A Contrastive Study of the Sound Systems of Nyifon and Esan Languages

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Abstract
The study compared and contrasted the sound systems of the Nyifon and Esan languages. Its goals were to determine the similarities and differences between the languages' segmental phonemes and to use this information to predict teaching and learning difficulties among teachers and learners of the languages. The paper used a descriptive approach, gathering pertinent data on phonology in both languages from primary and secondary sources and analyzing it using the Contrastive Analysis (CA) theoretical framework before drawing predictions from the findings. Findings revealed that the languages' sound systems have similarities and variances, with Esan having some sounds that Nyifon does not. For instance, the vowels / ɪ, ʊ/ are absent in Esan, but the nasal vowels / ĩ, ɛ̃, ã, ɔ̃, ũ / are lacking in Nyifon. According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, differences in the sound systems of the two languages may provide learning challenges for learners of either language, although similarities may make learning easier.
Keywords: Nyifon, Esan, Contrastive Analysis, Sound system, Tones.

Introduction

The concept of contrastive analysis, according to Okpanachi and Ali (2015), emerged at the end of World War II. According to some linguists, contrastive analysis is the comparison of the structure of two languages that can be compared. While some believe it helps with effective language education, others argue that it is necessary to forecast, explain, correct, and minimize errors caused by interference between first and second languages (L1 and L2). This research compares the sound systems of the Nyifon and Esan languages. The goal of this paper is to determine the similarities and differences between the languages' segmental phonemes and to use this information to anticipate learning difficulties among teachers and learners of the languages. This study thus covers the Nyifon and Esan consonants, vowels, and tone system, predicting difficulty regions and proposing methods to help learners avoid developing the initial pronunciation difficulties that they would normally face while learning their target language.

Nyifon and Esan

Nyifon is a minority language spoken in Nigeria's Benue state. Furthermore, the indigenous Nyifon people acknowledged that they are a minority population. "...in the states where Nyifon people live, they are considered minorities... The people are extremely tiny and unrecognized Nigerians," write Moze and Ikyado (2011: ix). According to Uba (2021), the population of Nyifon is around 40,000 people (2021). Christians account for one-third of the group. The majority of Nyifons work as farmers, hunters, fishermen, and traditional medicine men and women, while modern-day Nyifons work in a variety of occupations such as education, nursing, and civil service. The Esans are thought to have migrated from Benin, with whom they share cultural and linguistic ties (Talbot (1926), cited in Westermann and Bryan, 1970). However, according to Okoduwa (2001; Osiruemu, 2005), the similarities in the two groups' languages and practices are insufficient evidence that the Esan people migrated directly or indirectly from Benin. He claims that such a claim implies that Esan's ancestors left Benin for the bush only 500 years ago to escape the draconian rule of a Benin king. According to Odaigbe (2004), the word "Esan" is derived from the phrase "Esan la oha," which translates as "they jumped into the bush". Those who fled to this part of the region were known as Esan at the time, and their language was also known as Esan until very recently. Esan speakers are referred to as "Ishans," an anglicized variant of Esan. Esan is the mother tongue of the people in the following Edo State Local

Government Areas: Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-West, Esan West, and Igueben. Esan is a north-central Edoid language, according to Elugbe (1989: 26).

Literature Review

In its most basic form, contrastive linguistics can be defined as the theoretically grounded, systematic, and synchronic comparison of typically two languages, or at most a limited number of languages, according to Mair (2018). Comparisons were typically conducted in the early stages of the field's development in order to use the findings to benefit the community, such as in foreign-language education or translation. In recent years, this applied focus has been supplemented by a growing body of contrastive research with a more theoretical bent. The languages being compared may or may not be genetically related, and they may or may not be typologically similar or dissimilar.

The primary notion of contrastive analysis, as articulated by Robert Lado in his book Linguistics Across Cultures (1957), was that by methodically comparing the two languages and cultures, native speakers of another language may identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will provide. Where the two languages and cultures are similar, there will be no learning difficulties; nevertheless, where they are different, there will be learning difficulties, and the greater the difference, the greater the degree of predicted difficulty. It was hoped that based on such analysis, teaching materials might be customized to the needs of learners of a specific first language (Lennon, 2008).
"An approach to the study of second language acquisition (SLA) that comprises predicting and explaining learner concerns based on a comparison of L1 and L2 to discover similarities and differences," according to Saville-Troike (2006:34). Perhaps Keshavarz's (2012) definition of CA is more detailed and better conveys the study's purpose. Contrastive analysis, according to him, is "the systematic study of a pair of languages to establish their structural differences and similarities, usually for translation or teaching purposes."

According to Harris (1969), as reported in Afangideh (2005), contrastive analysis allows us to determine;
a) Languages with similar linguistic patterns (identical language patterns mean phonology, syntax, semantics, lexis).
b) Patterns in target languages that do not have analogues in L1.
c) Problems in the target language that are likely to cause interference but can also serve as valuable learning opportunities.
Afangideh went on to say that contrastive analysis will be extremely useful when developing target languages for learners from various linguistic backgrounds. This type of study would aid language teachers in determining the level of selected difficulty of various patterns in the target or foreign language.
Obimma (1998) compared and contrasted Edda dialect and mainstream Igbo phonology. She showed that Edda Igbo has 38 phonemes, twenty-nine consonants, and nine vowels, compared to 36 phonemes in standard Igbo, which has twenty-eight consonants and eight vowels. She claims Edda doesn't have the /h/ sound that other Igbos have. She emphasized that nasalization is an important part of the Edda dialect. Although Edda, like Igbo, does not allow consonant clusters or closed syllables, they do appear in some imported terms.

In the year 2015, Malah, Zubairu, and Sebariah Md. Rashid published Contrastive analysis of the segmental phonemes of English and Hausa languages. According to the researchers, the study's objectives were to (i) evaluate the similarities and differences between the segmental phonemes of English and Hausa languages, and (ii) predict learning problems among Hausa ESL learners based on this comparison. Learners of English as a second language (L2) frequently face difficulties, which are exacerbated by the features of their native tongues (L1). Hausa speakers in Nigeria learn English as a second language, and their spoken English reflects the Hausa language's peculiarities. The authors employed desk research to gather data for this study. While some phonemes in Hausa and English are shared, the sounds in the two languages behave differently, with Hausa having 47 phonemes and English

having 44. Due to variances in phonological components between the two languages, the Hausas have difficulty learning English.

Etim (2018) compared Ibibio and Igbo languages stated that Igbo had eight vowels and twenty-eight consonants, while Ibibio had ten vowels and fourteen consonant phonemes. The results of studying the contrast of two languages show that the sound systems of the two languages have similarities as well as differences. There are various sounds in Ibibio that are not found in Igbo. Igbo also has a lot of phonemes that Ibibio doesn't have. The phonemes /e, a, i, o, u, p, b, t, d, k, kp, m, n, j, f, s, j, w/ are common to both languages. Except for Except for /ʉ, ɨ, ʌ, ə/, all Ibibio phonemes are present in Igbo. There are two vowel segments in Igbo: / ɪ and ʊ/, as well as fourteen consonant phonemes: /g, gb, kw, gw, w, v, z, h, l, r/. what Ibibio lacks. While both languages have highs, lows, and lows, Ibibio also has contoured or melodic tones, which Igbo doesn't have. Also, in Ibibio, the reduced tone is traditionally marked with an exclamation point, while in Igbo, the timbre is traditionally marked with a raised macron over the segments that carry it.

Methodology

Similar to previous contrastive analyses, this is secondary research. Previous studies have identified and classified the segmental phonemes of Nyifon and Esan languages, hence the study lends itself to this technique naturally. As a result, the researchers drew on existing literature in both languages on segmental phonemes and tones. Such investigations on the Nyifon sound system can be found in Uba (2021). Nyifon is made up of forty phonemes, including thirty-one consonants and nine vowels, according to the research. Nyifon is a three-tone language including low, downstep, and high tones. Vowels in the language are Tone Bearing Units (TBUs). Esan phonology is exemplified by Ejele (1982) and Osiruemu (2005). According to them, Esan has twenty-six consonants and twelve vowels, including seven oral vowels and five nasal vowels. Esan has high and low tones and is a two-tone language. For the language, vowels are also TBUs. For our two languages, we utilized the tone marking convention, with the high tone indicated by an acute accent [́], the low tone indicated by a grave accent [̀], the downstep tone indicated by the exclamation mark [!], and the mid-tone indicated by the bar [̄].

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Nyifon Sound System

While describing speech sounds, we try to capture as many of their properties as feasible. To classify the sounds, all that is required is to find the features that differentiate them and leave the classification at that. Consonants and vowels are the two forms of speech sounds in the Nyifon language, as they are in all other languages.

Nyifon Consonants

Nyifon has thirty-one consonant phonemes, according to Uba (2021): / p, b, t, d, k, g, kʷ, gʷ, ts, dz, ʧ, ʤ, kp, gb, m, n, ɲ, ŋ, ŋʷ, f, v, s, z, ʃ, ɣ, ʍ, h, r, l, j, w/. Ten stops, five nasals, four affricates, eight fricatives, two liquids, and two approximants make up this group. The following diagram depicts how these phonemes are represented:

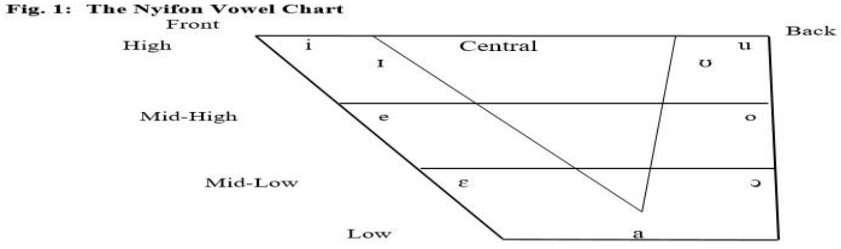
Tab. 1: The Nyifon Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial-velar	Labialized velar	Glottal
Stops/ Plosives	p b		t d			k g	k͡p g͡b	kʷ gʷ	
Nasals	m		n		ɲ	ŋ		ŋʷ	
Fricatives		f v	s z	ʃ		ɣ	ʍ		h
Affricates			ts dz	ʧ ʤ					
Trills			r						
Lateral			l						
Approximants					j		w		

These sounds are described as follows
p /p/ píémé 'accept', píé 'out/be fit'
b /b/ bébé 'dark colour', bʊ̀à 'mute', bózū 'burst'
t /t/ témé 'remove' ùtí 'tree'
d /d/ díà 'be able', dé ‘see/look’, díúdí ‘generous’,
k /k/ kálʊ́wà 'prostitute', kéámé 'mend', kái 'hatch'
g /g/ gɔ̀ 'feel', gɔ̀ɔ̀dé 'taste'
kw /kʷ/ kʷèdùŋélō 'alone', àkʷàtì 'box’
gw /gʷ/ gwɛ́ɛ́ ‘to say’, ìjìnátòágwɔ̀ ‘bangle’, zàgwùdìà ‘persuade’
kp /kp/ ìkpú 'tribute' kpùùdɔ̄ 'punishment'
gb /gb/ àgbáŋgíá nísē 'chin', ḿgbágìé ‘thank’
m /m/ mùŋé 'fill', ìtòmò 'leopard'
n /n/ ìnɔ̀ 'scorpion', nì 'bury'
ny /ɲ/ ɲáídɔ̀ 'shout', mɔ́ŋɔ́ 'abundant'
ṅ /ŋ/ ŋ̀-gé ‘person’, mʊ́ŋá ‘early’, mùŋé fill’,
nw /ŋʷ/ ŋá 'wide' ŋɔ́ŋɔ́ 'ferment', bèŋà 'imitate'
ts /ts/ ìtsu 'pimple', àtsùŋwé 'duty'
dz /dz/ dzé ‘stay’, àdzí ‘face’, ùvdzì ‘penis’
ch /ʧ/ áʧʃ́ 'poison', áʧ̀ìkà 'lie'
j /ʤ/ ùʤí 'thread', íʤí 'food'
f /f/ ìfè 'louse'. ìfú 'crocodile'
v /v/ vùn 'jump', vɔ̀ 'bake' vɔ̀ 'drink'
s /s/ sè 'pour', sémō 'forbid'
z /z/ ùzù 'groom', záágʊ̀ 'pacify'
sh /ʃ/ nùàʃìn 'dirty', ʃĩʃì 'pity'
gh /ɣ/ ɣààlè 'bruise', vɔ̀èɣá 'pretend'
hw /ʍ/ ʍé ‘learn’, ʍésè ‘valley’, ʍédìà ‘width’
h /h/ àhʊ́ 'feather', hɔ̀ìvɔ̀ 'clear'
r /r/ ràkúmí ‘camel’, dɛ́rí ‘hundred’, zánárìjá ‘gold’
l /l/ fúúlé 'wither', bɔ̀ɔ̀le 'hide'
y /j/ jíjàké '(be) fair', dɛ́ɛ́jì 'vision'
w /w/ ʊ̀wɔ́ 'bride', kálʊ́wà 'prostitute'

Nyifon Vowels
There are nine vowels in the Nyifon vowel inventory. The vowels, their orthographic form, phonetic description, and their distribution are presented below:
i /i/ close front unrounded vowel [+ATR] ìkì 'land', ìjù 'bee'
ị /ɪ/ close front unrounded vowel [-ATR] nì 'bury', àgìgá 'drum'
e /e/ close-mid front unrounded vowel dé 'see', èkà 'venom'
ẹ /ɛ/ open mid front unrounded vowel èkìé 'parrot', ètìkà 'tap'
a /a/ open front unrounded vowel áná yesterday', áʧà 'rejoice'
ọ /ɔ/ open mid back rounded vowel èkɔ́ ‘pot’, tsɔ̀ 'stab'
o /o/ close-mid back rounded vowel bozù 'men/male', ùnòvò 'beer'
u /u/ close back rounded vowel [+ATR] dú 'pound', ùbù 'oil'
ụ /ʊ/ close back rounded vowel [-ATR] ʊ́bʊ́ 'beach', ʊ́bɔ́ 'ten'

Fig. 1: The Nyifon Vowel Chart



Nyifon Tones and Tonal System

Nyifon is a register-toned tonal language. The four tones accessible in Nyifon are high tone [́], low tone [̀], downstep tone [!], and high falling contour tone [ˆ]. The most prevalent contour tone in the language is the high falling contour tone (HF), which occurs most frequently at the end of syllables or words. Vowels and syllabic nasals are tone-bearing units in Nyifon. The following are examples of Nyifon words with tones.

HF /bâ/ 'copulate'
H /bá/ 'draw'
L /bà/ 'wait'.
HH /áná/ ‘yesterday’ /jájá/ ‘help’
LL /ìtì/ ‘cricket’ /nàkà/ ‘before’
HL /fúfù/ ‘lung’ /áʧà/ ‘rejoice’
LH /ùtí/ ‘tree/ log’ /ɛ̀tsú/ ‘market'
LHF /ènâ/ ‘there’ /àhû/ ‘horn’
HHF /áfî/ 'bile gall' /úfê/ 'year'
HS /bó↓zú/ ‘burst’ /kú↓ná/ ‘knee’

Nyifon high and low tones are not constrained, according to current data, as they can occur word-initially, medially, or ultimately. The downstep, as seen in one of the examples above, is limited and phonetically implemented. The same can be said about the language's contour tone. The contour tone can be found in Nyifon lexical items at the end of a syllable or at the end of a word.

The Esan Sound System

We strive to capture as many of the characteristics of speech sounds as possible while describing them. All that is required to classify the sounds is to identify the characteristics that distinguish them and leave the differentiation at that. The Esan language, like every other language on the planet, includes two types of speaking sounds: consonants and vowels.

Esan Consonants

A minimal pair analysis revealed that Esan had 26 consonant phonemes: /p, b, t, d, k, g, k͡p, g͡b, β, f, v, s, z, ʃ, x, ɣ, h, m, n, ɲ, ʧ, ʤ, l, r, j, w/. These phonemes consist of eight stops, nine fricatives, two affricates, three nasals, two liquids, and two approximations. These phonemes are shown in the following table.

Tab. 2: The Esan Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velsr	Labial-velar	Glottal
Stops/Plosives	p b		t d			k g	k͡p g͡b	
Nasals	m		n		ɲ			
Fricatives	β	f v	s z	ʃ		x ɣ		h
Affricates				ʧ ʤ				
Trills			r					
Lateral			l					
Approximants					j		w	

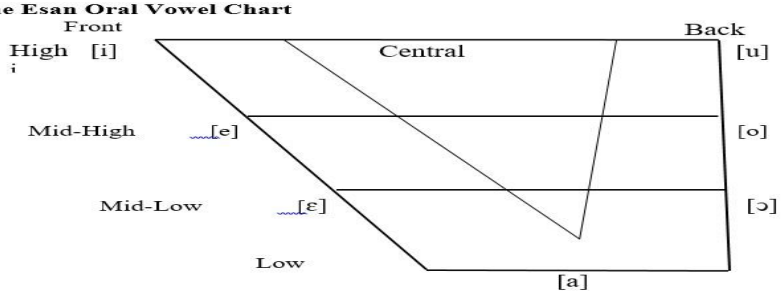
These sounds are described phonetically as follows:

/b/ voiced bilabial stop as in [bjɛ̀] 'slice’
/d/ voiced alveolar stop as in [dɛ̀] 'to buy'
/ʤ/ voiced palato-alveolar affricate as in [óʤì] 'thief'
/f/ voiceless labio-dental fricative as in [ófɛ̀] 'rat’
/g/ voiced velar stop as in [gà] 'to worship’
/g͡b/ voiced labio-velar stop as in [ógbà] 'fence’
/ɣ/ voiced velar fricative as in [àɣà] "impotent'

/h/ voiced glottal fricative as in [hɔ̀] 'to wash'
/k/ voiceless velar stop as in [kà] 'to dry'
/x/ voiceless velar fricative as in [xɛ̀] 'to wait'
/k͡p/ voiceless labio-velar stop as in [ékpå] 'vomit'
/l/ voiced alveolar lateral as in [ɛ̀lɛ̀] 'today'
/m/ voiced bilabial nasal as in [mɛ̃̀] 'me'
/n/ voiced alveolar nasal as in [ènɪ̃̀] 'there'
/v/ voiced labio-dental fricative as in [vɜ̃̀] 'to shout'
/ ʃ / voiceless palato-alveolar fricative as in [ɔ́ʃɔ̌] 'friend'
/ ɻ / voiced alveolar approximant as in [tʃèrè] 'to return'
/z/ voiceless alveolar fricative as in [izɛ̀] 'rice'
/r/ voiced alveolar trill as in [rè] 'to take'
/s/ voiceless alveolar fricative as in [isɛ̀] 'amen'
/t/ voiceless alveolar stop as in [étò] 'hair'
/w/ voiced labio-velar approximant as in [wɛ̀] you'
/j/ voiced palatal approximant as in [éjɛ̀] "bird'
/β/ voiced bilabial fricative as in [βɔ̀] 'to uproot'
/p/ voiceless bilabial as in [pjɛ̃̀] 'to press'
/ɲ/ voiced palatal nasal as in [ɲɛ̃̀] \cook\
Esan consonants are bilabial, labiodental, alveolar, post-alveolar, palatal, velar, labial-velar, or glottal, depending on where they are articulated as illustrated in the diagram above. The glottis's place, manner, and state are used to characterize these speaking sounds. The specific area of the oral tract involved in the production of a consonant is referred to as the place of articulation. Before being discharged, the airstream is constrained by narrowing or closing the channel altogether.

Esan Vowels
The Esan language has twelve (12) vowels in its phonetic inventory. Seven (7) of these vowels are oral while five (5) are nasal. The vowels are: /i, ĩ, e, ɛ, ɛ̃, a, ã, ɔ, ɔ̃, o, u, ũ/. The oral vowel sounds are represented in a phonetic chart as shown below:

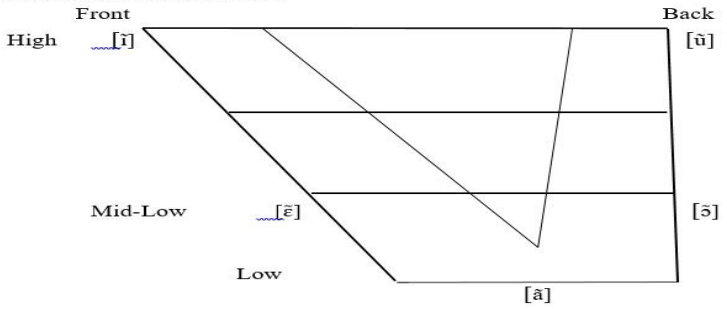
Fig. 2: The Esan Oral Vowel Chart



The oral vowels are described below:
i /i/ close front unrounded vowel òsìsì 'gun'
e /e/ close-mid front unrounded vowel étò 'hair'
ẹ /ɛ/ open mid front unrounded vọwel ɛ́dɛ̀ 'river'
a /a/ open front unrounded vowel ágà 'chair'
ọ /ɔ/ open mid back rounded vowel ɔ̀kpà 'one'
o /o/ close-mid back rounded vowel òsɛ̀ 'God'
u /u/ close back rounded vowel ùkpà 'lamp

The nasal vowel sounds are represented in a phonetic chart as shown below:

Fig. 3: The Esan Nasal Vowel Chart



The nasal vowels are described below
in / ĩ / close front unrounded nasal vowel ásɨ̀ 'pepper'
ẹn / ɛ̃/ open mid front unrounded vowel ófɛ̃̀ 'rat'
an / ã/ open front unrounded vowel ítã̀ 'proverb'
ọn / ɔ̃/ open mid back rounded vowel àsɔ̃̀ 'night'
un / ũ/ close back rounded vowel bũ̀ 'plenty'

The tongue height parameter is used to lift a piece of the tongue when forming a vowel, as seen in the vowel charts and examples above for the two languages. When it comes to tongue height, some Esan and Nyfon vowels are [+ high], [+ low], or [- high, - low]. The tongue position parameter specifies where the vowel is uttered on the tongue. The three points that make up this parameter are the front section of the tongue, which includes the tip, the center of the tongue, which usually includes the greater part of the tongue, the tongue blade, and the back of the tongue, which includes the back half and the root of the tongue. Some vowels were affected by this setting.
When forming a vowel, the third parameter is the shape of the lips. Rounding, spreading, and neutral are the only three lip forms that can be achieved during vowel articulation. In this situation, some vowels were found to be [+round] when formed by rounding the lips and [-round] when produced by expanding the lips.

The Esan Tonal System
The Esan language is a register tone language that has two level tones, high and low with the mid-tone existing as an allotone of the low tone in words in their citation form (Ejele, 1982, 2002a, 2003a). Ejele (1994) and Osiruemu (2005) agree that the Esan language has the High (H) [́] and Low (L) [̀] level tones as well as the Falling (H͡L) [ˆ] contour tone at the phonetic level of description. Like in other tonal languages, a word in Esan may have different lexical meanings depending on its tone. Tones in Esan are presented below:

L	gbà 'beat'
H	dɛ́ 'bought'
LL	ɛ̀fè 'wealth'
HH	ɛ́kɛ́ 'inside'
LH	ɔ̀gɔ́ 'bottle'
HL	ébè 'book/leaf'
LH͡L	àbâ ‘father’
HH͡L	óxwô ‘woman’

The data above show that the high and low tones in the language can occur at all positions of lexical items, either initially, medially, or finally. This same is not true about the contour tone. The contour tone occurs only at the word-final position in the language.

Similarities between Nyifon and Esan Sound Systems

a. From the data and charts above, the languages share some similarities in terms of their sound systems. The sounds may have minor differences in production but may not cause any difficulty in communication.
b. The two languages share the following consonant phonemes: /p, b. t, d, k, g, kp, gb, m, n, ɲ, f, v, s, z, ʃ, ɣ, h, ʧ, ʤ, l, r, j, w/. These phonemes are twenty-four in number. Of this number, sixteen are voiced while eight are voiceless.
c. For the vowels, the two languages share seven vowels, which are /i, e, ɛ, u, o, and ɔ/.
d. Both languages share high and low tones. The languages also have the Falling (**H͡L**) [^] contour tone at the phonetic level of description and share the following tonal patterns LL, HH, LH, and HL.

Differences between Nyifon and Esan Sound Systems

a. Nyifon has nine vowel phonemes while Esan has twelve. The lax vowels / ɪ, ʊ/ are not present in Esan while the nasal vowels / ĩ, ɛ̃, ã, ɔ̃, ũ / present in Esan are absent in Nyifon. From the data above, it was observed that Nyifon has a form of vowel harmony which shows that the language has a vowel harmony system in this case partial. This harmony system is not present in the Esan language as the vowels in the language can freely co-occur in any environment they find themselves in.
b. The absence of vowel harmony in Esan will present difficulty in pronunciation of the lax vowels / ɪ, and ʊ/ as Esan native speakers will realize them as /i, and u/ respectively.
c. Nyifon has thirty-one consonant phonemes while Esan has twenty-six in its consonant inventory. There are seven consonants / k^w, g^w, ts, dz, ŋ, $ŋ^w$, ʍ / in Nyifon which are not present in Esan while Esan has two consonants / β, x / which are absent in Nyifon. Nyifon speakers will replace / β, x / with /b, k/ anywhere they appear in any Esan lexical item because they are absent in their language's sound inventory. For the phonemes /ts and dz/ in Nyifon, Esan speakers will find it difficult to pronounce them. They are likely to delete one of the two co-articulating sounds. For example, /t/ may be elided while /s/ is retained or vice versa.
d. The downstep tone [!] which is present in Nyifon is absent in Esan.

Discussion

The primary focus of contrastive analysis is pedagogy, or the teaching and learning of languages. The first question that springs to mind when two languages are compared and contrasted is which aspects are similar and which are different. Students will be able to overcome their learning challenges and language teachers will be able to accomplish their duties more efficiently if they comprehend the similarities and differences between the two languages.

Some segmental phonemes and tones of Nyifon and Esan were found to be similar in this study. However, there are several differences between the two languages that tend to cause pronunciation difficulties for Nyifon and Esan learners of Nyifon, as native speakers of both languages would transfer the habit they developed for their mother tongue or first language into their target language or second language by frequently substituting unfamiliar phonemes with familiar phonemes that do not correspond to unfamiliar phonemes. In other words, as previously stated, the disparities in phonological patterns between the two languages mean that the discrepancies pose instructional obstacles. The reason for this is because phonemes that aren't found in a Nyifon learner's native tongue cause problems, and the same thing happens when an Esan learner of Nyifon encounters phonemes that aren't found in his home dialect. Learners will transmit phonological traits from their first language to the target language in these situations.

The vowels of the two languages are found to have some striking similarities. Both languages have /i, e, ɛ, a, o, u/, although /a/ has various phonetic descriptions that vary from author to author. For example, in Esan, /a/ is a central open vowel; in Nyifon, /a/ is an open front vowel. This will, however, make learning easier because the distinction between them is in their description rather than their pronunciation. The two lax vowels / ɪ and ʊ/ in Nyifon that are absent in Esan may offer a dilemma for Esan learners of Nyifon because they may substitute them with vowels that are fairly similar in their language, and in this case, /i and u/ respectively. Nyifon learners of Esan may also face the dilemma of

the nasal vowels / ĩ, ɛ̃, ã, ɔ̃, ũ / present in Esan are absent in Nyifon. There is the possibility of Nyifon learners substituting the nasal vowels for their oral counterparts.

The Nyifon phonemic consonants system is more complex than the Esan phonemic consonants system, which is less complex. This would allow Nyifon learners of Esan to quickly learn and comprehend the Esan phonemic consonant system, but the same cannot be said of Esan learners of Nyifon. Nyifon has all but two of the Esan phonemic consonants. This could make it easier for Nyifon speakers to learn Esan. Seven Nyifon consonants do not exist in Esan. The segments are: / k^w, g^w, ts, dz, ŋ, $ŋ^w$, ʍ/. The Esan learners of Nyifon will have a major pronunciation problem as a result of this. They would replace some of the segments in their mother tongue when pronouncing words with these segments. For example, the segments / k^w, g^w/ in Nyifon may be realized differently in Esan as the labialized /^{w}/ may be realized as a glide /w/ in Esan. In the segments /ts, dz/ present in Nyifon, Esan learners will most likely articulate /s/ instead of /ts/ and /z/ instead of /dz/ respectively. There will be great difficulty in learning /ʍ/ as the phoneme is not known by Esan native speakers since they will find it difficult to pronounce words containing these phonemes well. This same is true of Nyifon learners that don't have /β, x/ in their sound inventory. The former may be realized as /b/ while the latter as /k/
As a result, teachers should take time to teach such sounds to their students, describing the phonetics of those sounds, particularly the articulatory processes involved in their formation. The variation will be correctly distinguished as a result of this. To avoid these issues/mistakes, learners of both languages should study and be comfortable with those sounds with which they are unfamiliar,

Tones are divided into three levels in Nyifon languages: high, low, and downstep tones while Esan has two-level tones high and low. The difference is that Nyifon has the downstep tone which is indicated by a raised macron above the segments containing it but is absent in Esan. Contour tone — falling tone also occurs in Nyifon and Esan, according to but are not considered as tone types but rather as consequences of tonal processes. This is something that learners of both languages should keep in mind during their studies.

Finally, the pedagogical problems of similarities and differences between Nyifon and Esan segmental phonemes and tones reveal that learners of either language will have problems primarily in the areas of differences, which will aid language teachers and students in emphasizing the difficult areas to solve their linguistic problems.

Conclusion

This paper attempted a contrastive study of the sound systems of Nyifon and Esan languages. The study compared the consonant, vowel, and tonal systems of the two languages using contrastive linguistics (analysis) as the theoretical framework for analysis. The areas of pronunciation difficulty for learners of either language were anticipated based on the differences in the languages' sound and tone systems. The differences and similarities in the sound systems between the languages served as the foundation for our subsequent discussion, which focused on the ramifications for L2 learners of either language.
The results of this study revealed that mastery of the learnt language is harmed by knowledge of the acquired language, particularly when the L1 and L2 are from different linguistic groups. When a Nyifon learner is confronted with the Esan language, which has different speech sound patterns than the learner's current speaking behaviour, this is the situation. The contrastive analysis goes a long way toward contrasting one language's system with that of a second language in order to anticipate the difficulties that a speaker of L1 will have when learning the L2 and to build teaching materials to help him learn it effectively. The comparative analysis of the languages has revealed the difficulties that a Nyifon or Esan L1 speaker will experience when acquiring the other languages.

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