

## Contrastive Analysis between Vowel Sounds of English and Fur Languages

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### ABSTRACT

This research article aims to compare and contrast vowel sounds of English and Fur languages in order to find differences and similarities between them. The researchers have adopted contrastive methodology to conduct this research article. They compare and contrast vowel sounds of English and Fur languages. The results of the research revealed that the both languages belong to different language families. English is from an Indo-European language family, whereas, Fur belongs to Nilo-Saharan language family. Moreover, there are short vowels in both languages with slight differences between them. English has seven short vowel /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/, /ə/ but, there are eight /a/, /a/, /e/, /i/, /i/, /o/, /u/, /u/ in Fur language. They almost share the same phonetic features of these five vowels /æ/, /e/, /ɪ/, /ʌ/, /u/. There are two short in English /ʌ/, /ə/ without equivalent in Fur; however, Fur language has /a/, /i/, /u/ these sounds do not exist in English. In addition to that, there are five long vowels ( English /i:/, /a:/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, /u:/) ( Fur /ee/, /oo/, /ii/, /aa/, /uu/) in both languages which have the same phonetic characteristics. On the other hand, English has eight diphthongs and triphthongs without counterparts in Fur language. Furthermore, there are three long vowels in Fur which do not exist in English language. The differences in vowel sounds between two languages result in problems faced by the Fur language learners when learning English and vice versa.

**Keywords:** vowel sounds, short, long, phonetic

### INTRODUCTION

#### Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) contrasts and compares the two languages that are genetically distinct with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Thus, CA studies the structures of two languages from two different language families. English is an Indo-European language family as the source language whereas; Fur is Nilo-Saharan as the target language so as to determine the points where they are different. These differences are the main cause of problems in learning a second language.

#### The Statement of Problem

The approximately 29 million inhabitants of Africa's largest country, Sudan, speak at least 135 distinct languages belonging to three different language families, Afro-asiatic, Niger-Congo, and Nilo-Saharan.

It is obvious that the phonetic differences in English and Fur vowels create difficulties in the teaching and learning of English, the target language. This research article attempts to find out the similarities and differences which exist between the two languages. These phonetic differences could have effects on the process of teaching and learning English as the foreign language in Sudan. In this field, it is expected that contrastive analysis of English and Fur vowel sounds will have pedagogical advantages to the Fur learners when they English as a foreign language in particular and the other Nilo-Saharan languages speakers in general.

#### The Objectives of Research

This research article aims to:

1. identify the areas of similarities in the pronunciation of the English and Fur vowel sounds;
2. describe the differences between the vowel sounds of English and Fur languages;

#### The Questions of Research

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what degree do the English and Fur vowel sounds differ from one another?
2. How far do English and Fur vowels have similarity with one another?

## The Methodology of Research

The researchers have adopted contrastive analysis methodology to conduct this research. They contrast and compare some examples of vowel sounds of Fur and English languages. The data was collected from English morphology books, grammar book of Fur language as well as related websites and journals. Population of this research includes vowel sounds in English and Fur languages.

## The Hypotheses of Research

This research hypothesizes the following:

1. The English and Fur vowel sounds differ from one another.
2. English and Fur vowels have similarity with each other.

## Importance of Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and early 1970s, as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn [1].

## Indo-European Languages

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [2]. The Indo-European languages are a language family native to the overwhelming majority of Europe, the Iranian plateau, and the northern Indian subcontinent. Some European languages of this family, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Dutch, and Spanish, have expanded through colonialism in the modern period and are now spoken across several continents. The Indo-European family is divided into several branches or sub-families, of which there are eight groups with languages still alive today: Albanian, Armenian, Balto-Slavic, Celtic, Germanic, Hellenic, Indo-Iranian, and Italic; and another nine subdivisions that are now extinct.

Today, the individual Indo-European languages with the most native speakers are English, Hindi–Urdu, Spanish, Bengali, French, Russian, Portuguese, German, and Punjabi, each with over 100 million native speakers; many others are small and in danger of extinction.

In total, 46% of the world's population (3.2 billion people) speaks an Indo-European language as a first language — by far the highest of any language family. There are about 445 living Indo-European languages, according to an estimate by *Ethnologue*, with over two-thirds (313) of them belonging to the Indo-Iranian branch.

All Indo-European languages are descended from a single prehistoric language, linguistically reconstructed as Proto-Indo-European, spoken sometime in the Neolithic to Early Bronze Age. The geographical location where it was spoken, the Proto-Indo-European homeland, has been the object of many competing hypotheses; the academic consensus supports the Kurgan hypothesis, which posits the homeland to be the Pontic–Caspian steppe in what is now Ukraine and southern Russia, associated with the Yamnaya culture and other related archaeological cultures during the 4th millennium BC to early 3rd millennium BC.

## Nilo-Saharan Languages

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [3]. The Nilo-Saharan languages are a proposed family of African languages spoken by some 50–60 million people, mainly in the upper parts of the Chari and Nile rivers, including historic Nubia, north of where the two tributaries of the Nile meet. The languages extend through 17 nations in the northern half of Africa: from Algeria to Benin in the west; from Libya to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the centre; and from Egypt to Tanzania in the east.

As indicated by its hyphenated name, Nilo-Saharan is a family of the African interior, including the greater Nile Basin and the Central Sahara Desert. Eight of its proposed constituent divisions (excluding Kunama, Kuliak, and Songhay) are found in the modern countries of Sudan and South Sudan, through which the Nile River flows.

In his book *The Languages of Africa* (1963), Joseph Greenberg named the group and argued it was a genetic family. It contains the languages which are not included in the Niger–Congo, Afroasiatic or Khoisan groups. Although some linguists have referred to the phylum as "Greenberg's wastebasket", into which he placed all the otherwise unaffiliated non-click languages of Africa, specialists in the field have accepted its reality since Greenberg's classification[4]. Its supporters accept that it is a challenging proposal to demonstrate but contend that it looks more promising the more work is done.

Some of the constituent groups of Nilo-Saharan are estimated to predate the African Neolithic. Thus, the unity of Eastern Sudanic is estimated to date to at least the 5th millennium BC. Nilo-Saharan genetic unity would necessarily be much older still and date to the late Upper Paleolithic. The earliest written language associated with the Nilo-Saharan family is Old Nubian, one of the oldest written African languages attested in writing from the 8th to the 15th century AD.

### **English Language**

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [5]. English is a West Germanic language of the Indo-European language family, with its earliest forms spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England. It is named after the Angles, one of the ancient Germanic peoples that migrated to the island of Great Britain. English is genealogically West Germanic, closest related to the Low Saxon and Frisian languages; however, its vocabulary is also distinctively influenced by dialects of French (about 29% of modern English words) and Latin (also about 29%), plus some grammar and a small amount of core vocabulary influenced by Old Norse (a North Germanic language). Speakers of English are called Anglophones.

The earliest forms of English, collectively known as Old English, evolved from a group of West Germanic (Ingvaenic) dialects brought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the 5th century and further mutated by Norse-speaking Viking settlers starting in the 8th and 9th centuries. Middle English began in the late 11th century after the Norman conquest of England, when considerable French (especially Old Norman) and Latin-derived vocabulary was incorporated into English over some three hundred years. Early Modern English began in the late 15th century with the start of the Great Vowel Shift and the Renaissance trend of borrowing further Latin and Greek words and roots into English, concurrent with the introduction of the printing press to London.

Modern English grammar is the result of a gradual change from a typical Indo-European dependent-marking pattern, with a rich inflectional morphology and relatively free word order, to a mostly analytic pattern with little inflection, and a fairly fixed subject–verb–object word order[6]. Modern English relies more on auxiliary verbs and word order for the expression of complex tenses, aspect and mood, as well as passive constructions, interrogatives and some negation.

Modern English has spread around the world since the 17th century as a consequence of the worldwide influence of the British Empire and the United States of America. Through all types of printed and electronic media of these countries, English has become the leading language of international discourse and the *lingua franca* in many regions and professional contexts such as science, navigation and law. English is the most spoken language in the world[7] and the third-most spoken native language in the world, after Standard Chinese and Spanish. It is the most widely learned second language and is either the official language or one of the official languages in 59 sovereign states. There are more people who have learned English as a second language than there are native speakers. As of 2005, it was estimated that there were over 2 billion speakers of English. English is the majority native language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland (see Anglosphere), and is widely spoken in some areas of the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. It is a co-official language of the United Nations, the European Union and many other world and regional international organisations. It is the most widely spoken Germanic language, accounting for at least 70% of speakers of this Indo-European branch.

### **Fur Language**

According to omniglot.com/writing/fur [8], Fur (Poor) is a member of the Fur branch of the Nilo-Saharan language family. It is spoken by about 745,800 people in Sudan and Chad. There are about 744,000 speakers of Fur mainly in the states of North Darfur, South Darfur and West Darfur in southwestern Sudan, and also in the east of Sudan. There are also about 1,800 Fur speakers in the Sila region of southeastern Chad.

Fur is also known as Dala, For, Fora, Fordunga, Forok, Forta, Furakang, Furawi, Kadirgi, Konjara, Korra, Kungara, Kurka, Lali, Onage or Yerge. Native speakers call it *Poor* [pɔɔr] and call themselves *Poora* [pɔɔra].

### **Its members are:**

Fur in western Sudan with around 750,000 speakers in 2004.

Amdang (also called Mimi) in eastern Chad with around 40,000 speakers in 2000.

Fur is written with the Latin alphabet and is used in literature and on the radio.

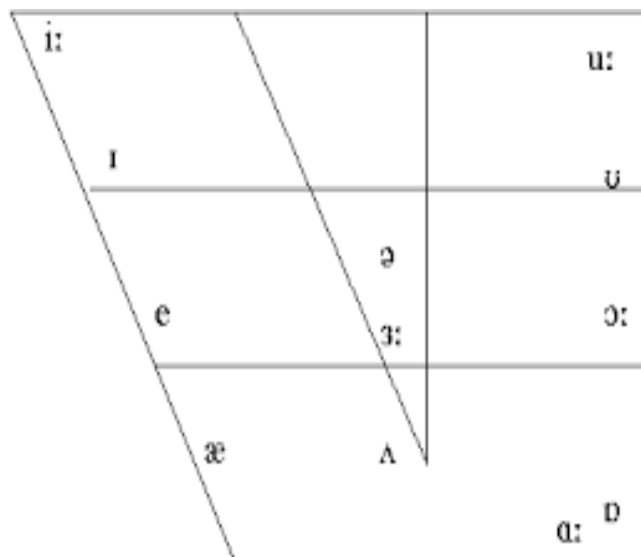
### **Phonetics**

Phonetics is the science which studies the characteristics of human sound making; especially those sounds used in speech, and provides methods for their description, classification and transcription[9]. Phoneme is the minimal unit in the sound system of a language, according to traditional phonological theories [9].

### **Vowel Sounds of English vs. Fur**

David Crystal [9] explains that the vowel is one of the two general categories used for the classification of speech sounds, the other being consonant. Vowels can be defined in terms of both phonetics and phonology. Phonetically, they are sounds articulated without a complete closure in the mouth or a degree of narrowing which would produce audible friction; the air escapes evenly over the centre of the tongue. If air escapes solely through the mouth, the vowels are said to be oral; if some air is simultaneously released through the nose, the vowels are nasal. In addition to this, in a phonetic classification of vowels, reference would generally be made to two variables, the first of which is easily describable, the second much less so: (a) the position of the lips – whether rounded, spread, or neutral; (b) the part of the tongue raised, and the height to which it moves.

### The Vowel chart



Source: (2022,11.26) <https://www.google.com/search?q=short+vowel+diagram>

### The Short Vowel

There are seven short vowel sounds in English language, whereas, Fur language has got eight vowel sounds English has a large number of vowel sounds; the first one to be examined are short vowels.

**Table (1) English Short Vowel Sounds**

English/ æ /	Examples apple ant at man	English / e /	Examples end egg level leg
/ æ /		/ e /	
English /ɪ/	Examples it little busy sin simple	English / ɑ /	Examples gentle giant gymnasium ginger hydrogen
/ɪ/		/ ɑ / ɑ //	
English / ʌ /	Examples upper come up cut	English / u/	Examples cool suit dude food
/ ʌ /		/u/	
English / ə /	Examples better important above letter		
/ ə /			

The above table (1) shows seven English short vowels, with two vowels / ə /, / ʌ / which do not exist in Fur, it can lead to pronunciation problems to Fur language speakers when they learn English.

## Short Vowels of Fur Language

**Table (2)** Fur language has eight short vowel sounds as follow:

Fur / a/	Examples and English meaning	Fur /a/	Examples and English meaning
/ a/	ardīn -reading arī -front awge -removal asûd -lazy	/a/	darma -leather addi -during adis -living thing amal -behaviour
Fur /e/	Examples and English meaning	Fur /i/	Examples and English meaning
/e/	elel -future ere -direction ewel- formerly ergel - fence	/i/	iwa -widowe illa -that tin -monent in - this
Fur /i /	Examples and English meaning	Fur /o/	Examples and English meaning
/ i /	ilo - wet ilol - ladder ilon -technology injel -next year	/o/	orom -hut oro -affairs orê -explanation oya -straight line
Fur /u /	Examples and English meaning	Fur /u/	Examples and English meaning
/u/	ulul -mad uri -summer urma - mercy uḡâ -spring	/u/	uní - lamp umo -tired uon - guard urdi -lad/young boy

The above table (2) shows eight Furshort vowels, with three vowels/u/, /i/, /a/ which do not exist in English, it can lead to pronunciation problems to English language speakers when they learn Fur.

**Table (3)** English Long Vowel Sounds

English/ a: /	Examples	English / ɜ: /	Examples
/ a: /	arm farm part heart	/ɜ: /	earth bird learn turn
English /i:/	Examples	English / ɔ: /	Examples
/i:/	eat see bee need	/ ɔ:/ ɑ //	door or port nor
English / u: /	Examples		
/ u: /	soon rule room two		

The above table (3) shows five English longvowels. There are their equivalent in Fur language .

## Fur Long vowel Sounds

**Table (4)** Fur language has eight long vowel sounds as follow:

Fur /aa/	Examples and English meaning	Fur /aa/	Examples and English meaning

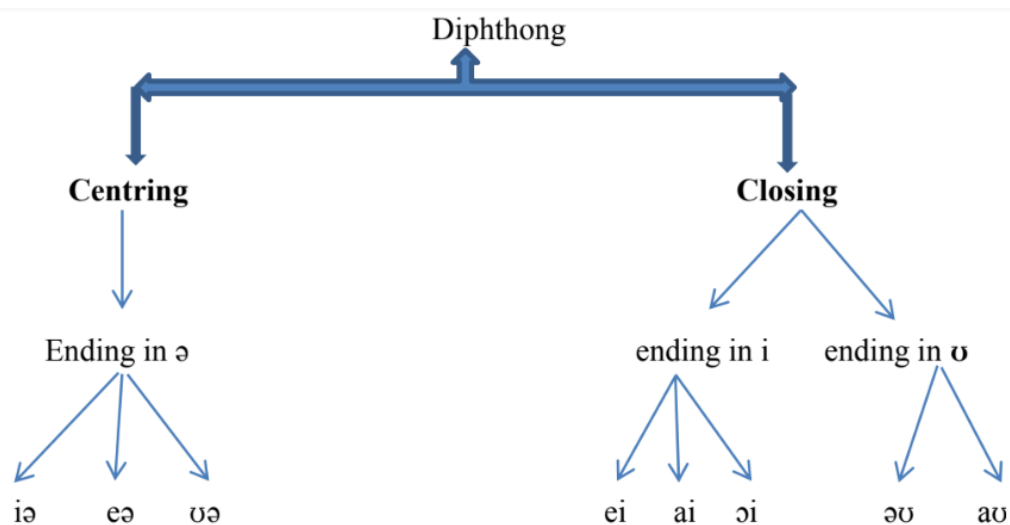
/aa/	d̩aariŋ -delivery maari -widow Naamú -crocodile	/aa/	baas- employer baar -sea baaj - freedom daara -council
Fur /ee/	Examples and English meaning	Fur /ii/	Examples and English meaning
/ee/	beeraja - signs beenja -sales dee -male deer - war	/ii/	iiba -invalid dii -that Kii-sí -whose lii -there
Fur /ii /	Examples and English meaning	Fur /oo/	Examples and English meaning
/ii /	iis -three miir - black smith piila -crops rii -wind	/oo/	rimsoo -chairs roo - a well foor - Fur nooyo -chelly
Fur /uu /	Examples and English meaning	Fur /uu /	Examples and English meaning
/uu/	ruug -livelihood ruuk -luch suur - body/self uŋa -spring	/uu/	puuriŋ - grammar ruuny -breeding suuru - earth tuur -agriculture

The above table (4) shows eight Fur long vowels, with three vowels /uu/, /ii /, /aa/ which do not exist in English, it can lead to pronunciation problems to English language speakers when they learn Fur.

### English Diphthongs

BBC pronunciation has a large number of diphthongs - sounds which consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another. A vowel which remains constant and does not glide is called a pure vowel. In terms of length, diphthongs are similar to the long vowels described above. Perhaps the most important thing to remember about all the diphthongs is that the first part is much longer and stronger than the second part; for example, most of the diphthong ai (as in the words 'eye', 'I') consists of the a vowel, and only in about the last quarter of the diphthong does the glide to i become noticeable. As the glide to i happens, the loudness of the sound decreases. As a result, the i part is shorter and quieter. Foreign learners should, therefore, always remember that the last part of English diphthongs must not be made too strongly[10].

On the contrary, Fur language does not have diphthongs, so this causes problems to the Fur speakers learning English. There are eight diphthongs in English language as the following:



**Table(5) English diphthongs**

English/ iə/	Examples	English / eə /	Examples
/ iə /	hear near ear	/eə /	there scare air
English / ʊə /	Examples	English /ei /	Examples
/ʊə/	poor moored tour doer	/ei / a //	day name same say
English /ai /	Examples	English /ɔi /	Examples
/ai /	eye tie nice	/ ɔi /	toy boy oil
English /əʊ /	Examples	English /aʊ /	Examples
/əʊ /	go no phone home	/aʊ /	how now cow loud

The above table (5) displays the English eight diphthongs with examples, which Fur language lacks them. Definitely, they cause problems to Fur language speakers when they learn English language. Therefore, the teachers should have to take this point in account when they teach those learners English.

**Triphthongs**

Peter Roach [10] states that the most complex English sounds of the vowel type are the triphthongs. They can be rather difficult to pronounce, and very difficult to recognise. A triphthong is a glide from one vowel to another and then to a third, all produced rapidly and without interruption. The triphthongs can be looked on as being composed of the five closing diphthongs described in the last section, with ə added on the end. Whereas, Fur language lacks this feature, definitely it results in difficulties which face Fur speakers when they learn English language.

**Table (6) they are as the following:**

English/ eia/	Examples	English / aiə /	Examples
/eia /	player square	/aiə /	royal fire liar
English / əʊə /	Examples	English /auə /	Examples
/əʊə/	Slower lower	/auə/ a //	shower hour our
English / ɔiə /	Examples		
/ ɔiə /	royal loyal		

The above table (6) shows the combination of triphthongs. They can be looked on as being composed of the five closing diphthongs described in the last section, with ə added on the end. Whereas, Fur language lacks this feature, definitely it results in difficulties which face Fur speakers when they learn English language.

**Findings**

The contrastive analysis of English and Fur vowel sounds has revealed that there are differences and similarities between English and Fur vowel sounds as the following:

**Similarities**

- There are short vowels in both languages with slight differences between them.
- They almost share the same phonetic features of these five vowels /æ/,/e /, /ɪ/, / a /,/u/.
- They almost share the same phonetic features of these five vowels /æ/,/e /, /ɪ/, / a /,/u/.
- There are five long vowels ( English:/i:/, /a:/, /ɜ:/,/ɔ:/,/u:/)( Fur /ee/,/oo/,/ii/,/aa/,/uu/) in both languages which have the same phonetic characteristics.

**Differences**

- The both languages belong to different language families. English is from an Indo-European language family, whereas, Fur belongs to Nilo-Saharan language family.
- There are two short in English /ʌ/, /ə/ without equivalent in Fur; however, Fur language has /a/, /i/, /u/ these sounds do not exist in English.
- There are three long vowels in Fur which do not exist in English language.

## CONCLUSION

This research article has done a contrastive analysis between English and Fur vowel sounds. The analysis began with comparing and contrasting between vowel sounds of English and Fur languages. In the light of contrastive analysis (CA) the phonetic difficulties for the learners of Fur language were predicted based on the differences in the vowel sounds of the two languages. These difficulties are due to phonetic differences of vowels of two languages, English belongs to Indo-European language family, whereas, Fur belongs to Nilo-Saharan family. The tutors should be acquainted with the results of CA for both languages, it enables them to teach accurate pronunciation to the foreign language learners in general and Fur learners in particular. Thus, the problems of pronunciation of vowels can be solved, and the Fur learners of English will become proficient in English and vice versa.

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