

# THE EFFECTS OF HAUSA-FULANI ENGLISH ACCENT ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN KANO METROPOLIS

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## Abstract

English language is a global language which is used to perform communicative function at different forums all over the world. Because of its contact with many other first languages, it has produced various dialects and accents all over the world today. Nigeria recognizes English as official, and a language of business in its cities, including Kano Metropolis. The Hausa-Fulani who are the main occupants of this metropolis have their accent of English, which they must use in doing business with partners from other parts of the world. This study is set to investigate their accent of English and how their performance in this regard affects the business communication in the metropolis. To carry out this investigation, the researcher adopts the Labovian theoretical framework by recording some educated indigenous Hausa-Fulani business people in the metropolis, and testing same on selected non-indigenous business partners. The data, as presented in tables, show that communication did not flow freely between the Hausa-Fulani business people and their partners because of their inaccurate articulation of some English sounds, particularly the fricatives. The study enjoins the people to make conscious efforts to attain an appreciable accent of English for the purpose of successful business communication.

**Key Words:** English fricatives, business communication, accents, dialects, Hausa-Fulani accent of English.

## Introduction

English, like all other languages, is supposed to be spoken with adequate proficiency, but the development of dialects and accents resulting from language contacts has not made this quite realistic.

English has been in contact with many other languages in places where it is in the status of the second language. One of such places is Kano Metropolis in the Northwest region of Nigeria.

The Northwest region of Nigeria comprises of Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara and Kebbi states. In terms of business development, the outstanding states in the region are Kaduna, Kano and Sokoto. The focus of this study is on Kano Metropolis in Kano State because of its centrality to the Hausa-Fulani, who are the main indigenes in the region. They come from all other states in the region to do business in Kano where they can afford even the businesses that do not require professional skills. From established historical accounts, Kano Metropolis is the centre of commerce in Northern Nigeria. According to Researchgate.net (2019), "Kano Metropolis is the second largest industrial and commercial centre in Nigeria after Lagos and it experience (sic) rapid population growth rate, the population of the metropolis at year 2000 is 1.6 million (Maiwada, 2000). In 2003 the population rose to 2 million".

Though the indigenes are the Hausa-Fulani tribe, the population is remarkably mixed with Yoruba, Igbo, Itsekiri, Ibirra, Urhobo, Igala, and other tribes in the nation. Apart from these tribes in Nigeria, some other nationalities also come to do business in Kano Metropolis, nationalities such as Nigeriens, Malians, Chadians, Cameroonians, Italians, Lebanese, Egyptians and a host of others who embark on importation and exportation of products into and out of the metropolis. The indigenes and the non-indigenes converge on the metropolis in search of livelihood, offering services and products that are bought and consumed by the populace. The Hausa-Fulani form the majority of the population.

This study hinges on the fact that a lot of scholarly works have been done on Hausa-Fulani usage of English, particularly with regards to their performance in English grammar, but not much on phonology in its sociolinguistic perspective. The exercise of researching into Hausa-Fulani usage of English has not been robustly extended to Hausa-Fulani accent of English. The outstanding work by Jubril Munzali in his Ph.D.

thesis which is within the domain of phonology made reference to Hausa-Fulani accent of English but not in a full study of the accent. As much as the researcher knows, not much study has been done on Hausa-Fulani English accent, let alone to investigate its effect on business communication in Kano Metropolis. It is this gap that this research is set to cover.

The study aims at investigating the effects of Hausa-Fulani accent of English on business communication in Kano Metropolis. To achieve this aim, the following **objectives** are thus set in place:

- a. to find out the problems the Hausa-Fulani speakers of English have with articulating English fricative consonant sounds;
- b. to find out how the problems in (a) above affect business communication in Kano Metropolis;
- c. to proffer possible solutions to the problems identified in (a) and (b) above.

From the objectives the following research questions can be pursued from the set objectives:

- a) What problems do Hausa-Fulani speakers of English have with articulating English fricative consonant sounds?
- a) How do the identified problems in (a) above affect business communication in Kano  
b) Metropolis?
- c) What possible solutions can be proffered to the problems in (a) and (b) above?

In terms of significance, the study will expose the Hausa-Fulani accent of English to the critical views of language scholars in Nigeria particularly and to the world in general. By so doing, the process of attunement would begin and be achieved, as the readers would know what happens in the accent in focus. Achieving attunement between Hausa-Fulani speakers of English and speakers of other accents of English would amount to some appreciable level of successful business

communication in Kano Metropolis. This would be possible because whoever reads about the Hausa-Fulani accent of English would be able to understand the speaker in communication. This also means the ease of communication in business.

This study is also significant in the sense that it would leave a penumbra behind; there would be some gap that it would not be able to cover, thereby expecting some scholars to explore such gaps in further research. By so doing, accent study and business communication would be further enriched.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Languages are spoken as sounds, though there are some that do not involve speaking or making of sounds. In semiotics, communication involves the making of signs and signalling (Lyons, 2009; 17 - 24). Human languages involve the making of sounds. According to Chomsky and Halle (1968), the sounds with which human languages are spoken are categorized into vowels and consonants. Ladefoged and Johnson (2010) define vowels as sounds made without any clear obstruction(s) to the pulmonic egressive air, while consonants are made with clear obstruction(s) to the pulmonic egressive air. The focus of this study is on consonants, which can be categorized into plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasals, lateral, approximants. Ape and Fagge (2018; 59 - 60) have the following explanations for the categories of consonant sounds: a plosive consonant is made with the air exploding out of a total blockage in the vocal tract; fricatives are consonant sounds produced with friction through a partial closure in the mouth cavity; an affricate consonant begins with plosion, but fizzles out with friction; nasal consonants are produced by a complete closure of the mouth cavity while the air escapes through the nasal cavity; the lateral is produced by allowing the airflow to be diverted around the sides of the tongue; the approximants are made by slightly narrowing the vocal tract, while still allowing a smooth flow of air.

As stated earlier, the focus of the study is on fricative consonant sounds. Jones (2010) and Fromkin et al. (2014) also explain that fricative consonant sounds are made with friction. Roach (2000) describes a majority of the fricatives as sibilant sounds, which Fromkin et al. (2014) specifically present as [s, z; ʃ, ʒ; tʃ, dʒ]. According to them, sibilants are consonant sounds characterized by an acoustic property known as friction, a hissing sound which is a mixture of high frequency sounds. Finnegan (2012), in explicating the allomorphs of the plural morpheme, also describes [s, z; ʃ, ʒ; tʃ, dʒ] as "a natural class called sibilants". Wiktionary, an on-line dictionary, says a sibilant is a consonant having a hissing sound such as the 's' or 'sh' in "sash" or "surge". They are also described as groove fricatives.

It is, however, necessary to point out that not all sibilants are fricatives, and not all fricatives are sibilants. Yule (2007), in categorizing the English consonant sounds, presents [f, v; θ, ð; s, z; ʃ, ʒ; h] as English fricative consonant sounds. Lyon (2009) also sees the aforementioned as fricatives, and affirms [tʃ] and [dʒ] as affricates. In all, some fricatives and the affricates constitute the sibilants.

Fricative consonants, which form the focus of this study, are made with friction through partial blockage or obstruction against the pulmonic egressive air (Yule; 2007). On the same subject, Jones (2010) says it is a sound made by forcing air through a narrow gap so that a hissing noise is generated. If the noise is accompanied by a vibration, the sound is called voiced fricative; but if not, it is called voiceless fricative. Jones (566) presents [f, θ, s, ʃ, h] as a set of voiceless fricatives, and [v, ð, z, ʒ] as a set of voiced fricative consonant sounds.

Iyiola (2005; 47 - 53) presents several word-examples of the fricatives, as follows:

/f/ photo /fəʊtəʊ/, suffer /sʌfə/, proof pru:f/;  
 /v/ vest /vest/, seven /sevən/, save /seiv/;  
 /θ/ thirty /θɜ:ti/, worthless /wɜ:θləs/, truth /tru:θ/;  
 /ð/ them /ðem/, brother /brʌðə/, clothe /kləʊð/;  
 /s/ sense /sens/, prosper /prɒspə/, patience /peɪʃens/;  
 /z/ zip /zip/, razor /reɪzə/, cease /si:z/;

/ʃ/ sheep /ʃi:p/, sufficient /səfɪʃənt/, fish fɪʃ/;  
 /ʒ/ gigolo /ʒɪgələʊ/, television /telɪvɪʒən/, garage /gæra:ʒ/;  
 /h/ happy /hæpi/, behind /bihaɪnd/.

Business communication, in the context of this study, refers to the linguistic interactions that go on between two or more people who are involved in business. The business can range from selling and buying to litigation in court, teaching and learning in school, consulting and enquiring in hospitals, hotels, and other activities meant to better the lot of dwellers in a society. In the process of such activities, various people engage in discourse; they are found encoding and decoding ideas, a communication process which may be successful or unsuccessful, depending on the accents and/or dialects used by the interlocutors. If there is no accuracy in articulation and there is no adequate attunement among the interlocutors, the business communication may fail. As said earlier, this study is of the hunch that the Hausa-Fulani have problems in articulating some English fricatives, a problem that has marked out the way they speak the English language. This markedness has also warranted the claim that there is an accent known as Hausa-Fulani English accent. It is their accent of English because it is unique to them, and may hamper their business communication with other non-Hausa-Fulani people in the Kano Metropolis, particularly with those who are not adequately attuned to their accent.

### **Empiricism and Theoretical Framework**

The sociolinguistic theoretical framework to the study of language is the one that observes the roles of language in society, particularizing on its contribution to communication and the fall-out of this major role of contributing to communication in the society. Scholars like William Labov and Peter Trudgill, in their sociolinguistic variationist approach, have dwelt seriously in this domain; Labov's studies have been on the phonological perspective of language, exploring how dialects and accents have marked out social stratifications in the society with reference to English in New York and

other allied communities in the United States of America (Labov: 1966; 2001). By the use of questionnaire or survey, Labov gathered data on accent and/or dialect variations among Americans, testing how they would pronounce certain words, focusing on certain phonological segments. By this, he was able to distinguish Americans whose accents were marked with 'r' intrusion and those whose accents did not have such a marking. By extension, this same distinction projected differences in social classes; the upper versus lower, and/or middle classes.

Peter Trudgill's studies are like those of Labov's but set in the British Isles. In his pursuit of the Labovian theoretical framework, Trudgill (1972: 182 - 194) examined dialect contact phenomena in the United Kingdom, explaining the changes in English as one moves from isle to isle in the Great Britain. Through the method of observation, he explored the effects of the variations in dialects and/or accents among the various English speakers in the United Kingdom. Apart from the effect of negative attitude to any strange dialect or accent, Trudgill identified the issue of class consciousness and communication differentiation occasioned by accent variation in English.

Attah (1989) did a study of the acceptability of three accents of Nigerian English, patterned after Trudgill's comparative studies of English accents in the British Isles. Attah had his first contact with Trudgill while doing a Ph.D. in the University of Wales. In adapting the Trudgillian approach, Attah identified what is called the Nigerian English and its various accents, and compared the effects of the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa accents of the Nigerian English among selected secondary school students in Benue State. He concluded that the Igbo accent was the most acceptable to the students. The proximity of the setting (Benue) to the Igbo of the Eastern Nigeria was the most obvious reason for the acceptability of the Igbo accent of English among those Benue secondary school students.

In his study, Attah tested and discussed the intelligibility of the three accents to the students and was able to draw his conclusion on

the most acceptable. It was an interplay of intelligibility versus acceptability; the intelligible accent was the acceptable accent.

This present study relates to Professor Attah's work in the sense that it is interested in the problem of intelligibility occasioned by accent variation in the English speech of the Hausa-Fulani in Kano Metropolis. The people's difficulty in articulating some English consonant fricatives makes them unintelligible to their interlocutors who are not attuned to their accent of English. The situation portends some adverse effects on business communication in the metropolis, that is, the Hausa-Fulani fails to be accurately understood by the non-Hausa-Fulani business partner some times, because of the inability to articulate some English sounds, particularly the fricative consonants accurately. The unintelligible tend to be unacceptable, thereby leading to failure in business.

The methods of data collection involved purposively selecting and recording a Hausa-Fulani speaker of English whose accent was tested on a purposively selected number of non-Hausa-Fulani speakers of English who did business in Kano Metropolis. The selected Hausa-Fulani speaker of English was a lecturer of Electrical/Electronic Engineering in Kano State Polytechnic. He was randomly selected, but care was taken to ensure that he did not have speech impediment, and that he truly represents the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria. The choice of the lecturer for this exercise was to ensure that the accent being investigated is not as a result of illiteracy. The lecturer was made to read the word-examples of the fricative consonants in the Literature Review section into a tape-recorder. It was also ensured that the tape-recorder functioned faultlessly and that the recording was done in a noise-free environment. The word-examples were read at intervals to enable the listeners note them down as in a lecture (dictation) session. The recorded words were played to the hearing of selected non-Hausa-Fulani business persons in Kano, two (2) lecturers from each of Nigeria Police Academy and Bayero University, Kano; two (2) medical doctors from Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano; and four (4) literate shop-keepers (owners) from Bata-Central Market in Sabon Gari, Kano. They



(the ten correspondents) were required to write down the words they heard from the tape-recorder. It was also ensured that the exercise was done in a noise-free situation.

The tools used for data collection included the list of word-examples of fricatives as presented under Literature Review, a tape-recorder and a record disc. All the tools were in good working condition; not one had any defect or malfunction, even the word-example list was bold and clear.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data generated from the field work are presented in the tables below and analysed using simple percentage approach; each table is clearly described to enhance comprehension and easy flow of the process.

**Table 1: Profile of the speaker of the Hausa-Fulani accent of English**

Name	Malam Rabiū Bello
State of origin	Kano
Highest educational qualification	MSc Agric. Engineering
Profession	Lecturing
Department	Agricultural Engineering
Institution	Kano University of Technology, Wudil

**Table 1** presents the profile of Malam Rabiū Bello who spoke the Hausa-Fulani accent of English. He hailed from Kano State of Nigeria, and has MSc degree in Agricultural Engineering as his highest educational qualification. Malam Bello lectured in the Department of Agricultural Engineering at the Kano State University of Technology, Wudil.

**Table 2: Selected Non-Hausa-Fulani Business Persons for the Interpretation of the Recorded Words N = 10**

Institution	Number of Interpreters	Language
POLAC	2	Yoruba, Igbo
BUK	2	Idoma, Igala
AKTH	2	Ishang, Ukale
BATA MKT	4	Gbagyi, Efik, Tiv, Ibira
TOTAL	10	10

Table 2 presents ten (10) selected non-Hausa-Fulani business persons - speakers of different languages who listened to the recorded words in order to interpret what they heard. Two (2) were selected from each of POLAC (Nigeria Police Academy), BUK (Bayero University, Kano), AKTH (Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital), and BATA MKT (Bata Central Market, Sabon Garin). They speak ten different first languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Idoma, Igala, Ishang, Ukale, Gbagyi, Efik, Tiv and Ibira).

**Table 3: The words as interpreted by the Igbo business person N = 25**

Words	RP	What was heard	Correct or wrong
<u>Ph</u> oto	/fəʊtəʊ/	/pəʊtəʊ/	Wrong
<u>S</u> uffer	/sʌfə/	/sʌpə/	Wrong
<u>P</u> roof	/pru:f/	/fru:p/	Wrong
<u>V</u> est	/yest/	/best/	Wrong
<u>S</u> even	/sevən/	/sehən/	Wrong
<u>S</u> ave	/seiv/	/seiv/	Correct
<u>T</u> hirty	/θɜ:ti/	/θɜ:ti/	Correct
<u>W</u> orthless	/wɜ:θləs/	/wɜ:θləs/	Correct
<u>T</u> ruth	/tru:θ/	/tru:s/	Wrong
<u>T</u> hem	/ðem/	/ðem/	Correct
<u>B</u> rother	/brʌðə/	/brʌðə/	Correct
<u>C</u> lothe	/kləʊð/	/kləʊz/	Wrong
<u>S</u> end	/send/	/send/	Correct

<b>Prosper</b>	/prɒspə/	/frɒsfə/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Patience</b>	/peɪfəns/	/feɪfəns/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Zip</b>	/zɪp/	/zɪf/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Razor</b>	/reɪzə/	/reɪzə/	Correct
<b>Cease</b>	/si:z/	/si:z/	Correct
<b>Sheep</b>	/ʃi:p/	/ʃi:f/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Sufficient</b>	/səfɪfənt/	/səpɪfənt/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Fish</b>	/fɪʃ/	/pɪʃ/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Gigolo</b>	/ʒɪgəʊlə/	/dʒɪgəʊlə/	Wrong
<b>Television</b>	/telɪvɪʒən/	/telɪbɪʒən/	Wrong, not on the target sound
<b>Garage</b>	/gæra:ʒ/	/gæra:ʒ/	Correct
<b>Happy</b>	/hæpi/	/hæfi/	Wrong, not on the target sound

Table 3 presents twenty-five (25) words featuring the English fricative consonants in initial, medial and final positions. The recorded words (in Hausa-Fulani accent of English) were played out for the Igbo business person to interpret as heard. The table shows the RP articulation of the words and the respondent's perception which means the articulation of the Hausa-Fulani speaker. As shown in the table, there were sixteen (16) wrong perceptions, that is sixty-four percent (64%) and nine (9) correct perceptions, which is thirty-six percent (36%). Some of the wrong perceptions were not on the target sounds, that is, the fricative consonants, they however show the Hausa-Fulani accent and its effect on business communication in Kano metropolis.

**Table 4: Summary of the tables for Idoma, Igala, Ishang, Ukale, Gbagyi, Efik, Tiv, Ebira, Yoruba**

Ethnicity	Number of correct perceptions	Number of wrong perceptions
Idoma	11 (44%)	14 (56%)
Igala	13 (52%)	12 (48%)
Ishang	10 (40%)	15 (60%)
Gbagyi	13 (52%)	12 (48%)
Ukale	11 (44%)	14 (56%)
Efik	10 (40%)	15 (60%)
Tiv	12 (48%)	13 (52%)
Ebira	10 (40%)	15 (60%)
Yoruba	11 (44%)	14 (56%)

Table 4 summarizes the performances of the business persons from the other ethnic groups. The Idoma person had eleven (11) correct perceptions out of the expected twenty-five (25), meaning forty-four percent (44%) correctness. The Igala had thirteen (13), meaning fifty-two percent (52%). The Ishang had ten (10), which is forty percent (40%) correctness. The same performance goes for the Efik and the Ebira. Like the Igala, the Gbagyi perceived thirteen (13) words correctly, standing at fifty-two percent (52%). Like the Idoma person, the Ukale and the Yoruba persons perceived eleven (11) words correctly, meaning forty-four percent (44%) correctness for each of them.

## Discussion

The tables show that the business persons misperceived the words because the Hausa-Fulani speaker did not articulate them correctly; that is why the Igbo person in Table (3) perceived

/pəutəu/ instead of /fəutəu/;

/sɒpə/ instead of /sɒfə/;

/fru:p/ instead of /pru:f/;

/best/ instead of /vest/; /sebən/ instead of /sevən/.

These errors are as a result of wrong articulation of the fricative consonants in those words. It is therefore observed that the typical Hausa-Fulani speaker of English would realize /p/ for /f/, /b/ for /v/, etc. That accounts for the perceptions of

/frɒsfə/ instead of /prɒspə/;

/feɪfəns/ instead of /peɪfəns/;

/zɪf/ instead of /zɪp/; etc. as shown on Table (3).

The statistics from tables 3 and 4 show that there were more wrong perceptions than correct perceptions. The Igbo had 64% against 36%; the Idoma, the Ukale and the Yoruba had 56% against 44%; the Ishanng, the Efik and the Ebirra had 60% against 40%. Only the Igala and the Gbagyi persons had more correct perceptions than wrong perceptions; each had 52% correct perceptions against 48% wrong perceptions. In spite of this, the overall statistics points to the fact that the business communication in the setting is not a success. There is no free flow of communication as the Hausa-Fulani speaker would not articulate some sound segments correctly, thereby leaving his interlocutor (the business person) to think or suggest possible meaning of what has been said. This is also because of lack of attunement. The non-indigenous business persons do not have adequate attunement to the Hausa-Fulani English accent. They had to guess what the encoder had encoded most of the times. The third research question which borders on the solution to the identified problem is answered as a recommendation or suggestion in the next section.

## Conclusion

The study is on the effect of the Hausa-Fulani accent of English on business communication in Kano Metropolis. The Hausa-Fulani's accent of English is marked with wrong articulation of some fricative consonants. He freely replaces /f/ and /v/ with the bilabial plosives /p/ and /b/ respectively. He also articulates the voiced fricative consonant /z/ in place of the voiced inter-dental fricative / ð/. As a result of this free variation from the standard (RP or BBC) English accent and due to lack of adequate attunement, the business communication in Kano

Metropolis does not flow freely in some cases. This study suggests that Nigerians of all ethnic groups should strive towards Standard English accent so as to help effective communication in English. We should also make all efforts to be attuned to one another's accent of English, no matter how poor it is. This can be achieved through general education, travelling and constant interactions with people of other ethnic backgrounds.

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