Dropping/Deletion Of Palatal Approximant /J/ In Spoken Nigerian English

Dr, Nkereke M. Essien
Department Of English
University Of Uyo, Uyo

Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon which involves the dropping/deletion of the palatal approximant /j/ in Nigerian spoken English. This is with a view to revealing the extent to which the spoken language of the subjects studied conforms with a traditional native accent. When a word contains /j/, speakers of English from Nigeria usually delete or drop the approximant /j/ during their speech. This has been of keen interest to the researcher, therefore, decides to investigate the phenomenon that leads to this incidence as a way of proffering a linguistic explication to it. To do this, a total of forty (40) educated speakers of Nigerian English were randomly selected from the university of Uyo and the University of Cross River State, Calabar. They were given a list of (40) words with varying number of syllables to read aloud while their voices were recorded. The recordings were played back and the data sorted and analysed statistically according to word types. The result showed that majority of Nigerian speakers of English deleted or dropped the approximant /j/ in their speech. The paper concludes that palatal approximant (semi vowel) does not feature appropriately in their speech production and it is also a problematic consonant for Nigerian speakers of English

Key words: Dropping/Deletion, Palatal Approximant, Nigerian English, Semi vowel.

I. INTRODUCTION

Whenever languages come in contact variation of the dominant language in contact situation arises (Josiah, 2013). This situation has been observed among Nigerian speakers of English. Linguists like Bamgbose (1971), Oluikpe (1981), and others as cited in Essien (2011) are of theopinion that English in Nigeria is the language of government, commerce, education and the mass media. Based on this stance, it is therefore, necessary for the Nigerian speakers of English to speak a variety that is nationally and internationally intelligible.

According to Inyang, Ebong and Okon, (2017) human beings employ certain speech sounds in their different languages universally. These speech sounds (consonants and vowels) differ from language to language. Users of English in a second language situation such as Nigeria generally exhibit variation that deviates from the norm which may be phonological, syntactic or lexico-semantic. At the level of phonology, Nigerian languages lack certain English sounds and combinations and these pose problems in the pronunciation of some English words. Also, phonological problems may result in semantic problems which may hinder effective communication in English.

Language contact has resulted in a variation in the realization of approximants among educated Nigerian speakers of English. The variation of approximants has a significant impact on the educated Nigerian-English bilinguals who, owing toa lack of exposure to the approximants in his first and second language may tend to perform inappropriately in the combination and articulation of English sounds. This variation of approximants among this category of educated Nigerian speakers of English motivated this study, since this usually manifestseither in deleting or dropping the English approximants like /j/ in their productions of English speech.

This study therefore, focuses on how speakers of English from the educated Nigerian language class articulate English approximants with particular reference to the dropping/deletion of palatal-approximant /j/. It explicates the English approximants and examines the variations of approximants in terms of deletion/dropping in the pronunciation of English words in educated Nigerian language, ascertains the features of Educated Nigerian pronunciation, and of words with approximants /j/ in all word positions as well as suggests ways of curbing the variations in the pronunciation of approximants in educated Nigerian language.

1.1 Conceptual Issues on Approximants

The term "approximant" was coined by Peter Ladefoged in the 1960s (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Approximant-consonant). Ladefoged (1975) describes approximant as an articulation in which one articulator is closed to another, but without the vocal tract being narrowed to such "an extent that a turbulent airstream is produced"(p.10). Approximant, in phonetics is a sound produced by bringing one articulator in the vocal tract close to another without, however, causing audible friction (https://www.britainnica.com/ topic/approximant).

According to Roach (2000:62) "it is an articulation in which the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a "complete" consonant such as a plosive, nasal, or fricative". Thus approximants are speech sounds that involve the articulators approaching each other but not narrow enough nor with enough articulatory, precision to create turbulent airflow. These sounds are produced by bringing two parts of the mouth, for example the tongue and the roof of the mouth, close to each other. However, it is not close enough to cause the air to be blocked, as in plosive sounds or fricative consonants. Also, the parts are not far apart enough to become a vowel.

The approximants have been grouped by various scholars in various ways. For instance, Ladefoged (1975) grouped the approximants into two namely, central approximants and lateral approximants. The central approximants are /w, r, j/ as in "which, rush and you" while the lateral approximant is /l/ as in "luck". However, Eka (1996) grouped the approximant as liquid and semi-vowels. The liquids and /l, r/ further classified as liquid lateral /l/ and liquid roll /r/ while the semi-vowels are /w, j/. The articulation of each of them varies slightly depending on the articulation of the following vowel and they are all voiced.Since this work is on the palatal-approximant /j/ we ignore the others make do with other types of approximants and concentrate on the palatal-approximant /j/.

For the palatal approximant /j/, Roach (2000:64) observes that it is "phonetically like a vowel and phonologically like a consonant. From the phonetic point of view that articulation of /j/ is practically the same as that of front close vowel such as /iː/, but is very short. But despite this vowel-like character, it is used as a consonant. Ufot (2000:43) describes /j/ as being vowel-like which acts like consonant in that it serves that function in the syllable carrying the same amount of prominence as consonant relative to true vowels, which are the nucleus of that syllable.

To pronounce the palatal approximant /j/, the side of the tongue touches the teeth, while the space is created at the center of the tongue from where the airstream escapes. Orthographically, /j/ is spelt as "y" when it begins a word as in yes, yam, youth, young, etc. but it is spelt as "i" if it occurs in the middle of a word like in "behaviour" and "u" as in 'use', 'unit', and 'unique' etc.

Orton (2017) suggests five ways by which /j/ sound could be spelt in the English Language. These include: (i) /j/ (2) g, 3-dge (4)-g-e (5) d. Discussing each of this ways Orton suggests that:

1. The letter "j" makes the /j/ sound when it comes before an "a", "o", or "u" in a word as in the following examples jab, job, jump, josh, jacket and jungle.

2. The "g" makes the /j/ sound when followed by an "e", "i" or "y" in words as in the following examples "gem" giant, gymnasium, ginger and hydrogen.

3. The letters "-dge" make the /j/ sound at the end of a one-syllable word, followed by one short vowel as in ledge, fudge, badge, bridge and lodge.

4. The letter "-ge" make the /j/ sound in a one syllable word following a diphthong, a consonant or a long vowel sound as in the following examples cage, rouge, crime, stooge, revenge and privilege.

5. The letter "d" makes the /j/ sound when used with the connectives "u". Here according to Guilingham, when the "u" connects the root or base word ending with a "d" to the suffix, the "d" makes the /j/ sound as in these examples individual and gradual. He then concludes that it is important to learn the five ways to spell the /j/ sound in the English language and the underlying rules behind each spelling.

1.2 Deletion/Dropping

Deletion may be regarded as a process of removing something that has been written or printed. Palatal deletion, therefore, means eliminating a palatal sound in a word. Abraham and Attah (2018:6 cites Ovu 2013) in attempting to explicate the concept of deletion points out that pronouncing words such as psychology, pseudonym, psalm, psychiatrics and psyche etc. with initial /p/ sound would result in a deviant consonant cluster in English. This is so because English does not phonotactically allow a combination of plosive + fricative. Faced with this situation, Nigerian speakers of English usually drop or delete the consonant sound /p/ while retaining /s/ in their pronunciation. Also, at word medial and final positions, they tend to forward that the consonant sound /b/ is usually silent in two main areas, namely where it combines with the sound /t/ and where it combines with that of /m/ as in the following examples: subtle doubt, debt, plumb, climb, dumb, tomb, bomb etc. the reason according to Abraham and Attah is the peculiarity of English phonotactics which does not allow a sequence of /mb/ or /bm/ sounds to form a cluster whether word initially or finally.

In a related work titled "Schwa Elision in Fast Speech: Segmented Deletion or Gestural Overlap" Davidson (2004) observes phonological analyses attributing schwa elision to across-the-board segmental deletion, and phonetic accounts proposing that elision, being characterized as gestural overlap have been restricted to very few sequence types. Davidson uses 28 different [#cx-] sequences and 9 participants (6 males and 3 females) to define appropriate acoustic criteria for elision, to establish whether elision is a deletion process or the endpoint of a continuum of increasing overlap, and to find out whether elision rates vary for individual speakers. The result of the study reveals that the acoustic patterns for elision only as faster speech rates; or elide regardless of rate.

Finally, Ovu (2013) in the study "Consonant Deletion in English: Phonotactic Explications and Implications for Teaching Spelling in an ESL Situation in Abraham and Attah considers deletion as one of the major contributors to the irregularities in the spelling system of English, and accounts for a great number of pronunciation errors committed by the L_2 users of English. The main thrust of this paper is to attempt to bridge this apparent yawning gap of deleting or dropping of the palatal /j/ sound in English words by Nigerian speakers by providing some insights into some simple but effective ways of improving the ESL user's spelling and boosting their confidence when communicating with native speakers of English or before an international audience.

II.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to demonstrate some specific variation that occurs due to deletion/dropping of the approximant, /j/ in the speech of Educated Nigerian speakers of English, twenty postgraduate students of the University of Uyo and Cross River State University, Calabar were selected. This group was selected based on their level of education from the two universities under study. In our analyses, we used these postgraduate students as they form the educated class based on this study.

The test items consisted of twenty words that contain the palatal-approximant /j/ in all word positions. The twenty (20) respondents from Nigeriaand a control from Britain read the words aloud into . Their productions   recorded and were transcribed and analysed perceptually and acoustically using speech filling system (SFS/WASP) computerized speech laboratory to interpret fo curve structure to corroborate findings from perceptual analysis.

III.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is hinged on Firth's theory of descriptive linguistics of 1951. Originally, the term descriptive was coined to express the distinction between historical or comparative linguistics, which dominated much of 19th century linguistics, and the emerging structuralist paradigm with its emphasis on the notion of synchronic system. According to Love (1986:31), Firth maintains that the business of linguistics is to describe language. The source further reports that Firth takes linguistics to be primarily concerned with the speech events themselves, and dealing with speech-events involves a systematic deployment of analytical constructs and categories, which may in practice, turn out to be rather similar to the constructs and categories involved in the analysis of abstract systems underlying speech-events.

In a clearer perspective, descriptive linguistics is a study of a language, its structure and its rules as they are used in daily life by its speakers from all works of life, including standard and non-standard varieties.Des In other words descriptive linguistics describes the language, its structure, and the syntactic rules that govern sentence and phrase constructions. Importantly, the concept of descriptive analysis is, in principle, applicable to any set of data, provided that the data represent the actual usage of a language under study at a given time in a given speech community.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that descriptive theory perfectly fits into this study. This is because in this research, we describe vividly how Nigerian speakers of English delete or drop the palatal approximant /j/ in their utterance. And of course, such description can never be complete, valid and reliable without the use of data. Data is considered as a tool with which linguists analyze or describe any language or its use by a particular speech community scientifically with the view to arriving at valid conclusions.

IV.   DATA PRESENTATION

As mentioned earlier on in our methodology, a total of twenty sentences containing words whose palatal approximants /j/ was deleted or dropped by Nigerian speakers of English were used as data. This was done with the sole aim of boosting our analysis and making us reach a valid and cogent conclusion. We therefore present the data in the following table.

Table 1: Control's Pronunciation of the palatal Approximant /j/ (SBE)

Subject	English Items	Control's (SBE) Pronunciation	Subjects' (ENE) Variants	Subjects' (ENE) Alternative Variant
1	Yellow	/jeləʊ/	[ʃeləʊ/]	[yelo]
2	Accurate	/æguriət/	[akuriet]	[akureit]
3	Yoke	/jəuk/	[yok]	[yoək]
4	Yawn	/jɔ:n/	[ʃɔ:n]	[yɔ:n]
5	Yael	/ji:l/	[ji:l]	[yi:l]
6	Yule	/jul/	[su:l]	[yul]
7	Obviate	/ɒbvjiet/	[ɔbviet]	[ɔbfiet]
8	Impunity	/impjuinəti/	[impunity]	[impiuniti]
9	Beautiful	/bju:təfʊl/	[biu:tiful]	[biu:təful]
10	Student	/stjudənt/	[stu:dent]	[student]
11	Guardian	/ˋga:djən/	[gadian]	[gadien]
12	Review	/rivju:/	[riviu:]	[rifiu:]
13	Huge	/hjyudʒ/	[hiug]	[hiutg]
14	Octople	/ɒktju:pl/	[ɔktu:pl]	[ɔktopl]
15	Lanyard	/lænjəd/	[lanya:d]	[lanyəd]
16	Excise	/ik¹sju:z/	[eksks]	[ikskius]
17	Gratitude	/grætitjud/	[gratitiud]	[kratitud]
18	Feud	/fju:d/	[fiu:d]	-
19	Mural	/mjurəl/	[miurel]	[morel]
20	News	/nju:s/	[nius]	[nus]

V. ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

Considering the above data in Tables 1 and 2, it is clear that the palatal approximant /j/ was either dropped/deleted or substituted by the vowel sounds /i/ and /u/ and the consonant /dʒ/ in the test items respectively. The substitutions could be seen where the approximant /j/ is preceded by alveolar nasal consonant /n/ as in the word /news//njus/, labio dental fricatives /f/ and /v/ as in feud /fju:d/ and obviate /ɒbvjiet/. Also when it precedes plosive sounds like in /d/ and /b/ in "impunity" /impjuiniti/ and beautiful /bju:tifʊl/. Furthermore, the deletion can be observed to take place when it is preceded by the velar plosives /k/ in accurate /ækjuriət/ and /h/ in huge /hju:ʃ/ respectively.

From the above discussion, the data presented shows that the palatal approximant /j/ may be realized as vowels /i:/ and /i/ and sometimes as consonant /dʒ/. From our statistical analysis presented below the long and short close and half-close vowel feature frequently while /j/ occurs less frequently.

Table 2: Test on Appropriate Pronunciation of SBE /j/

Subject	English Items	Controls Pronunciation	Subjects' (EIE) Variant	Subjects' Alternative
1.	Yellow	/jeləʊ/	[ʃələu]	[yelo]
2.	Accurate	/ækjuriət/	[akuriet]	[akureit]
3.	Yoke	/jəuk/	[yok]	[yoək]
4.	Yawn	/jɔ:n/	[ʃɔ:n]	[yɔ:n]
5.	Yael	/ji:l/	[ʃi:l]	[yi:l]
6.	Yule	/ju:l/	[ʃu:l]	[yul]
7.	Obviate	/ɒbvjeit/	[ɔbviet]	[ɔbfiet]
8.	Impunity	/impju:nəti/	[impiuniti]	[impiuniti]
9.	Beautiful	/bju:təful/	[biu:tiful]	[biu:təful]
10.	Student	/student/	[stu:dent]	[student]
11.	Guardian	/ga:djən/	[gadian]	[gadien]
12.	Review	/riʋju:/	[riviu:]	[rifiu:]

13.	Huge	/hju:dʒ/	[hiuʃ]	[hiutʃ]
14.	Octople	/bktju:pl/	[ɔktu:pl]	[ɔktopl]
15.	Lanyard	/lænjəd/	[lanya:d]	[lanyəd]
16.	Excise	/iksju:z/	[ekskius]	[ikskius]
17.	Gratitude	/grætitju:d/	[gratitiud]	[kratitud]
18.	Feud	/fju:d/	[fiu:d]	-
19.	Mural	/mjurəl/	[miurel]	[morel]
20.	News	/njus/	[nius]	[nus]

5.1 Data Analysis
5.2 Statistical Analysis

Perceptually, Tables 1, column three indicates EIE approximant /j/ realization. Simple percentage is used to compare the score of the subject's performance and the control's performance. As may be observed, there are marked differences between SBE and EIE as apparent in Table 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Respondents' Pronunciationof /j/

Subject	English Items	Controls Pronunciation	(EIE) Variant	Expected Score	Actual Score	% Score
1.	Yellow	/jeləʊ/	/ʃəlou/	20	12	60%
			/jeləʊ/		8	40%
2.	Accurate	/ækjuriət/	/akuriet/	20	12	60%
			/ækjuriet/		8	40%
3.	Yoke	/jəuk/	/yok/	20	16	80%
			/jəuk/		4	20%
4.	Yawn	/jɔ:n/	/jɔ:n/	20	20	100%
			/dʒɔ:n/		0	0%
5.	Yael	/ji:l/	/ʃi:l/	20	12	60%
			/ji:l/		8	40%
6.	Yule	/ju:l/	/ju:l/	20	13	65%
			/ju:l/		7	35%
7.	Obviate	/ɒbvjiet/	/obviet/	20	20	100%
			abvjiet/		0	0%
8.	Impunity	/impju:nəti/	/impju:niti/	20	16	0%
			/impju:niti/		4	80%
9.	Beautiful	/bju:təful/	/biutiful/	20	13	65%
			/biutəful/		7	35%
10.	Student	/stjudən/	/stu:dent/	20	20	100%
			/stju:dent/		0	0%
11.	Guardian	/ga:djən/	/ga:dian/	20	18	100%
			/ga:djən/		2	0%
12.	Review	/ri:vju:/	/ri:vju:/	20	18	90%
			/ri:vju:/		2	10%
13.	Huge	/hju:dʒ/	/hiudz/	20	16	80%
			/hju:dz/		4	20%
14.	Octople	/ɒktju:pl/	/ɔktu:ple/	20	16	80%
			/ɒktju:ple/		4	20%
15.	Lanyard	/ænjəd/	/lanya:d/	20	20	100%
			/lænjəd/		0	0%
16.	Excise	/iksju:z/	/ekisu:s/	20	17	85%
			/iksju:z/		3	15%
17.	Gratitude	/grætitjud/	/gratitud/	20	18	90%
			/grætitjud/		2	10%
18.	Feud	/fju:d/	/flu:d/	20	17	85%

			/fju:d/		3	15%
19.	Mural	/mjurəl/	/mural/	20	20	100%
			/mjural/		0	0%
20.	News	/njus/	/nius/	20	20	100%
			/njus/		0	0%
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**400**	**336**	

Overall Analysis of the Tokens		Percentage Score
Overall percentage score	400	100%
Respondents' overall score of /j/ pronunciation	336	84%
Number not able	64	16%

It would be observed from the result/data presenteed in Table 3 and 4 that respondents' actual overall scores in the realization of the approximant /j/ is 336 token of the expected while that of controls' token of 400 anticipated. Percentage scores for both control and respondents are therefore 84% and 16% respectively. This claim indicates that EIE respondents delete the approximant /j/ and substituted /i/, /u/ and /dʒ/ respectively in their production or speech.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far it could be seen that there are phonetic factors which are responsible for the incidences of deleting/dropping or substituting /i/, /u/ and /dʒ/ for approximant /j/ in English words. These incidences could be seen from our data that has been transcribed phonetically for clarity in Tables 1 and 2. From the data presentation and analysis above, we observe that Nigerian speakers of English delete/drop the approximant /j/ in words due to the fact that when /j/ is preceded by certain consonants sounds it changes it quality. This is as a result of the fact that such occurrences do not exist in their native or indigenous languages.Our data presentation and analysis have exposed to the readership the reason why Nigerian speakers of English delete /j/ in their speech communication. Consequently, the effect or influence of this is brought to bear on their use of the English language, which is popularly referred to as mother-tongue interference under teaching and learning situations.

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