

Consonants and Vowels in English and Wambule: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract

This paper deals with the Wambule phonemes and compares and contrasts them with English phonemes. Wambule, a Tibeto-Burman language is spoken by the same sub-ethnic group of Rai and English, though international language, is taught as one of the compulsory subjects from Nursery to Bachelor level in Nepal. In Nepalese context, Wambule speakers should compulsorily learn English. So, contrastive analysis between two languages plays a great role in suggesting some pedagogical implications. This paper attempts to compare and contrasts between two languages' phonemes and suggests some pedagogical implications in brief.

Key words: Consonant, Vowel, Contrastive analysis, Phonemes

Introduction

Wambule is a sub-ethnic group of Rai who originally settle in different places of Okhaldunga and Khotang districts. According to central bureau of statistics (2011), the current population of Wambule is 14470 (Tamang & Gurung, 2014). Wambule is a SOV language which has a complex morphology. There are very few works on the Wambule language. One of them is a grammar written by Opgenort (2004). On the contrary, English is a member of Germanic group of Indo-European language family (Yule, 2010, p. 225) and it is a SVO language. It is a well documented language and spoken across major cities of the world as an international language. There are many books describing about the English language.

The assumptions of contrastive analysis say that there are similar and different features found in two languages if we compare. It is assumed that similar features between the source language and target language facilitate learning and different features between two languages hinder the learning the target language. So, differences create difficulty in learning and difficulty interfere the learning. According to principles of contrastive analysis, "the most efficient materials are those based on a scientific description of the languages

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to be learned carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner” (Fries, 1945, as cited in James, 1980, p. 143). In this way, any difficult features found in the target language should be described on the basis of features found in the source language. If they cannot be described like this way, we pay more attention towards the different features while learning and teaching. This paper deals with different features of English which are not found in the Wambule language.

Methods and Materials

Consonants and vowels are the basic study of any language. They are core part of phonology. Consonants and vowels of English were taken from secondary source. The book was written by J. D. O' Corner (2007). Consonants and vowels of Wambule were based on my own field work in 2019. Informants for Wambule were selected through snowball sampling and informants were interviewed with pre-determined set of questionnaires related to consonants and vowels. All sounds were determined through a minimal pair. After having determined consonants and vowels, they were compared and contrasted with English consonants and vowels. On the basis of the principles of contrastive analysis, features found in both languages are compared and contrasted. More focus is paid on differences while teaching and learning.

Results and Discussion

In both languages, consonants and vowels are found. Some of the consonants are similar to each other and some of them are completely different to each other in terms of place and manner of articulation. Vowels are similar to each other and some are completely different to each other. They are presented gradually.

Consonants

According to Yule (2010), there are 24 consonants in English altogether. They are presented in the following table.

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p b			t d		k g	
Fricatives		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ		h
Affricates					tʃ dʒ		
Nasals	m			n		ŋ	
Liquids				l r			
Glides	w				j		

These consonants were determined by minimal pairs and they are 32 consonants in Wambule altogether. They are shown in the following table.

	bilabial		dental		alveolar		palatal		velar		glottal
Stop	p	b	t	d	ʈ	ɖ			k	g	ʔ
	p ^h	b ^h	t ^h	d ^h	ʈ ^h	ɖ ^h			k ^h	g ^h	
Implosive	ɓ		ɗ								
Fricative					s						h
Affricate							ts	dz			
							ts ^h	dz ^h			
Trill						r					
Nasal	m					n				ŋ	
Lateral						l					
Semi-vowel	w						j				

Similarities and differences

Consonants of English and Wambule can be compared. While comparing to consonants sounds in terms of manner and place of articulations, the following features were observed.

Stop sounds. There are are remarkably differences between stop sounds found in English and in Wambule. The differences between stop consonants of English and Wabmule are observed as follows:

- i. There are 6 stop sounds in English whereas there 17 stop sounds in Wambule.
- ii. Aspiration is phonemic in Wambule but allophonic in English. There are 8 aspirated stop sounds in Wambule whereas there are 3 aspirated sounds in English.
- iii. There are two bilabial stop sounds in English whereas there are four bilabial stop sounds in English.
- iv. There are two labiodental stop sounds in English whereas there is any labiodental stop in Wambule.
- v. There is no dental stop in English but there are four dental stop sounds in Wambule.
- vi. There are two alveolar stop sounds in English but there are four alveolar stop sounds in Wambule.
- vii. There are two velar stop sounds in English but there are four velar stop sounds in Wambule.
- viii. Glottal stop is not phonemic in English but glottal stop is phonemic in Wambule.
- ix. Wambule is rich in terms of stop sounds in comparison to English.

Implosive sounds. Implosive sound is a rare feature which is found in Wambule. Implosive sounds are produced with a glottalic ingressive airstream mechanism. The airstream is initiated by sharply lowering the glottis and it creates negative pressure in the supraglottal cavity. Such sounds cannot be found in English but found in Wambule. There are two /ɓ/ and /ɗ/ sound in Wambule.

Fricative sounds. English is rich in fricative sounds. There are 9 fricative sounds altogether whereas there only two fricative sound in Wambule. In English, fricative sounds are found in labiodental, dental, alveolar, palatal and glottal but fricative sounds are found only in alveolar and glottal in Wambule. /h/ found in English is voiceless whereas /h/ found in Wambule is voiced.

Affricate sounds. There are two affricate sounds in English whereas there are four affricate sounds in Wambule. In both languages, there are only palatal affricate sounds.

Trill. Sound /r/ is problematic in English. Some scholars group it under approximant, some group it under lateral. Some group under trill/ flap. According to Yule (2010), sound /r/ falls under lateral. Similarly, sound /r/ falls under gliding consonants (O'Connor, 2007). There are several phonetic features of /r/ so it creates problems to be identified. In Wambule, /r/ is identified as trill.

Nasal sounds. There is no problem in nasal sounds between two languages. They represent the same feature in both languages. In both languages, there are only three nasal sounds. Each of them is found in bilabial, alveolar and velar.

Lateral sounds. In English, there are two lateral sounds /l/ and /r/. Some of them scholars can group /l/, /r/, /j/ and /w/ as approximant. Some of them group /r/ as lateral. In Wambule, there is no confusion about it. There is only one lateral sound which is /l/. The most common laterals are approximants and belong to the class of liquids. Some prefer to say liquids.

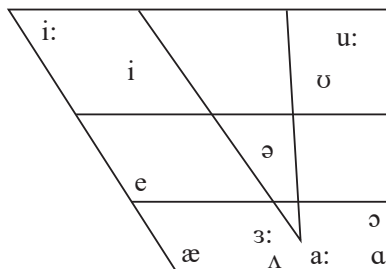
Semi-vowels. In both languages, semi vowels are found but /w/ and /j/ are voiced in English whereas /w/ and /j/ are voiceless in Wambule.

Vowels

Vowels can be categorised into pure and glide. Glide vowels are also known as diphthongs.

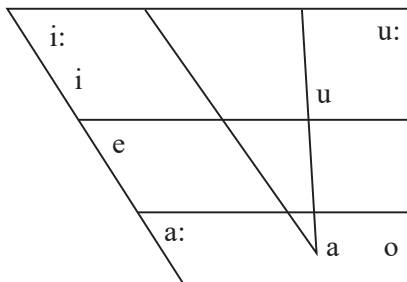
Pure vowels

Pure vowels stand alone and have no gliding feature. There are twelve pure vowels in English (O'Connor, 2007). They are present in the following trapezium.



On the contrary, Opgenort (2004) explored nine vowels but there are only eight pure vowels found in Wambule on the basis of minimal pairs. There is no /ə/ vowel in Wambule. Some

of them can use it but it may be borrowed from Nepali because there is no minimal pair of /ə/. Vowels found in Wambule are shown below.



Similarities and differences. While comparing vowels of English and Wambule, the following differences were explored.

- i. English is so rich in pure vowels in comparison to Wambule. There are twelve different pure vowels in English whereas there are only eight pure vowels in Wambule.
- ii. There are long and short vowels in both languages. In English, there are only two vowels /i/ and /u/ with long counterpart /i:/ and /u:/ but in Wambule, there are three vowels with their long counterparts. They are /i/, /i:/, /u/, /u:/, /a/, /a:/.
- iii. There are three different types of central pure vowels /ə/, /ɜ/, /ʌ/ in English but there is no such sound in Wambule.
- iv. In English, there are two types of /ɑ/, /ɔ/ in English which are not found in Wambule. There is only /o/ vowel in Wambule.
- v. In English, there is /æ/ sound but not found in Wambule.

Diphthongs

In English, there are eight diphthongs (O'Connor, 2007). They are /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, /ʊə/. They are two types in terms of gliding. In the first type of diphthongs, first glides to close, so they are called closing /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/ and in the second type of diphthongs, first glides to center so they are called centering diphthongs. On the contrary, in Wambule, there are also eight diphthongs. They are /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /uɪ/, /oɪ/, /aʊ/, /ɪu/, /ou/, /eu/. Diphthongs found in Wambule cannot be classified like in English. All diphthongs are closing. In English, these diphthongs /uɪ/, /ɪu/, /ou/, /eu/ are not found.

Similarities and differences. There are equal numbers of diphthongs found in both languages. Some of them are similar and some of them are different. Similar diphthongs are /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /oɪ/, /aʊ/. English diphthongs /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, /ʊə/ are not found in Wambule. In contrast, Wambule diphthongs /uɪ/, /ɪu/, /ou/, /eu/ are not found in English.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made after the observation between vowels of English and Wambule,

- i. Consonants of English are 24 altogether whereas consonants of Wambule are 32. Wambule is more difficult to learn from number perspectives
- ii. Series of fricative consonants are high so Wambule learners find them so difficult to pronounce.
- iii. Labio-dental consonants are not found in Wambule. They are really difficult for Wambule learners.
- iv. Consonants of English such as /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /h/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/ are not found in Wambule. These sounds are so difficult for Wambule learners to pronounce so they should be paid much attention while teaching and learning.
- v. Wambule is rich language in terms of consonants. Aspiration in Wambule is phonemic so English learners should pay attention to aspiration of Wambule. There is regular set of aspiration of each stops. So, Wambule is rich in aspiration.
- vi. There is a glottal stop in Wambule so English learners find it difficult to pronounce.
- vii. In Wambule, there are two interesting consonants. They are implosive which are really problematic consonants for pronunciation. It is ingressive in its nature.

The following conclusions were made after the observation between vowels of English and Wambule,

- i. English is rich in vowels in comparison to Wambule. There are 12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs in English whereas there are 8 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs.
- ii. There are different types of central vowels /ə/, /ɜ/, /ʌ/. Wambule learners find them so difficult to pronounce. So they should pay attention towards such vowels.
- iii. There is another sound æ which is also new for Wambule learner. So, it should be paid attention while pronouncing.
- iv. There are two types /ɔ/, /ɑ/. These vowels are not found in Wambule so Wambule learners should pay attention towards them while pronouncing.
- v. In English, there are two types of diphthongs. They are centering and closing. Centering diphthongs are not found in Wambule so they should pay attention towards such diphthongs while learning.
- vi. In Wambule, there are some strange diphthongs such as /ui/, /iu/, /ou/, /eu/. They should be paid attention by English learners while learning Wambule.

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