

Phonotactic Syllabification Systems of English and Amharic Languages and A Case for Language of African Union for Africa

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Abstract: Phonotactics sets rules for proficiency in language usage, especially in English Language, (a foreign language) and Amharic an African Language. This study sets out to analyse the phonotactic presence and similarities in their syllabic systems, for possibility of Amharic emerging as a language of African Union to replace English language during summits and international conferences, albeit as a starter. Many linguists, especially the Nigerian noble laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka have suggested other African languages like Swahili. This is an effort to prevent our indigenous knowledge from going into extinction. The justification for suggesting Amharic here is the natural and originality of the Geez feedel or script form where Amharic alphabetic system was developed. It is indigenous to Africa, with its origin in Axum, Ethiopia. Amharic shares some linguistic features of sounds like vowel sonority with English language and it is easy for anyone with proficiency in English to understand the Amharic sounds articulation and their acoustic allophonic references. The exploration of this unfamiliar terrain is worthy of consideration as a policy innovation for cultural and linguistic emancipation. The objective therefore is to contribute to the current trends in innovation in the area of language development in African continents. It is one of our own indigenous languages, widely spoken and its origin is African. The researchers used scripts developed online; Wikipedia, books, personal contacts and information from the indigenous people of Ethiopia. These were selected through purposive research design. Syllabification Theory, Chomsky's Theory of transfer and Contrastive Analysis were used for the study. Findings revealed that the similarity of sounds of English and Amharic makes it easy to understand the syllabification system of Amharic conforms with the composite structure of English and most world languages that combine consonants and vowels sounds. The tone and rhythmic patterns of the suprasegmental features add greater value to its musical cadences, especially when children speak during Amharic language lessons. It is therefore recommended that since Amharic language, based on our findings is suitable as a possible language of African Union. By this, it will continue to spread from Ethiopia to the rest of African nations and its sub-regions as an African linguistic identity.

Keywords: Phonotactics innovation, National language, proficiency, phonology, syllabification, acoustic, suprasegmental.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Brief Historical Background

African languages are rich in cultural values and indigenous knowledge which represent the identities and mind of the people. However, where there is intrusion of a colonial language, especially in multilingual, multi-cultural nations like Nigeria colonised by (Britain), Benin (France), Cameroon, (French), South Africa (Britain), Ghana (Britain) among others, having their indigenous languages and other challenges, proficiency in the colonial language cannot be guaranteed. Although English, the official language of some of these countries have solved some linguistic problems in multilingual states, the problems created are quite enormous, thus playing down the positive roles that these colonial languages would have achieved.

Ethiopia, the only country in Africa that was never colonised by any country also use English to keep the pace with other users of English as a world language and sadly so, since Africa has not yet evolved a national language of its own. Perhaps someday it may come into fruition. The legacy of colonization, it is being spoken and learned far away from its native environment and it is being taught mostly by non-native speakers. For these reasons and others, near-native accent proficiency remains an uphill task. English language today is a conglomeration of other languages of other countries, through loan words and lexical borrowings. Most languages fall into this category of primary existence. Some African languages derived their alphabet from the Latin alphabet as a result of the contact language English. Ethiopian languages have their own distinct ‘feedel’ or script known as the Geez. It is the legacy of the moribund Giiz language which other nations and nationalities adopted and use till today. The

English language consonants and vowels have their phonemes and phonetic representations for pronunciation and speech, the same way Amharic language has sounds derived from the Geez alphabets for pronunciation (morpho-phonemics). Pronunciation is the basis for analysing the sounds of a language while sound in itself is an abstract concept. Thus, symbols are assigned to sounds for identification and systematic documentation. Thoughts and intention, initiated is blurted out through noisy outbursts called “sound”, meanings are then attached the sound based on the sound system of the particular language and the linguistic repartoir shared by the participants in the speech act.

In effect, the phonotactic pronunciation is language determined. An example is the IPA symbols International phonetic Alphabet symbols adopted as the standard for English pronunciation. Any other pattern is considered deviant from the British English. Chomsky’s Theory of Transfer analysed positive and negative transfer. While positive one is proactive and facilitates learning, negative transfer is retroactive and inhibits effective learning. This is called interference Also Daniel Jones made an entries of sound pronunciation for phonemes and gives phonetic illustrations of some sounds of English. Examples like (Kw) in /KwƏliti/ quality (Ph) in peter /pitƏ/. (aspirated K and labialized k).

The Geez ‘feedel’ or script also provides sources for Amharic sound system that make learning easy for non-native speakers and learners of Amharic language. The phonotactic sets the boundaries for sound combination within a syllable system acceptable to a particular language. Thus, the syllabic system is language determined. The Amharic syllabic system is our focus as researchers tried to use some language theories to explain how sounds are

combined in English language syllable system. This is our purpose for translating of Amharic words into English, for easy analysis of the Amharic sounds, to establish their similarities and differences.

1.2. Brief Historical Background of English Language

The history of English language in Africa and its influence spread across some African nations and its sub regions. However, Ethiopia has continued to use their mother tongue as their official language, in addition to English, to downplay English language dominance after surviving colonization attempt by Britain and Italy. Fasanmi, (2018) ‘observed that lack of proficiency either the spoken or written forms of English has continued to pose a challenge for African users of English as a second language’ (ESL).

Albert C. Bauch (1951) in his account of the history of English language traced its existence from the Romanization of the island of Britain which gave birth to the Latinized English in Britain, Teutonic invasion “(Bede and Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’). The Teutonic Tribes were the Jutes, Saxons and Angles – the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle a clear account of how Angles occupied the Eastern coast and by the year 547 established an Anglian kingdom on the Northern side of Humber and Thames by the 5th century. The word Angles (OE) Engle was used for the tribes that were invading them giving them the name Angeleynn (Angle-kin or race of Angles). After the Danish period of about 1000 years, the name Engla-land, meaning ‘land of the Angles’ came into existence. English language that came into existence as a fusion of all the dialects spoken by the Teutonic tribes that invaded England at that period in time “English language belongs to the low west, Teutonic branch of the Indo-European

family; indo here referred to the Eastern Teutonic Gothic. The Goths spread from the Vistula to the shore of the Black sea.

The language spoken by the Celts living in Gaul by the time Caesar conquered them is known as Gallic. It was replaced by Latin, with the Julian alphabet, which most African nations adopted after colonization by Britain. The English language alphabet use 24 consonants, 12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs for speech sounds production.

The consonants are (p,b,t,d,k,g), plosives /f,v,θ,ð,s,z/, fricatives /tʃ,dʒ/, palato-alveola affricate, nasal stops /m,n,ŋ/, /l/ lateral alveola, /j/ palatal, /w/ approximant, /h/ glottal, /r/ retroflex or tap.

Vowels – /i,I,æ:u,u:, ʊ, ɔ, ʌ, ɜ:,ə/ Diphthongs – /ai, ei,au, ɔi, ea, Өu, uӨ, iӨ / These speech sounds “phones” are combined in speech as consonants and vowels. The vowel is the nucleus of the syllabic structure. It is obligatory. This will be analysed in our texts.

1.3. Brief Historical Background of Amharic

The Omniglot, online Encyclopaedia of Writing Systems and languages recorded that 25million people speak Amharic (coqci) (amarፀርና) in Ethiopia. Other countries are Eritrea, Canada, USA, and Sweden. It is the national language of Ethiopia and the Amharic was invented at the district of (Axum) Transliteration of the language was done by Ernest Hammer Schmidt, EAE transliteration system was developed by Aethiopica and the BGN/PCGN. This system was developed at the period of Romanizing names written in Amharic characters and it was adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1967.

The Amharic language of the Semitic branch is a member of the Ethiosemitic group

spoken as mother tongue by the Amhara and other major cities in Ethiopia. (Wikipedia): It uses 33 basic characters each comprising 7 different forms depending on the vowel chosen to be used along with it for pronunciation. (Ethiopia Alphabet-cyber Ethiopia 2007). The alphabet is called Ethiopic, dated back to 100BC and it was used to write Geez literary ecclesiastical languages as is being used in Eritrea, Tigre and Tigrinya. It is written from left to right. The 26 letters are used to represent consonants. This can serve as syllabic symbols when a vocalic marker, (vowel or syllabic vocoid) is attached to the letters. Oromo and Wolaita are also Ethiopian languages, but they are not widely spoken like Amharic.

Amharic Abugida (C2A) right now the unique calendar of Ethiopia is 75 years behind the Romanic calendar. We are all in year 2008, by that calendar. The Ge'ez script have been used to write these languages, Amharic, Argobaa, Awngi, Blin, Dizin, Harari, Inor, Silte, Tigre, Tigrinya, Xantanga (Omniglot online encyclopedia). It is obvious that the number may increase as more countries learn Amharic language and look forward to Amharic as a national language for African Union and perhaps for Africa scholars. The number of alphabets in the Ge'ez script is twenty-seven (27). This is a close number to English sounds alphabet which is 26, 21 consonants and five vowels from where the IPA symbols derived 26 consonants, 12 pure vowels, 8 diphthongs and three diphthongs are used.

The Geez alphabet derived its sounds from the 27 alphabets where 1-unit alphabet can be used to generate other sounds. Once, one understands the first sound others are easy to generate. They are '(a) u, i, a, E, I, o. from these sounds others can be generated in a syllable structure. They are generated vertically and horizontally. The above

sounds are the horizontal ones while the vertical ones include: (h,i,h,m,s) (r,s,sh,Q,b) (t,ch,h,n,n) (a,k,h,w,a) (s,T,ch,p,ts,p) (z,zhe,y,d,dj) (tz,f,p). (Lion of Judah society) Wikipedia.

These alphabets are represented in syllabic system of Amharic language as each of them is generated in five different ways with the link to the first alphabet. To learn a language is a complex issue because language itself is complex. It is left for a learner to find out in the course of learning how certain alphabet or sounds are combined or allowed for the purpose of using the particular language. These two sounds as observed by Hay (2009), /t/ and /s/ as in tsunami a Japanese language is not allowed in such combination in English. "Amharic is the second most widely spoken Afroasiatic Semitic language in the world after Arabic". (Phillipson and Skutnabbkangs (1995), It is the official language of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and many regions, military and the Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahido church. Amharic originated at Axum. It is spoken in Gonder, Gojam, Wallo and Shown among others.

Amharic is indigenous to 23% of the populace but because it serves official purpose, it is spoken by the whole nation. Afan Oromo (Cushite language) is indigenous to about 33% largest indigenous language and its expansive spread justifies historical fact that Ethiopia was never colonized by any other country of the world. Amharic serves both the "defacto" functions (basic needs) (Hirut Woldermarism 2008). And de jury function for its official status. The syllable structure of Amharic explains the combination of sounds in groups and the rule remains that one has to pick from one of the groups as required for pronunciation.

2. RESEARCH ETHODOLOGY

2.1. Pronunciation Phonotactic

Since all languages are rule-governed in their spoken and written forms, phonotactic constraints in English and Amharic pronunciation will be analysed with scripts culled from Wikipedia. The researchers made personal contacts with the indigenous owners of Amharic language in Ethiopia, the Eastern Africa and other sources.

The work is a purposive research type and texts selected from Wikipedia series. Information gathered through personal contact is also purposive. This is to have original speakers input to authenticate the veracity of the research. Our choice of the data is also purposive. Our texts are the Geez feedel or 'script' sourced and translated into English language.

2.2. Syllabification Phonotactics

Phonology can be referred to as the scientific study of sound patterns (Chomsky, 1968). Over hundred (800) speech sounds are used across the world and that linguistic aspect phonology is that it is a linguistic science study that describes discreet sound patterns and the rules that are applicable to the sound combination allowed by the language in focus. It is the tasks of learners to find out the sound that can be used together during speech act, as stipulated by the writing and speech system of such language. This is a phonotactic boundary. Hay (2009) observed that language is rich in regularities and that learners are well equipped to track that means, to sort and select the relevant blends. Freederic and Wessees (1993) Jusczyet al 1993, 1994) corroborating this also observed that language is organized according to phonotactics patterns and are regulated on how they are structured and strung together within words; and that they differ across

languages and must be learned. He gave example of consonants clusters in English likes st,fr,cl Curtin And Hufriage (2009) also explained phonotactics in terms of the co-occurrence allowed by specific language in different syllable positions. e.g. 'pt' cannot occur initially in English but can come finally in a word like kept.

There are types of writing recognized globally, logographic, syllabic and alphabetic. A syllable has been defined by many scholars; it is the least able chest pulse st, fr, cl, unity of a word, the breath pulse per outburst of air from the lungs and the vocal chords. Chomsky and Halle 1968: 354, Crimson 1989, Gussmann 1991 and Wells 1995 in Zoe Tsoft defined syllable as consisting of a vocalic centre optionally accompanied by a consonants onset or coda either of which may be complex (of sell irk 1982 / 1999:329) Blevins 1995 : 216).

They observed that in most language every syllable has a vowel as its nucleus, the centre. However, they opined that some languages allow segment which cannot be traditionally considered as vocalic to form the nucleus of a syllabic structure. They gave examples of in /B^tn/ and /L/Inm^dl and referred to them as syllabic consonants. We shall also analyse some Amharic words to verify if such occur syllable vocoids in the language phonotactically, the vowel is the syllabic sound that forms the peak of a syllable. It is the sonority level of the nucleus; the consonants form the onset and code as earlier on mentioned if the particular language in use have it. (Vowel Wikipedia) vowels determine the quality, loudness and length of the code types like tone intonation and stress. Phonetically, a vowel is released with open vocal tracts, frictionless while consonants are released with friction, sound like S, dʒ,f,v,t,s,θ,æ. Phonologically , the vowel is the sound which forms the peak of a syllable. An equivalent of this is the non-

syllabic sounds called semi vowels e.g. (w,j) no constriction in the vocal tract, they come at the beginning, onset of a syllable e.g /jes/ yes and /wet/ wet. This translates to indicate that they are consonants but functioning as vowels. Kenneth pike (1994) gave the name vocoid to phonetic vowels and vowels to phonologically vowels hence (j) and (w) can be described as vocoids instead of vowel. The composite structure of the English vowel phonotactics (C0-3VCo-4) indicates the boundaries set for consonant clusters i.e. 3 clusters before the vowel and 4 clusters finally as in the word $\frac{str}{ccc} \frac{e}{v} \frac{ngthene}{cccc}$ here the first 3 s,t,r precede /e/ vowel while the last letter from n to dnd (elision an and assimilation of the vowels are applicable. Other combination can be boy $\frac{boi}{cv}$ plumber $\frac{plʌmɔ/}{ccv cv}$ e.t.c. it is noteworthy to say that most Amharic words conform with the syllabic system of English language Examples are stated below.

3. FINDINGS

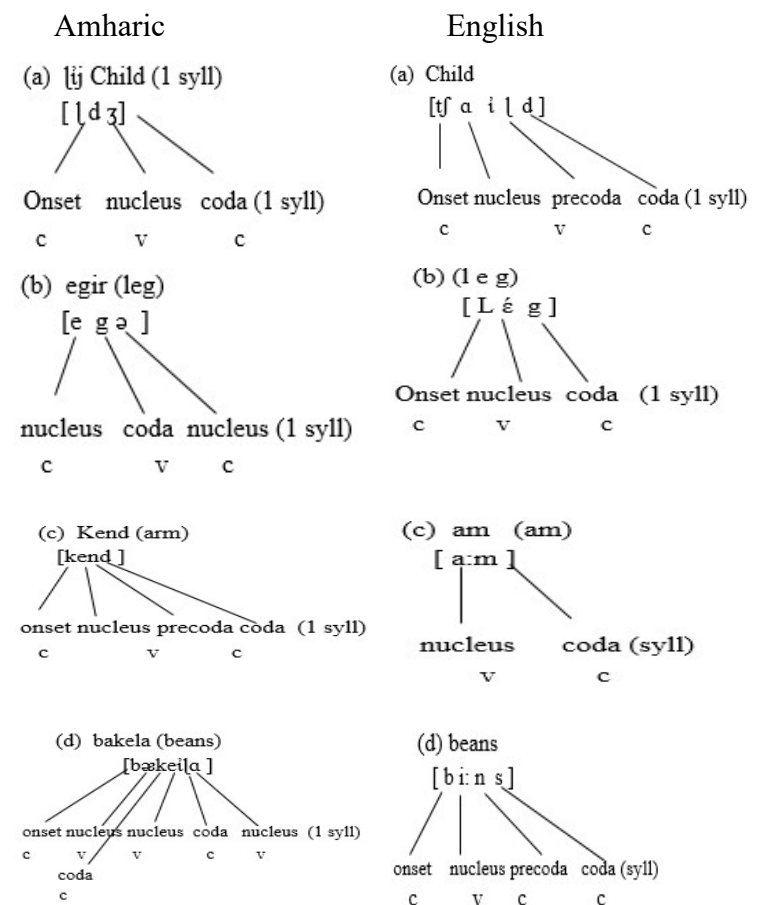
The study tried to see the syllabic systems of Amharic and compared it with the systems of English to see similarities and differences in terms of conformity with the global arrangement of conformity with the word order of consonants and vowel combination within the syllable systems during articulation.

3.1. Features of Amharic language

Amharic use 26 characters from Suberean script to make up for the set used. One very important feature of the Amharic is the gender recognition attracted to both female and male addressees like in French language during speech act. This feature manifest in

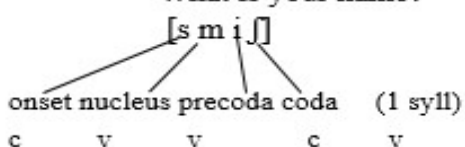
the writing and pronunciation of Amharic words as individual word and words within the sentence structure. Thus, within the written syllable the gender must be selected and this also happen during spoken Amharic, French i.e languages garçon. (a boy) and la fille (a girl) also in student (male student) and student (female student). However, our focus here is the syllables structure of Amharic language in comparism with English language in writing and perhaps in pronunciation.

3.2. Script on Monosyllabic and Polysyllabic Words



(e) Simish man new

What is your name?



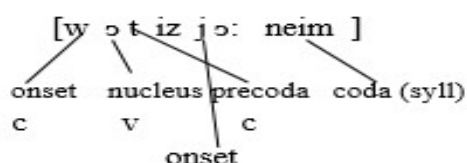
(En-gu dye)

Mushroom

(i n g u d æ)

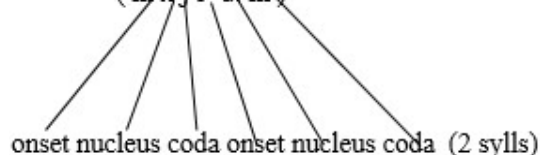


(e) What is your name?

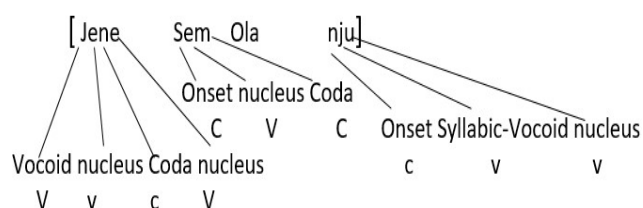


mushroom

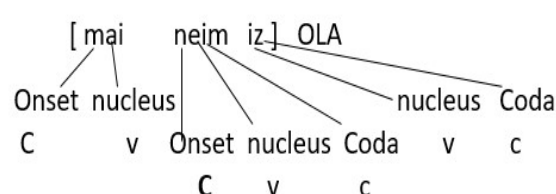
(m ʌ f r u m)



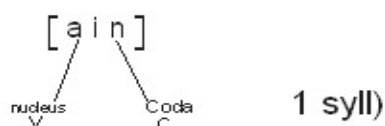
(f) Yena Sem Ola



(f) My Name is OLA



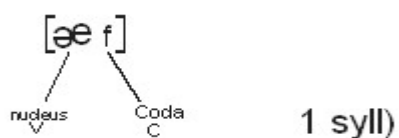
(g) ayn (eye)



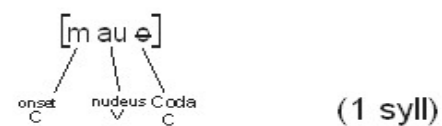
(g) (eye)



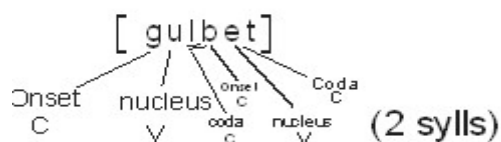
(h) af (mouth)



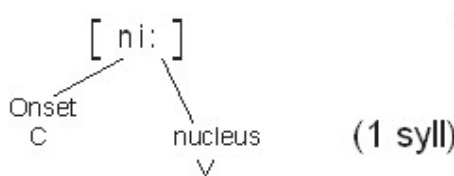
(h) (mouth)



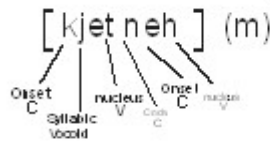
(l) gulbet (knee)



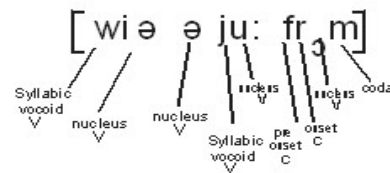
(l) (knee)



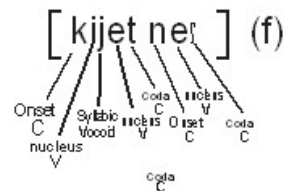
(j) kyet neh?
where are you from?



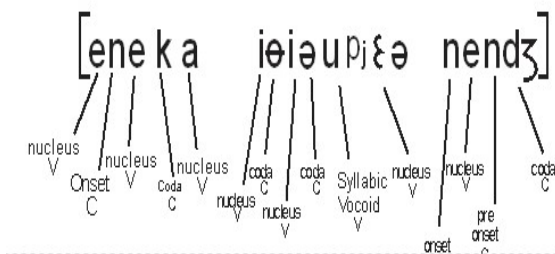
(j) where are you from?



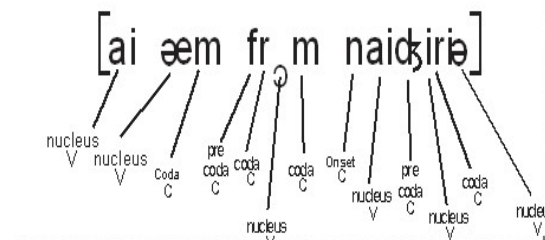
kyet neh?
where are you from?



(k) Ene k Ethiopia nence

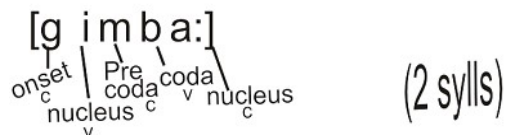


(k) I am from Nigeria



Amharic

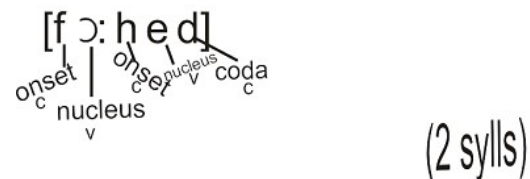
gimber (forehead)



(2 sylls)

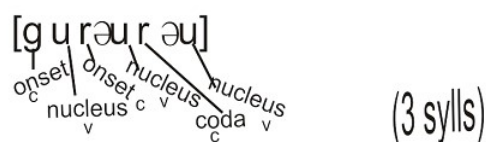
English

(forehead)



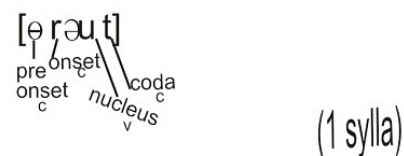
(2 sylls)

(m) guroro (throat)



(3 sylls)

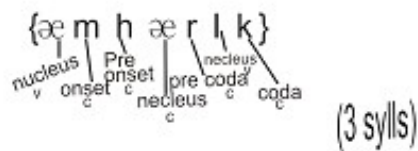
(m) throat



(1 sylla)

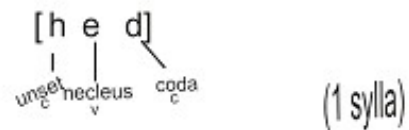
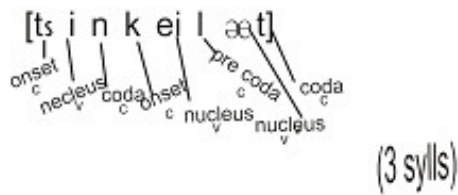
(n) Amharic (Ethiopia language)

(n)

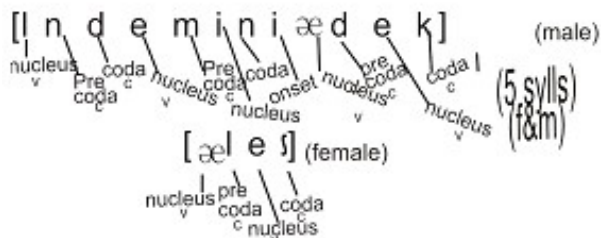


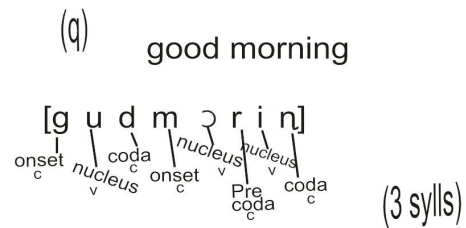
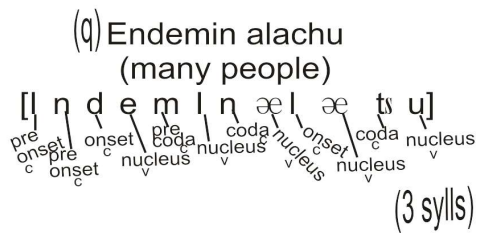
(o) chinkellat (head)

(o) (head

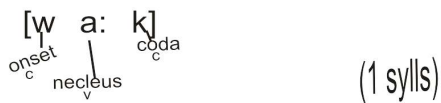
(p) endemin alek (male)
endemin Alesh (female)
(good morning)

(p)

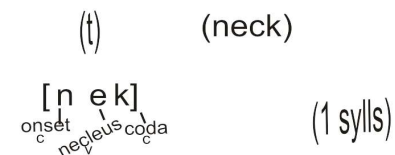
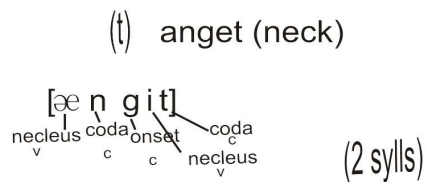
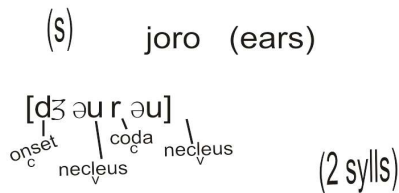




(r)
indemin walk (many people afternoon)

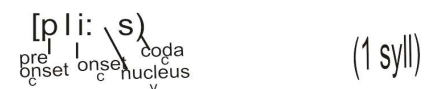
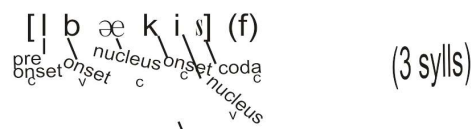


(r)



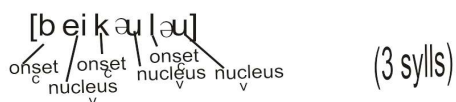
(u) l'bakish (f) please
L'ba khe (m)

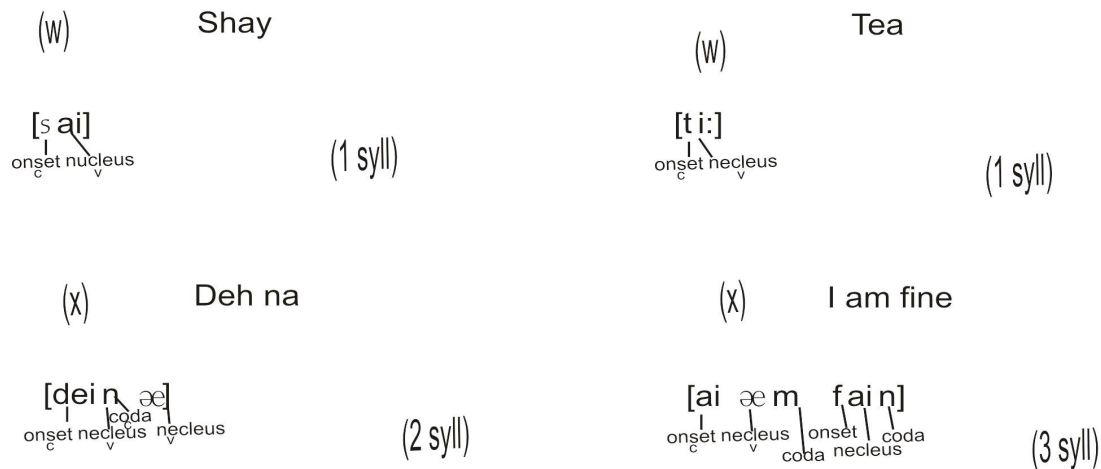
(u) please



(v) be ko lo

(v) corn





These sets of examples revealed a lot of features in Amharic sound combination with English IPA symbols of English language that will enhance the spread if English speakers in Africa can learn it. There are consonant clusters just like we have it in English language. The lengths of the syllables are also similar to the English syllable length if one considers the number of alphabets that make a syllable in Amharic language (the sounding of the Amharic words).

The choice of masculine and feminine gender options does not affect understanding of the pronunciation because mostly few sounds alteration occurs to denote the gender of the person being addressed. (However, on telephone the acoustic signal may be misinterpreted because sometimes a female voice is mistaken for a male speaker and vice versa. This does not downplay the beauty of the language as the acoustic effects are very interesting in sonority, amplitude frequencies and pitch. These can be measured in decibels e.g cpc hertz (cycles per seconds). A tool for measuring loudness and pitch of sound in the laboratory. The musicality effects attached to the online teaching of Amharic for kids in the ha ha se formerly online even make it more interesting to learn. As it is any second

learner of a language learns exactly like a child that is from the beginner class. 'The alphabet' just like English, the selected scripts (keelem) revealed phonotactics of an intervocalic sound (nucleus and semivowels (i.e. syllabic ovoid w, r, j and ambisyllabic sounds (i.e sound that function in preceding and syllables that is next. There is aspiration of sounds, assimilation and co-occurrence in some pronunciation that occur if a drastic step to have a national language for Africa, the colonial languages will continue to dominate and the problems of proficiency will continue to stay nate development of people. The fact remains that English as a world language is serving good purpose of bridging linguistic gaps in multilingual, multicultural African nations, however an evolved Africa language too can suffice, perhaps Amharic language of Axum Origin in Ethiopia. There are long and many syllables representing words in Amharic and English. Also, there are some words in Amharic that share pronunciation and meanings, or pronunciation with different meanings for instance:

Shay (Amharic) Shai (Nigeria Hausa language)
Both languages pronounce them as (jai)
Mean - tea

Karya Amharic

kaya (Nigeria Hausa language)
(pepper)
load

Both languages pronounce them as (k a i j a)
(2 sylls)

Mean - load

4. CONCLUSION

Since many countries like Ethiopia, Canada, Argobba, Awngi, Blin, Dizin, Harari, Inor, countries outside Africa are already using the Geez alphabet in their countries it is likely to serve wider countries in Africa to the extent that it can serve as a lingua franca for Africa in general, as the language of the AU during annual summit (starting from there)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amharic language can be adopted by other African nations, first as an official language side by side with colonial languages where they exist.
- English can be used to teach Amharic to achieve a faster spread while the Geez alphabet can be introduced as teaching progresses in schools
- The education policies of African nations can include Amharic language, while the language policy should make provisions for facilities, fiscal and human resources for teaching take off in African continents, if it is eventually adopted for education and spoken media widely in Africa
- Other indigenous languages can also be used to avoid politicizing Amharic inclusion

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