ORAL READING PROBLEMS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ONDO STATE

1ADEPOJU, ADETKUNBOH ABAYOMI Ph.D.  
& 2FADOJU, OLUBUKOLA ANIKE JANET  
1 & 2Department of Primary Education,  
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria.  
adecxyom@gmail.com

Abstract
The study investigated Nigerian primary pupils’ problems in the process of reading aloud English comprehension passage. Literature was reviewed problems of Nigerian learners in spoken English, phonemes that pose problems to them, types of miscues and reading faults. The study relied on behaviourism as its theoretical base and raised three research questions. Qualitative data were collected and case study design adopted focusing on a purposively selected class that included pupils from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Two research instruments, a self-designed instrument containing twelve words and an adapted passage, were used to elicit responses from the samples. Simple percentage analysis was used to calculate the frequencies of the mispronounced phonemes and thematic analysis used to analyse the miscues committed. The study concluded that reading problems emanate from the differences among the mother tongues and the English language and recommended among others that minimal pairs and problematic areas be well taught in the classroom by teachers when teaching reading.

Keywords: Comprehension Passage, Spoken English, Pupils, Miscues, Mother tongues

Introduction
Reading is a crucial tool in the learning process which broadens reader’s horizon and exposes them to information required to succeed in the learning situation (Adepoju, 2018). Suffice to say, most learning activities take place through reading exercises which must be efficient if resounding success is to be made. Reading is carried out through a medium called language which must be mastered if comprehension and fluency are to take place. Most Nigerian primary school pupils start having their reading experiences first in their primary schools which is the foundation level of their education. The reason for this is that most of their parents are illiterates who do not have the basically required educational prerequisites to train their children at home, hence, they first experience reading in schools in the language different from their mother tongues. This makes them vulnerable to errors in reading.
both oral and silent) because the language at home is different from the language in school. Consequent upon this, reading is bedevilled with miscues which make it boring and decelerate comprehension. The differences between the language of the immediate environment (mother tongue) and the language of instruction in schools (second language) have been the principal causes of errors in second language learning in the areas of speaking, listening, writing and reading (Adepoju, 2004). When errors (miscues) occur in reading, as earlier mentioned, comprehension is hindered unabated. Buttressing this claim, Wixson (1976) says miscues hinder comprehension in reading. Suffice to say that the aim of reading, that is comprehension, will be defeated.

Statement of the Problem
Oral or silent reading is the process of giving equivalent sounds to letters or group of letters which the eyes of the reader make contact with and extracting information from the text (Stahl, 2005, Lems, 2012 and FME/NTI, 2017). Invariably, pupils are expected to be fluent in reading after about five years of Primary Education. Reading should be hitch-free that is devoid of problems, errors and miscues. The reverse is the case with pupils as reading is characterised by problems and always very clumsy. Adepoju (2018) attests to this fact that pupils are very poor in reading comprehension and pointed some mispronounced phonemes such as substitution of /f/ for /v/ and /θ/ for /ð/. Buttressing this claim, Ademola-Adeoye, Adam, Somoye, Omiture, Macauley, Oderinde, Badaiki, Hawkes, and Dallas (2015), say Nigerian pupils always have problems in pronouncing English sounds that are not present in Nigerian languages. Repeated efforts made by educators to solve this problem have proved abortive. For examples, the recent introduction of phonics into the curriculum and the recommendation of drama, technology and phonics (dratechphonics) to teach reading by Adepoju (2018) have not yielded the desired positive results. These studies only examined poor level of reading comprehension and the problems encountered by pupils in the course of pronouncing phonemes not present in their language and not problems of pupils in the course of reading aloud, the gap which this study sought to fill.

In the light of the above, the main objective of the study was to identify observable problems of primary school pupils in the course of reading aloud.

Research Questions
The study addressed the following research questions:
(a) How do primary school pupils pronounce some phonemes that are different from the phonemes in their mother tongues in reading?
(b) What areas do primary school pupils have difficulties in reading?
(c) What type of miscues do primary school pupils commit in reading?

Literature Review
The problems of second language learners are hydra headed in reading. They are majorly caused by linguistic interference, faulty teaching techniques, inherent language problems, learners’ attitude and poor use of instructional materials (Adepoju, 2004 and Adepoju, 2018). Since reading is an aspect of
language learning skills such as writing, speaking and listening, it is not spared of the endemic linguistic glitches.

Linguistic interference is situation whereby a learner of a second language uses the previously acquired knowledge in the mother tongue to organise the second language which manifests at various levels such as syntax, phonology and lexis (Olugbeko and Adepoju, 2016). Since the first and second languages are different in many aspects, the differences will definitely give room for reading problems in the sense that learners will use their mother tongues experience to sound out words during reading and read sentences. This, in the view of this study will have negative effects on reading. Corroborating this, Yamasaki and Prat (2014) say if the interference is low, comprehension will be high. Therefore, if the interference is high, comprehension will be low.

Ademola-Adeoye, Adam, Somoye, Omiture, Macauley, Oderinde, Badaiki, Hawkes, and Dallas, (2015) remark that:

- Some phones pose difficulties to learners, viz: vowels /ei/, /ɔ/, /ʊ/ and /z:/ consonants /v/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/ and /tʃ/.
- Some phonemes are interchanged, such as /j/ for /dʒ/, /r/ for /ɹ/ or vice versa and /l/ for /v/.
- Some sounds, such as /b/ in comb and debt, /p/ as in Psalm and Psychology and /k/ in knee and knife, are silent where they appear.
- /m/ and /n/ are present in Nigerian languages and should not pose any threats; and
- That only nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and negative auxiliary verbs are stressed.

Arinmola-Brown (2007) highlights some variations between features of English and Yoruba phonological features viz : at the level of segmental phonetics, interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (voiced and voiceless respectively) are not present in Yoruba and learners have problems in pronouncing central diphthongs and at the level of supra-segmental phonetics, stress are wrongly placed.

A perusal of these remarks shows that learners only have problems in reading aloud words that contain sounds not present in their mother tongue. This implies that these problems emanate from the differences between the two languages, that is, L1 and L2. Envisaging that some sounds are confusing and learners might have problems in pronouncing some phonemes, Ademola-Adeoye, et al (2015) implore teachers to emphasis the distinctive features of these sounds in the process of teaching reading.

Similarly, Fajobi and Akande (2018) aver that the spoken English of Nigerians is affected by their mother tongues, home background and schools they attend. The scholars go further to identify some problems they encounter in the course of using the English language which include insertion of vowels, the omission of syllabic consonants and the quality of accented syllables. The realisations listed are: /θ/ as /θ/ or /s/ by Hausa speakers of English, /θ/ as /ð/ or /l/ by Yoruba speakers of English, /v/ as /v/ or /b/ by Hausa speakers of English and /v/ as /l/ or /s/ by Yoruba speakers of English. Attesting to this,
Adepoju (2018), pointed out some wrong substitutions of phonemes among Nigerian users of English such as /f/ for /v/ and /θ/ for /ʌ/.

Another problem encountered by Nigerian users of English in the course of reading comprehension is miscues. Goodman (2015) refers to miscue as any wrong production by the reader that is strange to the listener. Ohia, Adepoju and Adebile (2014) define miscues as a wrong production of a word, sentence or part(s) of a word or a sentence which is a deviation from the actual and acceptable pronunciation or utterance. Mikulec, puts it that:

*Miscues are not mistakes but a deviation made by the reader from the expected text on the page. Miscues are in fact a reflection of what the reader predicts the author of the text is trying to communicate.*

Methinks that miscues are departures from what the author actually puts in the text which are reader’s misconception of the idea. Suffice to say that the reader’s personal reading deficiencies affect the reading of the text which can be termed as a digression from the author’s actual presentation. This invariably means that any utterance, in the reading process, that deviates from the author’s intended communication is a miscue. Miscues are euphemistic expressions for errors in the reading process. This will bring inaccuracy to the reading exercise and affects comprehension because reading accuracy is a sin qua non to successful comprehension (Arya, Martens, Wilson, Altwerger, Jin, Laster and Lang, 2005). Errors committed in the course of reading are subtlety referred to as miscues. Ohia et al (2014) Wohlwend (2012) enumerates the following as patterns of miscues among readers. These include substitution (interchange of a sound, word or sentence), omission (this is the elimination of a sound, word or sentence), insertion (the addition of a sound, word or sentence not contained in the text), self-correct (making amendments to errors committed) and repetition which re-reading an already read portion of a text.

To analyse readers’ errors, Miscue Analysis, as a theory, provides insight into this by providing the procedures for analysing reader’s miscues to ascertain the similarity between the miscues and the texts and the effects on comprehension (Wixson 1979).

Reading faults among Nigerian pupils are finger pointing, regression and vocalisation Adediran, and Akinwande, (2014) and lack of retention, low vocabulary storage in the speech repertoire, word by word reading and poor comprehension (James, 1984). In this study, the former are hereby referred to as physical faults while the later are called mental faults.

This study sought to fill the gap in previous research in the sense that those researches considered miscue patterns (Ohia et al 2014) and investigated patterns of pronouncing interdental fricatives among Yoruba speakers of English (Fajobi and Akande, 2018). This current study sought to investigate problems of Nigerian primary school pupils in reading aloud. The significance of the study was to enhance quality of reading among primary school pupils.
Theory of the Study
This study relies on behaviourism as its theoretical framework. This postulates that language learning is achieved through imitation, reinforcement and analogy as postulated by B. F. Skinner (1957). Learners learn reading by emulating teachers/adults in the class/environment where reading takes place (Radford, Atkinson, Britain, Clahson, and Spenser, 2009). When learners produced acceptable copied language and are reinforced, they repeat it but when wrong version of the language are used and they are reprimanded they desist from such act (Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, 2011 and Santrock, 2014). When teachers teach pupils with look and say pedagogy during reading exercises, correct reading responses are reinforced and incorrect responses corrected. This will make pupils to repeat the applauded responses and at the same time correct the incorrect ones. Reading as a skill that is taught and encouraged when correct responses are made is in tandem with this theory, hence the justification for behaviourism.

Methodology
The study used qualitative approach because non-numerical data were needed for the study and a case study design that focused on a particular class in a primary school. The sampling technique was purposive which allowed the study to deliberately select the samples needed for the study and gave the study the opportunity of getting rich data. In this regard, an arm of Primary V class that contained pupils from the three regions of Nigeria, with the total population of seventeen pupils, was chosen. The school was purposively selected from one of the primary schools in Ondo East Local Government Area which is an agrarian community populated by people from the three major regions, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. With this, the study was able to get samples from the three major ethnic groups and other minorities.

Two research instruments were used, namely, a self-designed instrument that contained twelve words and six sentences by validated by research experts and a comprehension passage titled ‘Peju, the loving, obedient child’ culled from ‘Nigeria primary English Pupils’ book 4’. The research made the samples read the words and the sentences one after another and read the passage aloud. Correct responses of words and sentences were marked correct while incorrect responses were marked wrong in accordance with the marking guide prepared for the study. The participants also read the comprehension passage to the hearing of the researchers who noticed the participants’ miscues.

Analyses were done by categorising the mispronounced words and miscues committed by the participants as omission, repetition, self-correct, substitution and insertion. Simple percentage analysis was used to analyse the frequency of the mispronounced phonemes, wrong placement of stress and intonation and thematic analysis used to analyse the type of miscues and phonemes.

Credibility of the Study
Credibility of a study is how true, reasonable and acceptable a research is (Carlson, 2010 and Kosky, 2010). To achieve this, the study employed confirmability by reporting the data as collected and not allowing bias to influence the report. Anonymity was also used to protect the participants and the school
to protect them from any harm, hence, Pupil A, Pupil B, Pupil C and so forth were used to name the participants. The use of thick and rich description gave the study the opportunity to comprehensively and holistically report data collected. In the light of this, vivid presentation was done to drive home points in the course of discussion. The self-designed twelve-item instrument was also proof read to make it error free.

Results

Research Question one: How do primary school pupils pronounce some phonemes that are different from the phonemes in their mother tongues in reading?

Table 1: Number of correct and incorrect responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Word (phoneme)</th>
<th>No of Responses</th>
<th>Correct No of Responses</th>
<th>Incorrect No of Responses</th>
<th>Substitutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>the /ð/</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>/d/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>thick /ð/</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>/t/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>come /ʌ/</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>/Þ/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>van /v/</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>/f/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>judge /ðʒ/</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>12 (71%)</td>
<td>/j/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>radio /r/</td>
<td>11 (65%)</td>
<td>6 (35%)</td>
<td>/r/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>late /ei/</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td>15 (88%)</td>
<td>/e/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>peak /i:/</td>
<td>8 (47%)</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>/i/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>course /ɔː/</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>8 (47%)</td>
<td>/b/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>goat /ǝʊ/</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>Only the first part</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pronounced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Debt</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>Addition of /b/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Knife</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>K was silent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants found it difficult to pronounce the phonemes tested in items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10. None of them could pronounce the phonemes correctly in the course of reading those words as the results show 100% incorrect pronunciation. The replacements of each of the phonemes are listed against them. Thus, /ð/ was pronounced as /d/, /ð/ as /t/, /ʌ/ as /Þ/, /v/ as /f/ and /ǝʊ/ bastardised as /ǝ/, that is, only the first part pronounced. For item 5 only 29% of the participants pronounce it correctly while 71% did not pronounce if correctly but replaced it with /j/. Similarly, item 6 was pronounced as /ei/ by 35% of the participants, item 7 was pronounced wrongly by 88% of the participants as /e/, 53% of the participants did not get the correct pronunciation of item 8 as phoneme /i:/ was pronounced as /i/ while 47% of the participants mispronounced /ɔː/ as /b/. Items 11 was wrongly read by all participants by adding /b/sound while item 12 was read correctly by all participants.

Research Two: What areas do primary school pupils have difficulties in reading?
Table 2: Sentence stress and intonation in sentence reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Correct Intonation/Stress</th>
<th>Incorrect Intonation/Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Come here. ()</td>
<td>17(100%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Where are you? ()</td>
<td>17(100%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kill the goat. ()</td>
<td>17(100%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Did she do it? ()</td>
<td>14(82%)</td>
<td>3(18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Are you Olu? ()</td>
<td>15(88%)</td>
<td>2(12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Is he coming? ()</td>
<td>12(71%)</td>
<td>5(29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table 1, sentences 1, 2 and 3 were uttered with the correction intonations by all the participants while 14%, 15% and 12 % of the participants said sentences 4, 5 and 6 with correct intonations respectively. Regarding, stress, all the content words (in bold letters), that is, nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, that were supposed to be stressed were not stressed.

**Research Question Three:** What type of miscues do primary school pupils commit in reading?

**Comprehension Passage Used to Test Miscues**

*Peju, the loving, obedient child*

One day, Peju was ready for school, but Tessy still had half of her breakfast on her plate. She was looking at Peju and smiling, and Peju was laughing too. Their father came out of his room and saw them laughing. He asked, ‘Tessy, don’t you want to go to school today?’ Tessy answered, ‘I do, but I haven’t finished my food, Daddy.’ Their father patted her on the back and said, ‘My dear, finish your food quickly. Peju will wait for you.’ Peju and Tessy were still laughing. Mr Karimu liked to see his daughters so happy.

*Culled from ‘Nigeria primary English Pupils’ book 4’*

Miscues occurred when the participants read the passage as manifested when reading these words: still, her, their, don’t, to, and and wait. These words were mispronounced, substituted, omitted and repeated.

**Discussion of Findings**

From the findings of this study, it is crystal clear that reading among primary school pupils is bedevilled with a myriad of problems which hinder comprehension of the passage read. This is majorly caused by linguistic interference, which when it is high, hiders comprehension (Yamasaki & Prat, 2014).

Table 1 shows apparent substitution of phonemes. These phones replaced were those that are not present in Nigerian languages. Thus, /d/ was pronounced as /d/, /θ/ as /t/, /v/ as /f/ and /i:/ as /i/. van was therefore pronounced as fan and peak as pick. This is likely to cause confusion before native speakers of English as a sentence like ‘This is my school van’ can be mistaken for ‘This is my school fan.’ This finding confirmed the view of Ademola-Adeoye et al (2015) which say Nigerian learners of English have difficulties in pronouncing phonemes not present in their mother tongues. Similarly, these diphthongs /ei/ and /əʊ/ posed challenges to learners as only the first parts were pronounced in the course of reading.
Confirming this finding, Arinmola-Brown (2007), remarks that Yoruba learners of English have problems in pronouncing centring diphthongs. These are manifestations of linguistic interference which occurs at the level of lexis sand semantics (Olugbego & Adepoju, 2016). The fact that items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10 could not be read correctly, attest to the fact that the mother tongue of Nigerian learners affect their production of English sounds in reading. Also, items 5 and 7 were read wrongly by 71% and 88% of the participants respectively. These are instances of wrong substitution of phonemes (Adepoju, 2018). Performances of the participants were encouraging when reading items 6 /r/ and 9 /ͻ:/ because these sound are similar to some sounds in Nigerian languages.

Insertion of additional phonemes where the sound is silent was also prominent among the participants. In the course of pronouncing debt /det/, phoneme /d/ was inserted by all participants. Thus, /det/ was pronounced as /debt/ while the knife was read correctly by all participants. These attest to the view of Ademola-Adeoye et al (2015) and similar to what Fajobi and Akande (2018) referred to as insertion of vowels and omission of syllabic consonants. The causative factor is that all sounds in words in Yoruba are pronounced.

At the level of supra segmental phonetics, the situation is encouraging in the area of intonation but discouraging in the area of stress. As can be seen on table 2, that the least mark was 71%, which is on item 6. This implies that pupils are good in the area of intonation (see table 2 for their performance). The major area at the level of supra segmental phonetics the study found out that pupils have problem is the area of stress. The tested words, come, goat, Olu and coming were not given the proper accent as they were stressed like other structural words in those sentences. Therefore, ‘Is he coming?’ was read as ‘Is he coming?’ there is a similarity between the findings of this study and the study of Fajobi and Akande (2018) which remarks that Yoruba learners of English do not accent the appropriate syllables. In the course of reading the comprehension above, the participants committed miscues which hinder reading and comprehension. Prominent among the miscues are:

(a) **Omission.** Pupils C read ‘One day, Peju was ready for school, but Tessy still had half of her breakfast on her plate.’ as One day, Peju was ready for school, but Tessy (still ) had half of her breakfast on (her) plate.’ still and her were omitted in this sentence. Pupils K similarly read ‘Peju and Tessy were still laughing.’ as ‘Peju and Tessy were (still) laughing. The italicised words were omitted by the participants unconsciously in the course of reading. This will definitely impact negatively on the comprehension of the passage.

(b) **Self correct.** This is a situation where a reader realises a miscue and makes corrections immediately. Pupils J read ‘Their father patted her on the back and said…’ as The (their) father patted her on the back and said…’ and Pupils H ‘Tessy, do (don’t) you want to go to school today?’ The italicised words in parentheses were the self-corrections made by the participants after wrong production.
(c) **Repetition.** The participants re-read some words during reading. For instance, Pupils O read ‘Mr Karimu liked to *(to)* see his daughters so happy.’ and **Pupil D** read ‘…Peju and *(and)* smiling…’ The italicised words in parentheses were repeated during reading.

(d) **Substitution.** The participants substituted some words when reading the passage. These words substituted were similar words. **Pupil A** read ‘Their *(the)* father came out of his room and saw them laughing,’ while **Pupil M** read ‘Peju will wait *(want)* for you.’ The italicised words were substituted for the words preceding them.

The above were instances of miscues committed and noticed in the course of reading comprehension. Insertion was not committed by any of the participants in the process of data collection. These miscues, as analysed above, will definitely have effects on the level of comprehension of the passage because ideas were misrepresented in the course of reading (Wixson, 1979). These are not normal but expected in reading because there can be no second language learning without errors (Adepoju, 2004).

**Conclusion**

The study has unearthed the difficulties encountered by pupils in reading comprehension. These range from substitution of wrong phonemes, mispronunciations, insertion of additional phonemes and so forth. This will definitely impact on the level of comprehension of the pupils as ideas were misrepresented through miscues. These were majorly caused by linguistic interference, similarities among some words and phonemes and difficulties inherent in the second language.

**Recommendations**

Based on the above findings, the study hereby recommends that:

- Minimal pairs, such as beer and bear, should be emphasised so that pupils will understand the distinctive features.
- Phonemes not present in the mother tongues of pupils should be well taught with good examples.
- Word and sentence stress should be made a daily class reading activity in classrooms.
- Problematic phonemes in words, such as psychology, Psalm, comb and debt be treated reading activities with attention they deserve.
- Pupils should be advised to be well composed when reading to avoid omission, repetition and other miscues.

**References**


