparison and contrast of linguistic structure of two or more languages to find similarities and differences of these languages and the pedagogical implication of these similarities and differences for language teaching and learning.

In the early 1950s, the concept of language as a system, and mainly the concept of second language acquisition as the coming together of two language systems became more and more recognized, and thus linguists began to look upon errors as evidence of language transfer

(mother tongue interference). This was the period when contrastive analysis (CA) emerged. Elmahdi (2015) contends that the status of CA as a psychological approach to the investigation of the second language process was not accepted for some reasons, and CA gradually lost its validity. Strong criticism about CA showed that it was not as functional as it claimed to be. However, CA strongly emphasized that the notion of difficulty in language teaching and learning was equated with the degree of errors. The more second language (L2) learners made errors in their acquisition of L2 the more it was assumed to be difficult and consequently the more the target (L2) and native (L1) languages were different. Another seeming shortcoming of CA was its inability in identifying sources of difficulty in language teaching and learning other than the learners' L1. Similarly, CA did not contribute to language pedagogy effectively, and as a result of the drawbacks of CA, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, the linguistic analyst's attributes towards errors changed through a gradual process, and the emphasis shifted from the product to the underlying process with regards to ESL/EFL learners' error commitment. Then, the students' errors were not regarded as problems anymore, but as normal and inevitable events in the language pedagogical process which could contribute to the understanding of the strategies employed by L1 or L2 learners.

The very first argument for the significance of learners' errors was made by S. P. Corder in 1967. He espouses that errors are evidence of learners' in-built syllabus which shows how L1 and L2 learners develop an independent system of language acquisition. Corder (1967) argues further that learners, en route the process of language acquisition, make their lexicon (language) which could be different from their L1 and, or L2 with its own set of linguistic rules, otherwise referred to as inter-language as coined by Selinker (1972).

As an offshoot of CA, EA emerged in the 1960s to reveal that learners' errors well not only because of the learners' native (L1) language but also they reflected some universal learning strategies as a reaction to contrastive analysis theory, which considered language transfer as the basic process of L2 learning as reality suggested by behaviorists' theory. EA deals with the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive process they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they (learners) receive from the target language. Therefore, a primary focus of EA is on the evidence that learners' errors provide an understanding of the underlying process of L2 acquisition. Based on

this, Keshavars (1999) suggests that the field of EA can be sub-summed into two branches, namely “theoretical and applied”.

The proponents of EA considered it very important to distinguish between mistakes and errors, which are “technically two very different phenomena” (Brown 1994, 205). Similarly, Corder (1967) took the notion of Chomsky’s ‘competence and performance’ distinction relating errors of failures in competence and mistakes to failures in performance. According to this notion, Ogundele and Olanipekun (2013) opine that a mistake occurs not because of learners’ inability in utilising knowledge of the target language (TL), as such it has nothing to do with learners’ competence. An error occurs in violation of the rules of TL; errors come up as a result of incompetency. Native speakers can know and correct mistakes, but L2 learners need the linguistic competency in TL to identify errors and correct them consequently.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The long vowel sounds in the English sound system as a significant area of phonology are often pronounced using the American form of English such as /ka:r/ for car /ka:/ of the BrE by the Turkish EFL/ESL learners. Furthermore, very little attention has been paid to the effect of the negative transfer of AmE into the BrE that is obtainable in Nigerian schools. As far as this research is concerned, no studies have attempted to explore the cross-linguistic influence of BrE and AmE on EFL / ESL in the area of Turkish EFL learners’ sources of errors in the articulation of long vowel sounds. Therefore, this study might contribute to the development of cross-linguistic knowledge in articulating the English long vowel sounds by Turkish EFL learners.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Considering the fact that Turkish EFL learners are faced with problems of articulating English long vowel sounds is, therefore, the thrust of this paper, to detect the areas of learners’ errors and make productive efforts so that Turkish EFL learners will be able to realize the differences between BrE and AmE in the areas of phonology.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on what has been discussed thus far, the following research questions are raised to guide this study:

1. To what extent do Turkish EFL learners pronounce English long vowels?

2. Is the way Turkish EFL learners pronounce the English long vowel the same way they write them?

**METHODOLOGY**

This study is descriptive research. The population of the study consisted of all the Turkish EFL learners in the Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja that is 49 Turkish EFL learners (from 100 – 400 level). The learners all have the same linguistics background, thus determining the homogeneity of the subjects who were selected as the main participants of the study. The instrument for this study is a 20-item researcher-designed minimal pair of both long and short English vowel sounds as well as long and short English vowel sounds at the sentence level. The respondents were asked to read the items while the researcher awards one (1) mark for each correct pronunciation of the English long vowel sounds in both sections A and B. The instrument was given to experts in the English Studies department for its content validity while its reliability was ascertained via a test re-test statistical means, thus yielding a reliability index of 0.56 at the alpha level of significance. Frequency counts and percentage distribution are used to analyze the instrument on the correctly articulated English long vowel sounds at both minimal pairs and sentence levels.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Table 1: Minimal pairs of long and short English vowel sounds

S/N	Section A. Minimal pairs	
1.	peel	pill
2.	sit	seat
3.	much	march
4.	read (present)	rid
5.	book	tool
6.	full	fool
7.	bird	bed
8.	bath	birth
9.	firm	fend
10.	cat	cart

Table 2: Long and short English vowel sounds at the sentence level

S/N	Section B
1.	put the <u>fool</u> in the <u>pool</u>
2.	see <u>these</u> things on <u>this</u> table
3.	shift the <u>seat</u> and <u>sit</u>



4.	they are <u>leav</u> ing the <u>liv</u> ing room now
5.	my <u>fat</u> her and his <u>cat</u>
6.	I have a <u>sheep</u> in the <u>ship</u>
7.	the <u>firm</u> is behind the <u>fence</u>
8.	she <u>had</u> a <u>hard</u> time
9.	the <u>pot</u> is at the <u>port</u>
10.	he will pass <u>by</u> to <u>buy</u> the items

Table 3: Frequency counts and percentage distribution of minimal pairs of English long and short vowel sounds

S/N		Frequency	%
1.	peel pill	46	93.88
2.	sit seat	49	100
3.	much march	49	100
4.	read (present) rid	49	100
5.	book tool	48	97.96
6.	full fool	49	100
7.	bird bed	14	28.57
8.	cat cart	11	22.45
9.	bet birth	21	42.86
10.	firm fend	26	53.06

Table 4: Frequency counts and percentage distribution of long and short English vowel sounds at the sentence level

S/N		Frequency	%
1.	put the fool in the pool	43	87.76
2.	see these things on this table	49	100
3.	shift the seat and sit	49	100
4.	they are leaving the living room	49	100
5.	my father has a bat	49	100
6.	I have a sheep in the ship	47	95.92
7.	the firm is behind the fence	23	46.94
8.	she had a hard time	14	28.57
9.	the pot is at the port	17	34.69
10.	I am only passing by to buy the items	49	100

## DISCUSSION

The finding of the analysis (Section A) indicates that greater respondents ranging between 46 and 49 (representing 93.88%, 97.96%, and 100% respectively) at the minimal pairs level were unable to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 1,2,3,4,5, and 6. This is in line with the assertion of

Kuo (2006, 216) that different varieties of Englishes exhibit different grammar, lexis, and pronunciation, as this is evident when we look at the two most analyzed varieties of English, i.e., British and American Englishes. Averagely, 21 and 26 respondents representing 42.86% and 53.06% respectively, still under minimal pairs were unable to distinctively distinguish between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 9 and 10. Being through no fault of their own but furtherance on regional varieties, Kuo (2006) argues that concentrating on British and American varieties of English ignore the many other inner-circle varieties on offers, such as Canadian, Australian or Irish, all of which have variations of their own special lexical, grammatical and phonological identities and all of which have variations of their own, while only 11 and 14 respondents (representing 22.45% and 28.57% respectively) were able to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowels in instrument items 8 and 7 respectively.

Similarly, at the long and short English sounds at the sentence level, the finding of analysis in table 3 (Section B) shows that greater respondents ranging between 43 and 49 (representing 87.76%, 95.92%, and 100% respectively) at the sentence level were unable to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 10. This finding is supported by the finding of Elmahdi (2015) who posits that the differences between British and American Englishes are that BrE speakers regularly use the phrase ‘have got it’ in utterances such as ‘I’ve got a book about it’ or ‘have you got the time?’ when AmE speakers are more likely to say ‘I have a book’ or ‘do you have the time?’ Similarly, while BrE speakers in conversation make use of the present perfect in questions such as ‘have you read her latest article yet?’ an AmE speaker might well say ‘did you read her latest article yet?’, as well as many differences in vocabulary use such as BrE ‘lift’ for AmE ‘elevator’, BrE “flat” for AmE ‘apartment’, BrE ‘trousers’ for AmE ‘pants’, among others. At the phonological level, Nwosu and Micah (2015) affirm the following phonological differences between BrE and AmE such as BrE pronunciation of ‘law’/lɔ:/ which is pronounced as /lɒ/ by AmE speakers; BrE speakers pronunciation of ‘car’ /kɑ:/ is being pronounced as /kɑ:r/ by AmE speakers with emphasis on /r/, an indication that the colon sign (: ) is not instrumental to the long stretch of /ɑ:/. On average, 23 respondents (representing 46.94%) were able to distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument item 7, while only 14 and 17 respondents (representing 28.5

and 34.69%) were able to also distinctively differentiate between long and short vowel sounds in instrument items 8 and 9 respectively. This finding is also supported by the assertion of Jenkins (2004, 40) who argues that some allophonic variation is not evident in ELF conversations such as ELF speakers do not differentiate between strong and weak forms, they substitute voiced and voiceless 'th' /ð/ and/θ/ with /t/, /s/ and /d/ thus 'think' becomes 'sink' or 'think', as the case may be.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the finding of this study it was concluded that through no faults of the respondents, many of them were unable to distinctively distinguish between long and short English vowel sounds. This is largely due to their social, cultural, and academic backgrounds that are being tagged as mother tongue interference. Given the finding and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that faced with the description of learners' types of long and short English vowel sound pronunciation, teachers of language (English by implication) should systematically employ the use of drills with minimal pairs for the students and allow their active participation since pronunciation is an extremely personal matter, teachers of language should realize that students from different language backgrounds may have very different concerns and issues to deal with and as such, they need to be taught and trained to learn BrE since they (Turkish in students in Nile University) are taught using BrE as EFL.

## REFERENCES:

- Awodele, T.T. 2013. *Domestication of English in Nigeria*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Babalola, H.A.L. 2012. "Effects of process-genre based approach on the written English performance of computer science students in a Nigerian Polytechnic." *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3 (6): 1-6.
- Brown, H.D. 1994. *The Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman.
- Corder, S. P. 1967. "The significance of learners' errors." *International Reviews of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 5 (4): 161-170.
- Dessouky, S. 1990. "Error analysis: A non-stop Area of Research." *Studies in Curricula and Methodology*, 8: 146-176.
- Elmahdi, O.E.H. 2015. "Sudanese EFL learners' sources of errors in the production of articles." *British Journals of English Linguistics*. 3 (4): 25-32.
- Eze, F.K. 2016. *Task-based Language Teaching and Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harmer, J. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Longman.

- Jenkins, J. 2004. "ELF at the gate: the position of English as a Lingua Franca". In *Proceedings of the 38th IATEFL International Conference*, 33–42.
- Jenkins, J. 2006. "The spread of EIL: a testing time for testers." *ELT Journal*, 60 (1): 42-50.
- Khodabandeh, F. 2007. "Analysis of student errors. The case of headlines." *The Asian ASP Journals*, 3 (1): 6-21.
- Kuo, I. 2006. "Addressing the issue of teaching English as a lingua franca." *ELT Journal*, 60 (3): 213-221.
- Mahmoud, A. 2011. "The role of interlingua and intralingual transfer in learner-centered EFL vocabulary instrument." *Arab World English Journal*, 2 (3): 28-47.
- Malan, U.K. 2014. "Task-based Instruction." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18: 266-299.
- Nwosu, J. C., & E. Micah. 2015. *Standard Nigerian English: Issues of Identification*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Ohran, R.M. 2014. *Mental Presentation: A Dual-coding Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Seidhofer, B. 2004. "Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24: 209-239.
- Selinker, L. 1972. "Interlanguage". *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10 (3): 209-231.
- Timmis, I. 2002. "Native-speaker norms and international English: A classroom view." *ELT Journals*, 56 (3): 240-249.