



The Articulation of English Liquids by Annang-English Bilinguals

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Abstract. This paper investigates the articulation of the English liquids by Annang-English bilinguals. It identifies the liquid sounds and analyses them, taking into consideration the similarities and dissimilarities in both languages. As a result, the theoretical framework employed for the study is provided by the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) propounded by Robert Lado in 1962. Forty subjects drawn from a population of one hundred and twenty (120) Annang-English bilinguals of the Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), were given a production test of twenty-five (25) items containing the liquid lateral sound and the rhotic. Each subject was required to articulate the words containing the liquid sounds. This was done to ascertain the subject's ability towards articulating these sounds. From the study, it was realised that the subjects had difficulties pronouncing some of the words. Researches in bilingual analysis have shown that the similarities of sounds in both languages facilitate learners' ability to speaking the language appropriately and differences hinder. This study revealed that although the two liquids are present in the Annang language, the subjects had difficulties articulating the sounds when they were preceded by plosives. These consonant clusters posed a problem to the subjects. It also showed that since the subjects' speech community uses these liquids in free variation, some of them transferred it to the target language and this affected their pronunciation. Worthy of note is the fact that these problems were not observed at the initial word positions as the subjects were able to appropriately articulate the sounds. In conclusion, if Annang speakers make conscious efforts and are intentional about articulating the right sounds, they will certainly do so. This paper therefore submits that these set of speakers face these problems because of the positions in which these liquids appear in a word. That, the use of liquids in free variation in Annang also hinders them from articulating the words accurately.

Keywords: Liquid sounds, Articulation, Free Variation, Bilinguals, Speech community.

1. Introduction

In every human community, language serves as a basic tool for information and communication (Utin, 2016, p. 79). This tool helps us to interact, share our beliefs, opinions, knowledge and feelings. Language could be seen as a social event because of its relevance in the social setting of any community. Sapir (1921) quoted Eka & Udofot (2015) observe that language is primarily human and non -instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. The primacy of speech upholds that the spoken medium of language exists before the written medium. Some languages exist in the spoken form while others exist in both forms. It also refers to the basic way in which the spoken word is communicated between people. Learning a second language basically requires knowing the letters and sounds of the language, the spellings, the pronunciation, the right perception and the correct or proper articulation of the words in the target language. Essentially, contrastive analysis is to systematically study any pair of language with the view of identifying the similarities and differences. The process of learning a new language could be tasking and quite demanding, but the right efforts, interests and commitment to the course can make it less cumbersome.

Egbokhare (1992: p.11) quoted in Eka and Udofot (2015: p.5) observe that studying a language is important since every language has a definite number of sounds which it employs for communication by speech, some of these sounds are peculiar to it, others are shared with other languages.

It should be noted that the speech sounds of a language are assigned certain symbols which are used for its illustrative representations. In spite of this, since English does not have a one-to-one relationship between letters and sounds, it is pertinent for learners to make a conscious effort in learning the language and identifying the intricacies involved in the letter-sound relationships. This confirms the reason for Sapir

(1949:p.1) notion of a language. It observes that in the first place, language is primarily a system of phonetic symbols for the expression of communicable thought and feeling. In other words, the symbols of language are differentiated products of the vocal behaviour which is associated with the larynx of the higher mammals.

These symbols are common to all languages and Annang is not an exception. Annang language has its sound system which shares some peculiarities with English. As far as spoken language is concerned, it is pertinent to study its speech sounds as this will facilitate proper articulation of the words. Appropriate knowledge of the sounds of English and Annang facilitates effective production of the sounds and articulation of the words to a large extent. To this end, the lack of knowledge in this direction hinders proper comprehension and articulation of the words. Eka & Udofot (2015: p. 15) aver that every language has its own inventory of sounds, some of which are unique to it while some occur in other languages. All the sounds that occur in other languages of the world have traditionally been classified into two groups: vowels and consonants.

Just as the languages are different, their sound systems are also different in shapes and numbers. These variations to a great extent either hinder the proper articulation of words, while similarities of some of these sounds facilitate the proper articulation of the words. For effective information and communication (Utin, 2016: p.77) proper learning of the sounds is necessary as this will enhance correct articulation of the words. Good speaking and proper enunciation of words become integral part of the speaking skills which are quite pertinent for proper comprehension.

This paper investigates the problematic areas of sound articulation by Annang-English (Utin, 2023, Enang & Utin 2023, Utin, 2024, Udoka, Enang & Utin 2018) bilinguals with specific attention to the liquid sounds. English liquid is an expression used to describe /l/ and /r/ sounds otherwise known as lateral and rhotic (voiced alveolar approximant) respectively. The lateral liquid is a sound in which the airflow out of the body is redirected around the tongues and towards the sides of the mouth before passing out from the lips. Rhoticity in English is concerned with the pronunciation of the consonant /r/ in all r positions while non rhoticity refers to the dropping of the /r/ sound in particular r position. This category of sounds is complex in articulation as they exhibit a great deal of variation in different accent varieties with respect to the different syllabic and phonological contexts. In Annang language, it is interesting to note that these

liquids are used in free variation and as a result, they affect the spoken English of Annang-English bilinguals.

The method for data collection used in this study was a reading test comprising words with liquids at all word positions. The test items were carefully selected to capture the essence of the study. The kernel of the production test was to ascertain the ability of the selected subjects in articulating the liquid roll /r/ and the liquid lateral /l/ at all word positions. This was done taking into consideration the positions of these sounds in the selected words. The respondents were selected through a purposive random sampling method which was targeted at a specific group of students in the Faculty of Arts in Akwa Ibom State University. There were mainly Annang-English bilinguals, purposively selected from the five departments in the faculty. They include ten (8) each from the departments of English, Religion, History, Performing Arts and Philosophy. A total number of forty (40) subjects was used for the study. Each subject pronounced the selected words containing the liquids, data collected were analysed using the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH).

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. It was propounded by Robert Lado (1957) in his book, *Linguistics Across Cultures*. It is the systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences. The concepts of 'interference' and 'transfer' as proposed by Weinrich (1953) and Lado (1957) respectively constitute the main subjects of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). Contrastive Analysis results from the fact that in languages, there exist similarities and dissimilarities. This explains the reason for a thin sort of analysis. It also offers some strong claims in the area of teaching language usually characterised as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

Avery & Enrich (1992) observe that the native language affects the ability to produce English sounds as well as the ability to hear the sounds. It further states that the nature of a foreign accent can be determined by the native language of the learner. This is sequel to the fact that in every language, there exist a particular inventory of phonemes. It should be understood that learners' mispronunciation of words does not reflect random attempts at producing the correct sound but they indicate sounds, stress and more. Also, (Utin, 2024) has shown that the sound system of the mother tongue can influence the pronunciation of some

sounds in English. The authors have also pointed out that the sound system of the native language can influence the pronunciation of English in the following ways. They include:

- When learners encounter sounds in English that are not part of the sound inventory of the learners' native language.
- When the rules of combining sounds are different in the learner's mother tongue

This influence could be positive or negative as the presence could facilitate the articulation while absence of the sounds could hinder the proper articulation. It is pertinent to note that, in Anaang, the liquid /r/ and /l/ exist in free variation and as such affects the pronunciation of these sounds at different word environments. Some Annang speakers tend to replace one for another in the different contexts, as in 'urua' and 'ula' meaning 'market'. As a result, it is observed that some Annang-English bilinguals have problems articulating words with these liquid sounds /l/ & /r/ in words like 'fly' and 'fry'. Here, 'fly' becomes 'fry', while 'fry' becomes 'fly', 'glory' becomes 'grory' and 'landlord' becomes 'randrord'. It should be noted that the wrong pronunciation of words does not only affect the learner but it also affects the social, professional

and other aspects of the speaker interaction and communication. Beyond this, it undermines the speaker's confidence and self-esteem. It also interferes with one's ability to communicate clearly, and effectively with speakers from different linguistic and professional backgrounds (Yadugiri, 2013). To this end, it is worthwhile to note that the non-native speakers should make conscious effort to learning the correct pronunciation of words (Utin, 2023) in respect to the correct sound and also strive, by making a conscious effort to overcome these problems.

Eka (2000: p.40) observes that when two languages come in contact with each other, interference usually occur which involves the transfer of some elements which are found in one's first language into the target language. Quite often, Annang- English bilinguals usually have problems articulating words with liquids especially when they occur more than once in a word. For instance, words like 'reiterate', 'irrelevant', 'deteriorate', 'contemporary', pose problems to some Annang-English bilinguals. In situations like these, they tend to either delete one or replace one with the other as in 'retret', 'irrelevant', 'deteriate', 'comtemprraly' respectively. This deleting or replacing one sound for another is to ease pronunciation on the part of the speaker of English as a second language.

Table 1

	Word	Received Pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation/ Percentage		Wrong Pronunciation	Wrong Pronunciation/ Percentages	
1	Green grass	/gri:n gra:s/	/gringra:s/	15	37.5%	/gli:ngras/ /gri:ngras/	17 8	42.5% 20%
2	Landlord	/lændlɔ:d/	/landlɔ:d/	20	50%	/lanrod/ /dandod/	12 8	30% 20%
3	Problem	/prabləm/	/problem/	10	25%	/probrem/ /plobrem/	20 10	50% 25%
4	Celebrate	/se'libreit/ʃ	/selibreit/	13	32.5%	/seriblet/ /seribret/	17 10	42.5% 25%
5	Browse	/braus/	/braus/	25	62.5%	/blaus/	15	37.5%
6	Less	/les/	/les/	40	100%	-	-	-
7	Little	/'litl/	/litl/	40	100%	-	-	-
8	Bride price	/braid praiz/	/braidprais/	5	12.5%	/blaidplais/ /braidplais/	20 15	50% 37.5%
9	Blame	/bleim/	/blem/	20	50%	/brem/	20	50%
10	Plug	/plɒg/	/plɒg/	18	48%	/prog/	22	52%
11	Blind	/blaɪnd/	/blaɪnd/	20	50%	/braɪnd/	20	50%
12	Complex	/kɒmpleks/	/kɒmpleks/	15	37.5%	/kɒmpreks/	25	62.5%
13	Inferiority	/ɪnfɪəriɔːrɪti/	/ɪnfɪoriti/	20	50%	/ɪnfɪrioliti/ /ɪnfɪloriti/	10 10	25% 25%
14	Priorate	/praɪəriət/	/praɪəriət/	13	32.5%	/priolet/ /pliolet/	19 3 5	47.5% 7.5% 12.5%
15	Deteriorate	/detərioret/	/detərioret/	13	32.5%	/detərioret/ /detarioret/	23 4	57.5% 10%
16	Referral	/rɪfɜːrəl/	/rɪfɜːrəl/	18	45%	/refral/	22	55%
17	Like	/laɪk/	/laɪk/	40	100%	-	-	-
18	Protocol	/prəʊtəkɒl/	/prəʊtəkɒl/	24	60%	/plotokol/	16	40%
19	Ground	/graʊnd/	/graʊnd/	14	35%	/glaʊnd/	26	65%

20	Election	/iləkʃɪn/	/iləkʃɪn/	13	32.5%	/erəkʃɪn/	11	27.5%
							16	40%
21	Proclamation	/prɒkləmeɪʃən/	/plɒkrəmeɪʃən/	5	12.5%	/plɒkrəmeɪʃən/	16	40%
							19	47.5%
22	Theoretical	/θiəretɪkəl/	/tiəretɪkəl/	15	37.5	/tiəretɪkəl/	25	62.5
23	Framework	frem wɜ:k/	fremwɒk/	13	32.5	fremwɒk/	27	67.5%
24	Proclivity	/prɒklɪvɪti/	/prɒklɪvɪti/	15	37.5	/plɒkrɪvɪti/	25	62.5%
25	Let	/let/	/let/	40	100%	-	-	-

3. Data Analysis

From the table above, the subject's performances are presented. In the test item, 25 words containing the liquid sounds were administered to the respondents. From the data presented, a total number of forty (40) subjects, comprising students from the Faculty of Arts were administered the production test.

It was realised that the sound /l/ at the initial position did not pose any problem to the subject, as it was not problematic to the subjects. They were able to properly articulate the sound /l/ at the initial position. At this position, the sound /l/ is technically referred to as "clear" Eka & Udofot (1996). On the other hand, it was also realised that when the same sound was preceded by any of the plosive sounds, the problem of interference became noticeable in the pronunciation. Subjects for this study were purposively selected from the Faculty of Arts. They were students who speak Annang language as their mother tongue and English as a second language. Forty (40) students were selected from the five (5) departments which include Dept of English, Philosophy, History and International studies, Religious and Cultural studies and Performing Arts.

4. Discussion

From the data presented, it shows that words with the sound /l/ at the initial position recorded 100% articulation from all the subjects. In items no.6, 7, 17 and 25, the words less, ladder and let were articulated correctly by the subjects. It should be noted that there was a variation in item number 2 'landlord', as the presence of the /l/ sound at two different positions in the word posed a problem to some of the subjects. In this item, some were able to articulate the word with the /l/ sound at the different positions while others used /r/ to substitute for /l/ as indicated on the table. Here, it should be noted that some subjects were unable to articulate the word due to the problem of interference or outright transfer of what obtains in their language with regard to these sounds. The first item, 'greengrass' had a total number of 15 subjects representing a percentage of 37.5% who were able to articulate the word correctly. While 17 and 8 subjects articulated the word as /grɪŋgras/ and /glɪŋgras/

representing 42.5% and 20% respectively who were unable to properly articulate the word. The second item 'landlord' is an everyday word among the students. The result of the production test indicated that 20 subjects representing 50% were able to articulate the sound correctly in the word 'landlord' and 20 subjects representing 50% were also not able to produce the sound correctly. Results of the articulation of the word showed that "landlord" had other versions which were produced as [landord] by 8 subjects representing 20%, and 12 representing 30% of the subjects articulated [lanrod] and [lanlord], respectively. The experience in this item could be linked to the fact that some dialects of Annang, use /l/ /r/ and /d/ in free variation as in the case of "Urua", "Udua", "Ula" (Unang, 2007) meaning 'market'.

Item number 3, recorded seven (7) appropriate articulation as /problem/ and another 13 as /ploblem/ and [probrem]. The item "celebrate" was articulated as /selibreit/, [seriblet] and [seribret] in the following 13, 17 and 10 respectively. The percentage representations recorded showed 32.5%, 42.5% and 25% respectively.

The word "browse" also posed a problem to our subjects as 25 of them articulated 'blaus' and 15 articulated /brauz/. Items number 6, 7, 17 and 25 were articulated correctly by the subjects, where they recorded 100% in all the items. They include less, little, like, and let.

Another problematic item for the subjects was number 8 "brideprice". Here, the subjects had difficulty articulating the word. This item has two rhotic preceded by a voiced/b/ and a voiceless/p/. It should be observed that because of the nature of these plosives, that is being released among other things with a sudden parting of the organs, it obstructed the free articulation of the sounds by the subjects. In this item, 5 subjects representing 12.5% articulated the word as /braɪdpraɪs/. The remaining 32 subjects representing 87.5% articulated [blaidpraɪs] and [braɪdpraɪs]. In items numbers 9, 10 and 11, being "blame", "plug", and "blind" respectively, 10 subjects representing 25% were able to articulate the items correctly. For the other 30 subjects representing 75%, it was difficult for the subjects to articulate the words

as the liquid sounds are preceded by the voiced /b/ and voiceless /p/ plosive sounds. The results of the production test in these items were /bleim/, 20 representing 50% /plʌg/ 18 representing 48% /blaɪnd/ 20 representing 50% of those who were able to produce the sound and [brɛm], 20 representing 50% of those who were unable to articulate the sound. It was also realised that 22 subjects representing 52% articulated the item as [prʌg]. This could be attributed to the fact that the rhotic in this item is preceded by a plosive sound. As a result, they were unable to produce the sounds appropriately.

Item number 12, the recorded results of production showed that 25 of them representing 62.5% articulated [kɒmprek] while 15 subjects articulated it as /kɒmplek/ representing a percentage of 37.5% of those who were able to articulate the sound in the word. "Inferiority" being item number 13 was another difficult one for the subjects to articulate, as it had two rhotics at two different positions in the word. Here, 20 representing 50% of the subjects articulated it as [ɪnfɪliɒlɪtɪ] and 10 representing 25% of the subjects produced it as [ɪnfɪliɒdɪtɪ] and another 10 being 25% were able to articulate the word /ɪnfɪəriəriːtɪ/. The presence of two rhotics in this item, posed a great deal of problem to some of the subjects.

For items numbers 14 and 15, the subjects also had difficulty as these items also had two rhotics at two different positions in the words. The items were "priorate" and "deteriorate". In these items, the following articulations were isolated [plɪoɪet] [prɪoɪet] /praɪəriət/ with the following percentage distributions, 13 representing 32.5%, 19 representing 47.5%, 3 representing 7.5% while 5 representing 12.5% articulated the word with only one of the rhotics as [praɪət]. In addition, the second item in this category was articulated as /detərioret/ by 13 subjects representing 32.5%, and [detolioret] by 23 subjects representing 57.5% and 4 representing 10% articulated the item as [detoliet].

"Referral" which is item number 16 was articulated as /rɪˈfərəl/ and [rɪfələl] by 18 representing 45% and 22 representing 55% respectively.

Item number 17, 'let' was not difficult for the subjects as they recorded 100% in their articulation. For "protocol" and "ground", being items numbers 18 and 19, the subjects had a challenge with the rhotic as it was preceded by the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ and the voiced velar plosive /g/. The subjects articulated the words as [plotokɒl], /prəʊtəkəl/ with 24 subjects representing 60% and 16 subjects representing 40%. It is worthwhile to note that even though the major attention of this paper was on the liquid sounds, it was

observed that other details like articulating wrong pure vowels and diphthongs were also displayed by the subjects. Here, it was observed that the subjects monophthongised the diphthong sounds, reducing the qualities of the diphthongs to that of pure vowels. Item number 19, was articulated as /graʊnd/ by 14 subjects representing 35% and 26 articulate [glaʊnd], representing 65%.

The statistics for item number 20 being the word "election" was articulated as /ɪlekʃn/ by 13 subjects representing 32.5% [elekʃn] by 11 subjects representing 27.5%, while 16 representing 40% articulated the item as /ɪrekʃən/. It should be observed that beyond the wrong pronunciation of the words as in this item, it has the ability of changing the word meaning and communicating an entirely different idea to the listener. To avoid this, care should be taken by speakers of English to enunciate every syllable of the word completely and appropriately.

Item number 21, was the word 'proclamation' and it was articulated as /prɒkləmeɪʃən/ by 5 subjects representing 12.5%, 16 articulated [plokremeɪʃn] and 19 articulated [ploklemɛsn] representing 40% and 47.5% respectively.

Item number 22 "Theoretical", also posed a problem to the subjects as the voiceless interdental fricative (θ) was articulated as /t/. This resulted in the articulation of the word as /tɪoretɪkəl/ by 15 subjects representing 37.5% and 25 subjects articulated it as [tɪɔɪetɪkəl] representing 62.5% for item number 23 'framework', 13 subjects representing 32.5% articulated it as [ˈfremwɒk] while 27 subjects representing 67.5% articulated the word as [flemwɒk].

Item number 24 was the word "proclivity". Here, 15 subjects produced the word as [proklɪvɪtɪ] instead of /prɒˈklɪvəti/, while 25 subjects articulated it as [plɒˈkrɪvɪtɪ] representing 37.5% and 62.5% respectively.

In summary, this study has shown that Annang-English bilinguals experience different challenges in the articulation of the liquids /l/ and /r/. This is sequel to the fact that in Annang these sounds are used in free variation (Utin 2023). As a result, there is a transfer of the sounds from one language to the other and also being influenced by their mother tongue. They transfer the use of these sounds in free variation in their mother tongue to the English language, therefore, posing a problem to the speaker. A comparative study of any language reveals the similarities and the differences that exist in the languages (Lado, 1957).

This study has revealed that some Annang speakers are not adequately exposed to the phonological systems and rules which exist in both languages. It has also shown that at the initial and final positions of words, Annang speakers of English do not have challenges articulating the liquid sounds as experienced at the medial position. At the initial position, the liquid /l/ is regarded as being “clear”.

5. Conclusion

A phonological study of the language is an interesting aspect of language study. Unfortunately, a lot of people shy away from it and this becomes a problem to the learners. It is worthwhile to know that the wrong pronunciation of any word can change the meaning of the word completely, thereby sending a wrong message or signal to the listener/hearer. For instance, one of the items used in the production test was ‘election’ but some of the subjects articulated it as “erection” and this becomes an entirely different word with a different meaning. To avoid this, learners are encouraged to make a conscious effort to learn the rules of a second language and the sound system to enhance effective communication and comprehension. Finally, it should be noted that to overcome this, learners should be intentional about learning the sounds one by one, as this will help them differentiate one sound from another, in this case, the liquid lateral from the rhotic. Studies have also shown that the presence of sounds in both languages facilitate effective production of the sounds and absence hinder. But in this case, despite the fact that these sounds are present in Annang, it should be noted that the problem of interference, deletion and insertion of other sounds result from the fact that these liquids are used in free variation in Annang.

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