Phonological Basis of Mispronunciation in Spoken English of Kabarasi People in Social Setting

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ABSTRACT

The phonological basis of mispronunciation in spoken English by Kabarasi speakers in social settings includes voicing and devoicing, vowel insertion, substitution or avoidance, and syllable misplacement. The study adopted the contrastive analysis hypothesis theory by Khresheh (2016), which describes how errors are transferred from L1 to L2 and the degree of strength of errors transferred, whether positive or negative. The data was presented and analyzed in tables from which sounds of both English and Kabarasi were written. English has 25 consonant sounds, while Kabarasi has 23. Some sounds clash while others (voiceless) match, but the mismatch rate is higher than positive transfer, leading to errors in spoken English. Such errors can be minimized by practice in English elocution and oral skills based on minimal pairs. However, all the errors in spoken English by Kabarasi speakers can not be eradicated completely, provided that the utterer is a native speaker of Lukabrasi.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Public Interest Statement and Background

English, a global, official, and prestigious language, poses a challenge to Kabras speakers regarding mispronunciation of words occasioned by the mismatch in sounds and syllables with those of English. The study provides necessary measures for curriculum developers to prepare the content in English, which is tailored to meet the needs of Kabras native speakers. Curriculum implementers benefit from it in their pedagogical presentation, especially when handling Kabras learners. The study also necessitates the documentation of the Kabarasi dialect in Bibles, hymns, and other literary materials using the 23 consonants of Kabarasi speakers.

Kabras is one of the 19 Luhya dialects mutually intelligible in Western Kenya (Mudogo, 2018). Like other languages, it has its phonotactics, making it unique. Kabras stops(plosives), and fricatives are all voiceless; if voiced consonants exist, they should have been borrowed from Lulologi during their missionary work in Kabras (Indimuli, 2005). The current study investigates whether all the Kabras consonants are voiceless or only stop and fricatives, as Indimuli (2005) puts it. It, therefore, indicates that all Kabras sounds would be analyzed. Saidat and Al-Hussein (2010) studied the analysis of English phonotactics compared to that of Arabic. They found that Arabic students had difficulties pronouncing English words because they unintentionally inserted an anaptyctic vowel at

the onset and the coda of certain English syllables. It has caused declusterization due to mother tongue influence.

It was further found that the errors committed included insertion of the vowel /i/ in the onset and coda, substitution and deletion (Saidat & Al-Hussein, 2010). Kabras's phonotactics may differ from that of Arabic in one way or another, which has necessitated the current study. Studying all the Kabras consonant sounds before establishing their syllable structure compared to English is necessary to reach destiny. Jeptoo (2016) studied the phonological basis of misspelling English words among Nandi high school students and revealed that it resulted from consonant substitution, where English consonants and silent letters did not exist in their language. Since Nandi is a Nilotic language, there was a need to study if the same errors are transferred to spoken English among the Kabras, given that it is a Bantu language. Jeptoo narrowed the scope to high school students, while the current study broadened the scope to include other native speakers of a particular language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As a global language, English is widely spoken in social settings such as learning institutions, political arenas, requiem masses, weddings, religious services, and advertisements on social media platforms. As people express themselves in English, Kabras speakers also take pride in spoken English. However, there is a likelihood that Kabras speakers of English mispronounce some English words due to a phonological mismatch between English (L2) and Kabras (L1), hence impeding effective communication. It has made it necessary for the current study to minimize the errors transferred from L1 to L2.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

(a) Analyze the phonological basis of mispronunciation of English words by Kabras native speakers
(b) Establish the divergence zone between English and Kabras dialects in terms of consonant sounds

1.4 Research Questions

The study questions include:

(a) What is the phonological basis of mispronunciation of English words by Kabras speakers?
(b) What is the divergence zone between English and Kabras dialects?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the contrastive analysis (CA) theory by Kansir and Pakdel (2019), which states that errors found in L2 learners result from L1 interference. It shows that the learner transfers the rules from L1 to L2. They cited Mishra (2005), who said that there is a transfer that can be positive (when the two languages resemble) or negative transfer (when there is a mismatch between L1 and L2). The theory applies to the current study because it explains objective one, which deals with the basis of errors, and objective two, which deals with the point of divergence between L1 and L2. If the divergence between L1 and L2 widens, the more likely errors would be encountered in L2, but when similarities arise, the fewer the errors in L2. The study is aimed at establishing the magnitude of divergence.

Khresheh (2016) highlighted the errors as those of over-production (overuse of some words), under-production (avoidance), misinterpretation, and production (substitution, hypercorrection, and alteration). He emphasized that positive transfer makes learning successful while negative transfer makes learning cumbersome.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Phonological Basis of Errors in Spoken English Among Kabras Speakers

The study aimed to establish the phonological basis of errors in spoken English among Kabras speakers. Purnama et al. (2019) explained that phonological errors result in mistakes in words and grammar due to frequent interference caused by differences in the phonological system in L1 and L2. This assumption has not specified particular languages and phonological errors that occur, which is the heart of the current study. Ebarb (2016) agrees that among the 19 Luhya dialects, Kabras have never been documented (published). The Bibles and hymn books show evidence that Lulogoli, Lunyore, Luwanga, and Lubukusu, among the Luhya dialects, have been documented. The current study investigates all the Kabras sounds and compares them to those of English to establish the point of divergence. Indimuli (2005) attempted to carry out a study on the sounds of Kabras and found that it has voiceless stops and fricatives initially, and if the voiced ones appeared, it should be as a result of borrowing from Lulogoli when they came for missionary work. The study has set the foundation for the current study, which established all Kabras consonants compared to English to identify the source of errors. The structure of a syllable is unique to each language so long as it follows the order of onset and rhyme (nucleus and coda) when analyzed (Etakwa, 2010). The study was in Lunyala, one of the 19 Luhya dialects, and it is very similar to the vowel structure of Kabras. The current study adopts the same trend but distinguishes it from English mainly for pedagogical reasons.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive research design because it describes the phenomenon by gathering systematically factual information through observation and oral interviews (Luvonga, 2023). Wanjohi further explained that a descriptive research design yields rich data for detailed analysis. The study area is the Kakamega North sub-county, the principal inhabitants of which are the native speakers of Kabras. The target population is the Kabras-speaking community. The sample size is 50 speakers of Kabras who were listened to while delivering speeches in English at funeral masses, church conferences, political arenas, students and teachers in learning institutions, and newscasters. The conversations were audio-taped, recorded, transcribed, and organized into tables for analysis. Lexical items purposively collected from Kabras speakers were 45, while the English words commonly mispronounced were 36, among others. The process was done until the saturation stage was reached (Kumar, 2011). The data collected was presented and analyzed in tables and tree diagrams.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Data Presentation

Table 4. 1. Kabras lexical items and phonemic transcription

No.	Orthographical presentation	Phonemic presentation	Gloss
1	shesia	ʃe:siə	greet
2	vukula	ɸukula	take
3	mbeekho	Mbe:xo	Assist me
4	shampoko	ʃəmpoko	Personal name
5	avantu	əɸa:ntu	people
6	luvonga	luɸɒŋkə	Personal name
7	avetsukhulu	əɸetsuxulu	Grandchildren
8	eyinsu	eʌiinsu	house
9	papa	Pa:pə	father
10	winyoshe	wi:ɲɒʃe	Has gone
11	malava	mələɸə	town
12	ofulenje	ofulentʃe	legs
13	mutsuli	mutsuli	tomorrow
14	mukhwasi	muʍasi	brother-in-law
15	omushiele	omuɕele	Old lady
16	olwanda	olwantə	rock
17	amawanyi	əməwaɲi	Crane birds
18	amatsi	əma:tsi	water
19	elichunku	eli:tʃuŋku	rat
20	epinika	epinikə	kettle
21	ing'ombe	iŋompe	cattle
22	inyeni	iɲeni	fish
23	eshibwe	eʃiɸwe	fox
24	insukha	insuxə	snake
25	omusilishi	omusiliʃi	doctor
26	omusinchilili	omusintʃilili	leader
27	amarevo	əmaɹeɸo	questions
28	amayisio	əməʌi:sio	Show off
29	runka	ɹu:ŋkə	pay
30	kharumi	xəɹu:mi	Personal name
31	eshikhupi	eʃixupi	Chick-eating bird
32	eshitiani	eʃicənI	Mashed beans
33	eshiyia	eʃiʌə	new
34	vushiele	ɸuɕele	morning
35	amalooro	əməlɔ:ɹo	dreams
36	omubefu	omuɸefu	blind
37	elipokisi	li:pɒkisi	box
38	omuchela	omutʃelə	river
39	olubaala	oluɸə:la	bedsheet
40	okhuyeenga	oxuʌe:ŋkə	brew
41	yakhefusa	ʌaxefusə	hid
42	anayalanga	ənələŋka	is able
43	elikhanga	elixəŋka	wild goose
44	tsimbavasi	tsimbəɸəsi	mercy
45	eshituyi	eʃitu:ʌi	hare

It was from the above lexical items that Kabras sounds were identified below.

Table 4.2. Kabras consonant chart

	Bilabial	Labia-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop/plosive	p		t		k	
Nasal	m	ɱ	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	ɸ	f	s/ʃ		x	h
Affricate			t͡s	ç/t͡ʂ		
Lateral			l	ʎ		
Approximate	w		ɹ	j	ʍ	

Table 4. 3. English consonant chart (David, 2005)

	Bilabial	Labia-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Stop	b p			t d		k g	q	
Nasal	m			n		ŋ		
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					t͡ʃ d͡ʒ			
Lateral				l		ʟ		
Approximate	w			ɹ		j		

5. DISCUSSION

The researcher collected 45 lexical items from the Kabaras dialect, commonly used in day-to-day conversations until the saturation stage was attained. From the words sampled, it was found that Kabaras/Kabarasi has only 23 consonant sounds, while English has 26 consonants. There is a mismatch in sounds as a result of:

i. English has sounds /ð/ /θ/ /*q*/ and voiced sounds, which are missing in Kabras dialect. Alternatively, Kabras has sounds /ɸ/ /x/ /c/ /ɲ/ /t͡ʂ/ /ʍ/, which are not in the English language. Such variation causes mispronunciation of English words by substituting the missing sound in L2 with that of L1.
ii. Kabras are missing voiced sounds, and if accidentally found there, it can result from influence from Lulogoli, Lubukusu, Lunyala, and Luswahili.
iii. Where the sound in L1 is missing in L2, and vice versa, it leads to either substitution or avoidance tactics and mispronunciation of words.

The table below shows the mispronunciation of English words by Kabarasi speakers in various social settings.

Table 5.1 Mispronunciation of English words by Kabarasi speakers

No.	**English orthography**	**Phonemic transcription**	**Kabras orthography**	**Phonemic transcription**
1	boxes	bɒksɪz	pokisesi	pokisesi
2	plate	pleɪt	puleti	puleti
3	milk	mɪlk	miligi	miligi
4	subject	sʌbʤekt	sapuchegiti	səputsegiti
5	measure	mɛʒə	mesha	meʃə
6	children	ʧɪldren	chilidureni	tsiliduɪeni

No.	English orthography	Phonemic transcription	Kabras orthography	Phonemic transcription
7	people	piːpo	pipo	piːpo
8	desk	desk	desiki	desiki
9	development	dɪvɛləpmənt	tevelopumenti	teɸelopumenti
10	drum	drʌm	duramu	duɹəmu
11	handkerchief	hæŋkəʧɪf	handikachifu	handikətʃifu
12	furniture	fʌnɪʧə	fanicha	fənitʃə
13	budget	bʌʤɪt	pajeti	pədʒeti
14	tree	tɹiː	turii	Tuɹiː
15	Do not	duː nɒt	tu nodi	tuː nɒdi
16	tomb	tum	tombu	tɔːmbu
17	lavatory	lævətᵊɹi	lavatori	ləɸətɒɹi
18	bank	bæŋk	banki	baːŋki
19	bird	bɜːd	padi	paːdɪ
20	time	təɪm	tayimu	təjɪmu
21	thank	θæŋk	tsanki	tsəŋki
22	blue	bluː	bulu	buluː
23	programme	prɒgræm	brokuramu	bɹokuɹəmu
24	fifteen	fɪfˈtiːn	fifitini	fifitini
25	fifty	fɪfti	fifiti	fifiti
26	derive	deɹaɪv	teraivu	teɹaiɸu
27	material	mətɪəriəl	materio	mətiɹio
28	come	kʌm	gamu	gəmu
29	register	rɛʤɪstə	rechesita	ɹetʃesitə
30	biro pen	baiɹo pen	payiro pen	pajiɹo peni
31	phone	fɔːn	fonu	fɔːnu
32	lion	laɪən	layoni	ləjoni
33	geography	ʤiɒgɹəfi	chokurafi	tʃokuɹəfi
34	sandwich	sænwɪʤ	sandiwichi	səndiwitʃi
35	judge	ʤʌnʤ	chaji	tʃʌdʒi
36	volume	voljum	voliumu	ɸoljumu

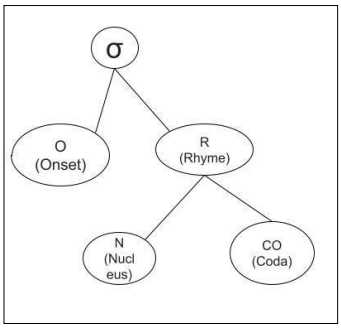
From the above table, it is observed that Kabarasi people mispronounce English words due to the transfer of rules from L1 to L2, such as the insertion of vowels after the coda. It shows that Kabras have a different syllable structure from that of English, as illustrated below:

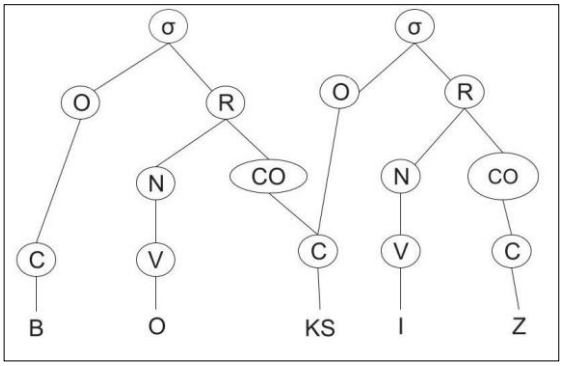
Kabras	English
amatsi – VCVCV	boxes – CVCCVC
elichingu – VCVCVCCV	subject – CVCCVCC
avetsukhulu – VCVCVCVCV	development – CVCVCVCCVCC – *closed syllable*
amarevo – VCVCVCV	
amaloro – VCVCVVCV	furniture – CVCVCV – *open syllable*

luvonga – CVCVCCV	tree – CCVV
anyalanga – VCVCVCCV	register – CVCVCCV
eshibwe – VCVCCV	oranges – VCVCCVC
omusinchilili – VCVCVCVCVCV – *open syllable*	
winyoshe – CVCVCV	

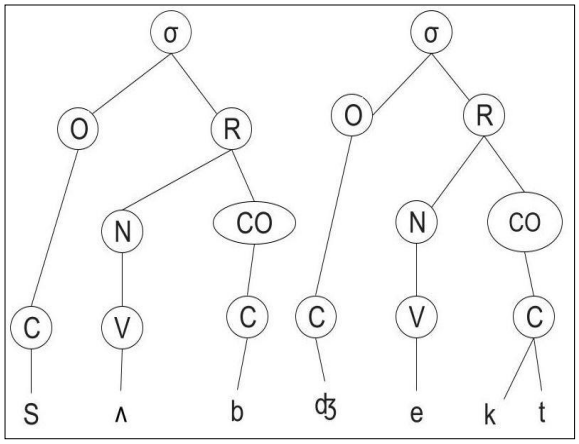
These illustrations reveal that English has more closed syllables than open syllables, while Kabras has only open syllables. The syllable pattern of Kabras is mainly CVCV, VCVCV, or CVVCV. A few double consonants following each other is the overlap of sounds due to assimilation (nt, ŋk, bw, ŋkw). Contrarily, English has all the patterns, including CCV, VCCC, and VCVC, CVCVC. From this rule or principle, it can be concluded that Kabras notoriously insert vowels after the coda of any word they come across, causing mispronunciation of English words. It is called vowel insertion. The following diagrams illustrate the syllable structure of both English and Kabras on a tree diagram.

Comparison of English and Kabras syllable structures

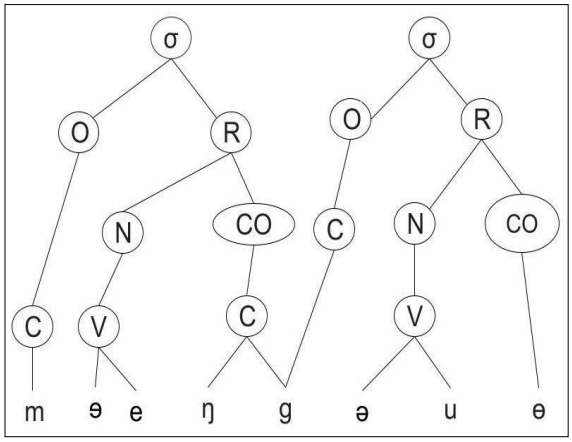




English

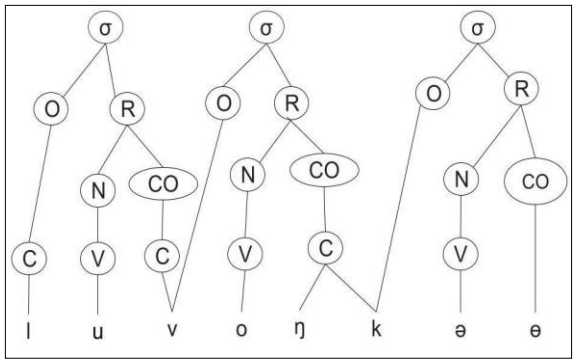


Closed syllable

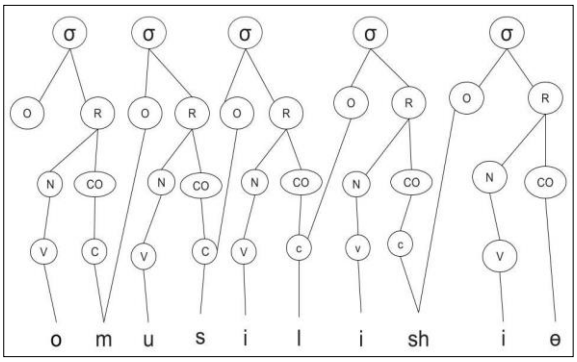


Open syllable

Kabras



Open syllable



Open syllable

The open syllables have no coda in Kabras, while English has a coda in most cases due to closed syllables. Onset is a consonant, nucleus or peak is a vowel, while the coda is a consonant. It emphasizes the rule of insertion of vowels leading to mispronunciation of English words by Kabras speakers.

It is also concluded that Kabarasi speakers mispronounce English words by devoicing the voiced sounds, and if they attempt to voice, they accidentally voice the voiceless sounds. Where sounds/ð/ and /θ/are missing in Kabras, they substitute with the sound /ts/, a palatal affricate. In most cases, some linguists who have not realized that Kabras consonants are voiceless tend to use sound /β/ instead of its voiceless counterpart /ɸ/.

6. CONCLUSION

6. 1 Conclusion

The study found that the phonological basis of mispronunciation of English words by Kabarasi speakers during oral presentations is voicing the devoiced sounds and devoicing the voiced sounds in English because Kabras has only voiceless consonants, but English has both. The other one is vowel insertion occasioned by a variation in syllable structure where Kabras has only VCVCVC/CVCV, resulting in open syllables, while English has both closed and open syllables, but most of them are closed syllables as they end with a coda. Kabras ends with nucleus/peak. Finally, there is the substitution of English sounds, which are not Kabras with Kabras sounds, leading to mispronunciation.

The three phonological bases are the divergence zones between Kabras and English. Kabras has 23 consonants, while English has 25. Kabras consonants that are missed in English are /ɸ/ /x/ /c/ /ɲ/ /ts/ /β/, while English sounds that are missed in Kabras include /ð/, /θ/ and the voiced consonants. Sounds "b" and "v" are used orthographically in Kabarasi to represent phonetical symbols /ɸ/ or /β/.

The phonological basis of mispronunciation of spoken English words by Kabras speakers is devoicing, vowel insertion, sound mismatch resulting in substitution, and avoidance. Positive transfer proved feeble as negative transfer became significant. Whether learned or not, native speakers of Kabras unconsciously mispronounce English words in their oral presentation, and the linguists use that to reveal their identity.

Every language community has its uniqueness in syllable structure and sounds different from English or any other language, making it unique, and that is why it is a speech community. Such characteristics make its speakers of English to be identified from others.

6.2 Recommendations

Kabras speakers must mispronounce English words as long as they are native speakers of L1. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers of English should put more emphasis on oral skills at the expense of written by using minimal pairs based on voiced and voiceless sounds, engaging students in elocution aspects such as public speaking, oral narratives, recitation of verses, chanting English, tongue twisters or any other oral piece.

Teachers of English can also involve the learners in group discussion, debate or engage them in a serious conversation that involves application of spoken English to build confidence in spoken English by the learners. The transfer of errors from L1 to L2 can be minimized with practice.

The researcher did not manage to analyze the diacritics, stress, and intonation due to time factors, and therefore, recommends that future studies focus on them to ascertain whether they are among the phonological bases of mispronunciation of spoken English among the Kabras native speakers. Further studies can also be done on phonological comparison between Kabras and Kiswahili.

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