The Spoken and the Written Language: Confusion Between English Sounds and Letter

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The most important media employed in language use are spoken and written. They are quite important in the progressive, educational and technological development of man and his environment. While speech is spoken medium of language made with the aid of speech sounds,(phonemes) what we say can in turn be committed into writing through the use of letter symbols.(graphemes) Since writing is a direct graphic representation of what we say, it is tempting to believe that good speaking has direct correlation with good writing. However, due to certain irregularities that exist between the spoken language and its written form, this is not the case. This paper intends to highlight some of these irregularities that do not allow for a smooth representation of what we say in the written form and their negative influence on learners with the aim of minimizing their negative effects.

Keywords: English Language. Technological development, Homonymic discrepancies, irregularities

INTRODUCTION

The bulk of research work on phonological variation in Nigerian English usage has focused more on Mother Tongue (MT). Whereas not much is done in the area of relationship that exists between the written and the spoken forms of the language. This research is therefore, informed by the need to further focus more attention on this area. Human language is basically designed to communicate. Communication can adopt the spoken form, which is primary or the written form which is secondary. In a country like Nigeria where English is used as a second language (L2), there has been a greater emphasis on the need to speak and write good English. This is because any public display of poor language skills can create a negative opinion of even the most intelligent and distinguished person. Since the basic aim of a language is to communicate effectively, a user of language according to Akinola (1988: 80-81), is expected to acquire a level of competence that will enable him to participate in various communicative acts as a member of the sociolinguistic community. The issue that is being addressed in this study is succinctly captured in the confusion created by the lack of regularity between the sounds and letters of the English language. A good number of writers such as (Dairo, 1988 and Folarin, 1975) have confirmed the potential negative implications such as lack of correlation between sounds and letters has on second language learners. The reason according to Rego AG (1998: 5.) is probably due to the fact that English is a difficult language, with its many vagaries and subtleties of speech. This position is buttressed by Obayan et al. (1983) who believe that learning to write is not an extension of learning to speak. This, according to them, is coupled with the fact that writing is a poor representation of speech. Both native English speakers and non-native speakers regard the spelling of English as one of its most difficult characteristics. This is because English spelling system is not based on a phonetic correspondence between sounds and letters. This mismatch between the sounds and the letters of the English language constitutes a hindrance to effective communication in the language. Discuss on the subject is approached through the consideration of certain linguistic concepts such as homographs, homophones and homonyms. These are concepts that can lead to communicative conflicts and are also capable of causing homonymic discrepancies. Our data comprised of words, majority of whose pronunciations do not derive from the letters making up the words.

English Phonemes and Alphabets

The objective of this study was to examine certain irregularities that exist between the written and its spoken form. Data comprising of reading and spoken test items were administered on 50 HND 11 final years Business
Administration and Management Studies students. The aim was to verify the extent to which these irregularities have influenced the learners’ linguistic knowledge. We have shown through this study that lack of correlation between words and their pronunciation is a source of confusion to learners’ linguistic knowledge.

Human communication can be done through the spoken or the written medium. When we speak, we make use of words. The spoken words are made up of a sequence of speech sounds (phonemes.) The phonemes consist of a set of vowel and consonant sounds. The spoken words can also be written.

When we write, the words are represented graphically through letters of the alphabet. The alphabets too consist of a set of vowels and consonants. Writing in English is an example of an alphabetic writing system in which phonemes are represented by characters or combination of characters. However, based on various historical accounts, the English writing system does this inaccurately.

We understand that the correspondence between sound and spelling in English, as recorded in the Microsoft Encarta Premium (2009) and corroborated by (Yule G,1996:14) is not phonetically exact for two main reasons:

First, spelling changes did not keep pace with changes in the sound system after the development of printing and of conventions for spelling. Second, some imported spelling conventions persist. For example, during the 16th century the b was inserted in doubt (formerly spelled doute on the authority of the Latin source of the word, dubitare, although the ‘b’ was not pronounced in English.

Lack of one-to-one correspondence between the phonemes and graphemes of English could be seen as another reason. A comparison between the two shows that while there are a total number of 44 phonemes assigned to the spoken English, the written form is done with 26 alphabets. The 44 phonemes are made up of 24 consonants and 20 vowels. The vowel phonemes are in turn divided into 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. This is against the total number of 26 letters of the alphabets that are made up of 21 consonants and only 5 vowels. This means, therefore, that while there are 24 consonant phonemes for the spoken communication in English, there are only 21 consonant alphabets to account for the same purpose in writing. There are 20 vowel phonemes reserved for speech, only 5 vowel alphabets are reserved for writing.

A close look at the phonemes and the alphabets further reveals a sharp divergence between the two. For instance, the 8 diphthong sounds do not have letter equivalents. It will be difficult therefore, to expect the only 5 English vowel letters to capture adequately both the 12 monophthongs and the 8 diphthong phonemes without a major spelling crisis. Likewise, the 21 consonant alphabets are not adequate to express the 24 consonant phonemes. This is why any attempt to correspond sounds with letters will always result into a mismatch. The word ‘shell’ in the following example provided by Bamisaye, T.O., (1999:8) explains this fact: ‘shell’ /ʃɛl/ a sequence of two letters ‘sh’ is represented by /ʃ/ and ‘ill’ becomes /l/. This example further shows that there is a difference between sounds and letters of English. This is why very frequently; the spelling of English words does not conform to the number of phonemes. This also partly explains why the pronunciation of some English words bears no relationship with the letters making up the words. This is also why most learners have problems with the pronunciation of words such as; awe, /ɔː/ ewe, /juː/ aisle, /aɪl/ etc.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The data for this study comprised of two test items: The subjects were made to read and then write the structures and passages that contain the features being investigated. In all, 50 HND 11 final year students of the Business Studies Class were selected based on their performance in the First Semester, Use of English Examination. The students were arranged in a class and provided with sheets of paper on which to answer the questions on the written test. After the first test, the students were again rearranged for the second test which was designed to test the proper use of words based on their pronunciation. They were called in one at a time to read the test items into an audio cassette. Words that were wrongly spelt or pronounced and were subsequently used out of context were analyzed. The analyses formed the premise on which our discussions and conclusions were based.

Data Analysis and Discussion on Findings

In this section we present the data analysis and discussion on findings. The analysis was based on two tests made up of 10 words comprising of homographs, homonyms and homophones. These are words that their spellings do not necessarily suggest their pronunciation and as such constitute communicative problems to learners. The first aspect was out to test the pronunciation while the second was designed to test the ability of the subjects to spell the words in context.
Table 1: Spoken Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s/n.</th>
<th>word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Contextual meaning</th>
<th>Correct score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>bow /bəʊ/ n.</td>
<td>a weapon for firing arrow</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bow /baʊ/ v.</td>
<td>bend head or body forward</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>lead /liːd/ v.</td>
<td>to show the way</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>lead /led/ n.</td>
<td>a type of grayish</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>row /rəʊ/n.</td>
<td>a number of people on a line</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>row /raʊ/n.</td>
<td>Quarrel</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>slough /slʌf/ v.</td>
<td>to cast off</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>slough /slaʊ/ n.</td>
<td>a swamp</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>sow /səʊ/v.</td>
<td>to plant</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>sow /saʊ/n.</td>
<td>a female pig</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Test item 1:** the hunter took an arrow, fixed it in his bow before he turned to the audience to take a bow.

*Item 1a:* bow /bəʊ/n.

The result shows that 80% of the subjects pronounced the words correctly and also used it appropriately. This is due to the fact that they understand the meaning of the word as ‘a weapon for firing arrow’.

*Item 1b:* bow /baʊ/ v.

This word does not provide any clue to suggest the present pronunciation. This is probably why only 40% of the subjects had the correct pronunciation. This is an indication that they had no proper understanding of the contextual usage of the word. Hence they could not interpret the word to mean ‘bend head or body forward’.

**Test item 2:** the athlete promised to lead other contestants in the race in order to win a plaque made of lead.

*Item 2a:* lead /liːd/ v.

A look at the word and the pronunciation shows a correspondence between the two. No wonder therefore, that the subjects demonstrated a proper understanding of the word and were able to score as high as 90%.

*Item 2b:* lead /led/ n.

If item 2a revealed a correspondence between the word and the pronunciation, item 2b offered no clue to warrant the pronunciation we have in 2b. This perhaps explains why the subjects could not provide the appropriate response in terms of the correct pronunciation and the correct usage hence, the poor result of 20%.

**Test item 3:** only those in the first row in the class witnessed the row caused by the bad boys.

*Item 3a:* row /rəʊ/n

There is no doubt that the subjects are quite familiar with the word ‘row’ as used in the context, which suggests something arranged in a line. They are also able to relate the word with the pronunciation as /raʊ/. This perhaps explains the overwhelming result of 96%.

*Item 3b:* row /raʊ/n

There is a clear evidence of lack of correspondence between item 3b and its pronunciation in this context. This result; only 10% score is an indication that the subjects were indeed confused from the lack of correspondence between the word and the present pronunciation.
**Test item 4:** the body of the snake is shining because it has just slough(s) its skin in a muddy slough.

Item 4a: slough /slʌf/ v.

There is no way the subjects can relate item 4a to its pronunciation as there is no relationship between the spelling of the word and its pronunciation under the present context. This is why the subjects demonstrated a very poor knowledge of the word. This also explains why they could neither pronounce nor use the word appropriately thereby returning a zero score.

Item 4b: slough /slaʊ/ n.

Even though, item 4b shares the same root with item 4a, the pronunciation as well as the meaning changes under a different context. Just like in item 4a, there is nothing in the spelling of item 4a that relates it to its present pronunciation. None of the respondents could properly articulate and use the word correctly.

**Test item 5:** every seed I planned to sow in the farm was destroyed by the troublesome sow.

Item 5a: sow /səʊ/v.

It is clear that there is a clear correspondence between item 5a and its pronunciation. Such correspondence always aids learners’ linguistic knowledge. We are therefore not surprised that the subjects were able to pronounce and use the word appropriately. This is why they were able to record as high as 92%, an indication that the respondents are quite familiar with the word.

Item 5b: sew /saʊ/n.

In terms of the relationship between the spelling and the pronunciation, item 5b is a clear opposite of item 5a as there is no correlation between the word and its pronunciation. This again is reflected in the subjects’ poor knowledge of the word and the zero percent score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s/n.</th>
<th>word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Contextual meaning</th>
<th>Correct score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a</td>
<td>bow</td>
<td>/bəʊ/ n.</td>
<td>a weapon for firing arrow</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>bow /baʊ/ v.</td>
<td>bend head or body forward</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. a</td>
<td>lead</td>
<td>/liːd/ v.</td>
<td>to show the way</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>lead /led/ n.</td>
<td>chemical element</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. a</td>
<td>row</td>
<td>/rəʊ/n.</td>
<td>a number of people on a line</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>row /raʊ/n.</td>
<td>Quarrel</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. a</td>
<td>slough</td>
<td>/slʌf/ v.</td>
<td>to cast off</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>slough /slaʊ/ n.</td>
<td>a swamp</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. a</td>
<td>sow</td>
<td>/səʊ/v.</td>
<td>to plant</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>sow /saʊ/n.</td>
<td>a female pig</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Test item 1

Item 1a: bow /bəʊ/n.
90% of the respondents got the correct spelling. This overwhelming result points to the fact that the respondents are quite familiar with the word.
Item 1b: bow /bɔːv/ v.
70% wrote the words correctly. This performance is still an indication of the subjects' good knowledge of the word.

Test item 2

Item 2a: lead /liːd/ v.
80% of the respondents got the correct spelling of the word. This is another indication that they have a good knowledge of the word.
Item 2b: lead /lɛd/ n.
The result here clearly showed that none of the respondents could write the word correctly. The subjects were probably misled by the pronunciation of the word which bears no relationship with the spelling.

Test item 3

Item 3a: row /rəʊ/ n.
The respondents put up a brilliant performance. 94% wrote the correct word. This is a clear demonstration that the subjects have a very good knowledge of the word. They were able to relate the pronunciation of the word to its spelling.
Item 3b: row /raʊ/n.
Unlike the brilliant performance demonstrated on item 3a, only 20% of the respondents were able to write the correct spelling. This result reflected their poor knowledge of the item. This is probably due to the fact that the pronunciation offered no clue to the spelling.

Test item 4

Item 4a: slough /ʃlɒð/ n.
This word appears to be very strange to the respondents. This is because none of them was able to write the correct spelling. This poor performance can also be traceable to the lack of correspondence between the word and its pronunciation.
Item 4b: slough /slaʊ/n.
Like in item 4a, none of the respondents had the correct spelling of item 4b. This shows that they have never encountered the word in any way either in its spoken or its written form. Even when items 4a and 4b share the same root, they have different pronunciations which bare no correspondence with the spelling. This largely accounts for the 0% score in both 4a and 4b.

Test item 5

Item 5a: sow /səʊ/v.
There is no doubt that the subjects have a very good knowledge of item 5a. 90% of them got the correct spelling. This brilliant performance no doubt, benefits from the correlating relationship between the word and its pronunciation.
Item 5b: sow /saʊ/n.
Unlike the overwhelming correct response recorded in item 5a, the result in item 5b clearly revealed the respondents' lack of the knowledge of the word as none of them could write the correct word. We will not be surprised by this result if we consider that lack of correspondence between a word and its pronunciation is a major source of confusion to learners of English language.
In analyzing this section, we take a look at the two extremes. The first consideration is on the performance where the respondents scored 40% and above in the two test items and the other extreme considers the scores below 40%. A look at the performance of the subjects shows that they scored 40% and above in both spoken and written forms in the following five test items:

1a: bow /bəʊ/ n. a weapon for firing arrow.
1b: bow /baʊ/ v. bend head or body forward

2a: lead /liːd/ v. to show the way.
3a: row /rəʊ/ n. a number of people on a line.
5a: sow /səʊ/ v. to plant.

Out of these five, the subjects scored 80% and above in items 1a, 2a, 3a and 5a. Others indicate that they scored above 70% in the written form of 1b and just 40% in its spoken form.

Table 3: A Comparison of the Spoken and the Written Forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s/n.</th>
<th>word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spoken Correct</th>
<th>Written Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>bow</td>
<td>/bəʊ/ n.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>bow</td>
<td>/baʊ/ v.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>lead</td>
<td>/liːd/ v.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>lead</td>
<td>/led/ n.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>row</td>
<td>/rəʊ/ n.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>row</td>
<td>/raʊ/ n.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>slough</td>
<td>/slʌf/ v.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>slough</td>
<td>/slaʊ/ n.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>sow</td>
<td>/səʊ/ v.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>sow</td>
<td>/saʊ/ n.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: The distribution of the scores along the spoken and the written forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spoken correct</th>
<th>Written correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a</td>
<td>bow /baʊ/ v.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. a</td>
<td>lead /liːd/ v.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. a</td>
<td>row /rəʊ/ n.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. a</td>
<td>sow /saʊ/ v.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. b</td>
<td>bow /baʊ/ v.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>199</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The good performance of the subjects in both the spoken and the written tests in the above test can be attributed to the fact that the words constitute part of the active vocabularies of the subjects. These are the words a person is likely to use confidently and regularly. Kirkpatrick, Betty (2007:230). In addition, they demonstrated the knowledge of the use of the words in their various contexts because according to Rego, A.G., (1998:9): when we have fully understood the ways of “words”, we may be in a better position to understand their combination in sentences. From the accounts of the two scholars, it is clear that the subjects performed well because they were in a better position to understand, pronounce and combine the words effectively. Our observation confirms our expectation in this research that correspondence between words and pronunciation can be beneficial to the learners’ linguistic knowledge and can also lead to greater awareness of words. The fact that the subjects scored very high marks in items: 1a, 2a, 3a and 5a which showed correlating relationship between the words and their pronunciation confirms this observation. We also try to account for the 40% score recorded in item 1b, the lowest under this category.

In test item 1: the hunter took an arrow, fixed it in his bow (1a) before he turned to the audience to take a bow (1b).

In 1a we found that the subjects scored 80% but in 1b they scored 40%. A Possible reason for this sharp difference can be traceable to the confusion likely to arise not only from the ability of the word to convey meaning under different contexts but also from the ability to change pronunciation under different contexts as we have in this case. Because the word ‘bow’ has several related but distinct meanings, extensive acquaintance is required to facilitate a good understanding and a better usage.

In this case, they are only familiar with some aspects of meanings more than the others. The subjects therefore, performed relatively poor because they pronounce ‘bow’ as /baʊ/ instead of /baʊ/ in the present context. Apart from item 1b which does not show correspondence between the word and its pronunciation, yet the subjects scored 40% in the spoken and 70% in the written forms against our expectation, the other four items where the subjects scored very high marks are enough to validate our claim that relationship between words and their pronunciations influence the learners’ linguistic knowledge.

The overall result reveals that the candidates slightly performed better in the written test. We shall now consider the other end of the extremes where the subjects scored below 20%. In this category we have items:

2b. lead /lɛd/ n. chemical element
3b. row /raʊ/n. quarrel
4a. slough /slʌ/ v. to cast off
4b. slough /slaʊ/ n.a swamp
5b. sow /saʊ/n. a female pig
Table 5: The distribution of the scores along the written and the spoken forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Standard Pronunciation</th>
<th>Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spoken correct</th>
<th>Written correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>b lead</td>
<td>/led/ n.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>b row</td>
<td>/raʊ/ n.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>a slough</td>
<td>/slʌf/ v.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b slough</td>
<td>/slaʊ/ n.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>b sow</td>
<td>/saʊ/ n.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 15 10

In this section, items: 4a and b as well as 5b where the subjects scored 0% in all the test items in both spoken and the written forms arouse our curiosity. They are quite significant to the subject matter of this research because they are likely going to offer explanations to some of our major concerns in this paper. Out of all these, the subjects scored zero in three spoken items: 4a, 4b and 5b, and zero in four written items: 2b, 4a, 4b and 5b. First, we take a close look at the three test items where the subjects scored zero in both the spoken and the written forms:

4a. slough /slʌf/ v. to cast off
4b. slough /slaʊ/ n. a swamp
5b. sow /saʊ/ n. a female pig

Slough in 4a was used as a verb and pronounced as /slʌf/ while the one in 4b was used as a noun with a different pronunciation as /slaʊ/, and under these different contexts conveyed different meanings. In 5b, sow was used as a noun and pronounced as /saʊ/.

Apart from the fact that the subjects are not familiar with the words; most especially 4a and b, the words do not fall into their active vocabularies. As we can see, the words are capable of producing shades of meaning when used in various contexts. They also share the same linguistic concepts relating to homonymy. The confusion, apart from the lack of correlation between the words and their pronunciation earlier mentioned, can also be traceable to the phobia provoked by the fact that the words can be:

a) homographs because they share the same linguistic forms.
b) heteronyms if they are pronounced differently, as in:
   i. slough /slʌf/ v. : something cast off
   ii. slough /slaʊ/ n.: a female pig
c) homophones when they are pronounced the same way as in:

/sʌf/ v: 1) swampy area
   2) spiritual low point
or
/slaʊ/ n. 1) something cast off
   2) dead outer covering

The same explanation accounts for the poor score in 5b.
We shall now look at item 2b where the subjects scored 20% in the spoken and 0% in the written forms:
Table 6: The distribution of the scores along the written and the spoken forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spoken correct</th>
<th>Written correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. b</td>
<td>lead /led/ n.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poor performance in both written and the spoken forms can be due to the nature of the word ‘lead’ which is one of the homographs that can be ambiguous in isolation. The subjects’ poor knowledge of the word is further derived from the different pronunciations derived from the same root. For instance, as a verb ‘lead’ is pronounced as /liːd/. As a homophone in this category, it has the ability to convey more than 19 different meanings. As a noun the word is pronounced as /led/, the same pronunciation reserved for the past tense of ‘lead’ /liːd/. It takes one with a very good knowledge of the word to be able to distinguish between ‘lead as a noun pronounced as /led/ and ‘lead’ as the past tense of the verb which is also pronounced as /led/. Further source of confusion is traceable to the fact that the word is capable of assuming different pronunciation and meaning under different contexts. Fromkin et al., (2003:362), particularly cited ‘lead’ as one of the homographs that have fueled the flame of spelling reform movements. One other source of confusion is influenced by what Adedeji (2005) and Akande (2003) specifically identified as lack of proper understanding of required skills and lack of communicative competence. It is therefore, only the subjects with a very good linguistic knowledge that will not be confused under this complex situation.

We finally take a look at item 3b the last under this category, where the subjects scored 10% in the spoken and 20% in the written form.

Table 7: The distribution of the scores along the written and the spoken forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s/n.</th>
<th>word</th>
<th>Standard Br. Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spoken Correct</th>
<th>Written Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. b</td>
<td>row</td>
<td>/raʊ/n.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 3b, ‘row’, is used as a noun and it is pronounced as /raʊ/. The subjects scored 10% in the spoken and 20% in the written. If we consider the high score recorded in item 3a where the subjects scored 96% in the spoken and 94% in the written along with the poor performance recorded in 3b, we still find a lack of agreement between item 3b and its pronunciation responsible for the poor performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has attempted to examine the confusion created by lack of agreement between the sounds and letters of English language. The aim was to see how far these irregularities have affected the linguistic knowledge of the learners. We have tried to do this by observing the effect of certain linguistic concepts that can lead to communicative conflicts and can as well cause homonymic discrepancies on 50 HND 1 students of the Business Administration and Management Department from the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. From the analysis, it was evident that there were indeed irregularities between the sounds and the letters of English Language and that these irregularities constitute a hindrance to effective communication. The fact that items 2b, 3b, 4a and b and 5b, where the subjects recoded the worst performance show no relationship between the words and their pronunciations further corroborates our claim that lack of correlations between the sound and letters of the English Language do not allow for a smooth representation of what we say in its written form. The overall performance which showed 199 for the spoken and 212 for the written, appears to suggest that the respondents were clearly at ease and better in the written form of communication than the spoken form.

The study concludes that, speaking and writing are different things and also require two different skills. The knowledge of vocabulary is key to reading comprehension and the more a learner knows, the better he or she will understand a text. Finally, the paper recommends the use of a variety of effective methods, capable of increasing the learners’ ability to learn new words, in the teaching of vocabulary. The provision of books on narrative and expository texts with tapes on one side of the classroom can also help to build the learners’ vocabularies. By hearing and seeing the words in context at the same time, learners do not only pick up the meanings, they also gain prosody and oral fluency.
REFERENCES


