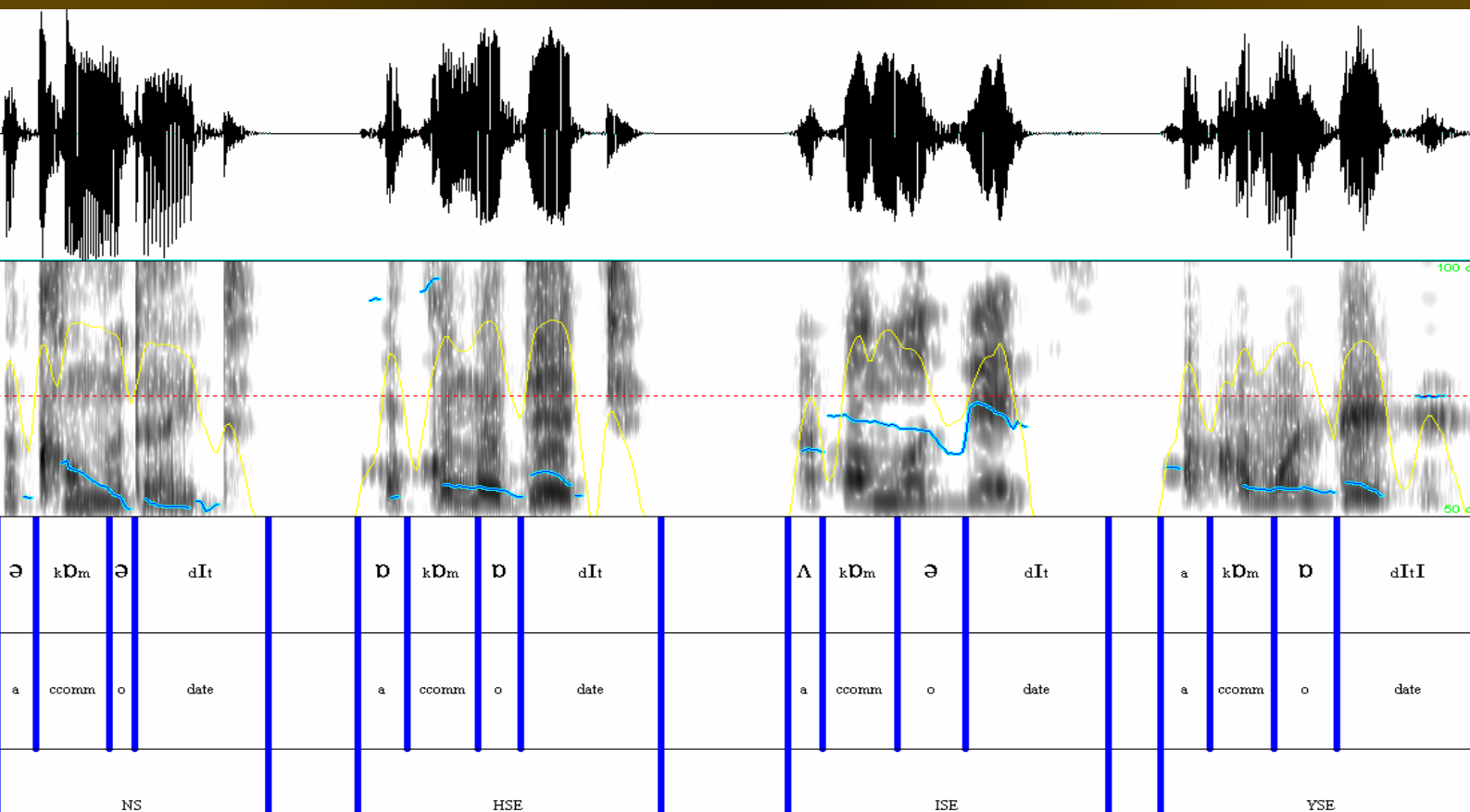


Research in English and Applied Linguistics  
REAL Studies 2

# The Stress Pattern of Nigerian English

## An Empirical Phonology Approach



Demola Jolayemi



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**An Empirical Phonology Approach**

**‘Demola Jolayemi**

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## *DEDICATION*

JEHOVAH JIRE  
THE VIGOUR OF MY ENDEAVOURS

DR. (MRS.) MARY OLUFUNMILAYO TINUOYE  
WHO STARTED  
BUT COULD NOT COMPLETE  
THE SUPERVISION  
OF THIS DISSERTATION

MY FATHER, PASTOR EVANGELIST  
JOSEPH AINA JOLAYEMI  
WHO, AT HOME  
UNDER A HEAVY DOSAGE OF THE CANE,  
TAUGHT ME  
OVER THREE AND A HALF DECADES AGO  
THE ENGLISH PARTS OF SPEECH...  
AND WHO SLEPT IN THE LORD  
BEFORE THE END OF THIS WORK

PROF. PASTOR EMMANUEL EFUROSIBINA ADEGBIJA  
A MENTOR AND SUPERVISOR WHO LEFT TOO SOON  
FOR HIS RIGHTFUL ABODE



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**'Demola Jolayemi (Ph.D. English Linguistics)**  
**Chemnitz, Germany**



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# ABSTRACT

Experts have established that Nigerians use a variety of English called “Nigerian English” (NE). The variety has become so systematic that attention of researchers has been drawn to the identification, codification and standardisation of the genres of NE. Consequently, the goal of this study was to investigate, empirically and acoustically, the stress pattern of Nigerian English with the aim of knowing whether there was homogeneity of stress pattern among Nigerian Speakers of English (NSE), and to determine if Nigerian Speakers of English operated a different pattern from Received Pronunciation (RP).

The discussion of stress patterns of NE in the study was based on the theoretical framework of metrical phonology. The approach excels, among other competing ones, on the basis of its explicitness in showing, graphically and diagrammatically, the difference in the stress pattern of Received Pronunciation (RP) and Nigerian English (NE). The acoustic analysis was based on the popular model of Source-Filter Theory which accounts for speech production emerging from the larynx through the filtering vocal tract to the outer world. Twenty-one (21) null hypotheses, made up of five major and sixteen sub-hypotheses, were formulated. Nine hundred (900) respondents comprising 300 Hausa Speakers of English (HSE), 300 Igbo Speakers of English (ISE) and 300 Yoruba Speakers of English (YSE) took part as respondents. In addition, a Native speaker of English (NS) was involved in the research to supply a collection of tape-recorded texts similar to those of the main respondents. Two hundred texts consisting of 20 phrases and 180 words were given to each of the respondents to read aloud. The responses were scored using RP as the standard. These scores were tested by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Duncan’s Multiple Range Test (DMRT) statistics. Lastly, some selected responses were digitised and analysed by Visi-Pitch Machine for graphical and PRAAT (version 4.404) for acoustic explications of the sound signals produced by the recorded utterances.

From the above analysis, it was discovered that homogeneity did not exist among the Nigerian Speakers of English on the basis of ethnicity but existed on the basis of educational levels. Also, while there was consistency in the stress placement of English utterances among Hausa Speakers of English, there was none among Igbo Speakers of

English and Yoruba Speakers English. Thus, the study empirically concluded that there was no homogeneity in the stress pattern of English among Nigerian Speakers of English. This result shows that, contrary to common opinion, Nigerians do not award stress on the same syllable of an English utterance. However, some NE stress pattern was found to be relatively similar but not statistically significant. In such cases, the study discovered that there was a general tendency of stress spread or what could be referred to as “multiple stressing”. This happened such that an utterance that should attract a primary stress on a syllable attracted two or sometimes three on different but contiguous syllables partly due to the failure of reducing vowels, consonant deletion and the inherently syllable-timed nature of the indigenous languages compared with the stress-timed nature of the target language. The study equally discovered that NE stress pattern experienced many primary stress shifts from the appropriate syllable to either the initial, antepenultimate, penultimate or final positions. The study provided appropriate acoustic evidence for this category of stress pattern using the measurements of the acoustic signals based on duration, intensity and fundamental frequency ( $F_0$ ). The study also discovered an emergence of pseudo-suffixes in NE stress pattern. Lastly, it was found that NE stress pattern operated re-ordered English Stress Rules such that the Compound Stress Rule (CSR) was replaced with the phrasal stress rule Nuclear Stress Rule (NSR) and vice versa such that compound rules were imposed on phrases and phrasal rules on compounds; these were captured in the Nigerian English Stress Rules (NESR) formulated in the study.

It is hoped that this empirical-acoustic study will contribute towards changing the impressionistic postulations made by scholars on the stress pattern of English among Nigerian users. It is expected that NE stress rules formulated in the study, in line with the guidelines of metrical phonology, will go a long way in standardising this variety of English. Equally, it is hoped that the use of the Visi-Pitch Machine and audio tools made clearer and graphical, the differences in the stress pattern(s) between RP and NE on the one hand and among the Nigerian Speakers of English on the other. Also, the avalanche of acoustic evidence through the analysis of duration, intensity and  $F_0$  of the data provided to support the identified stress pattern through PRAAT is instructive. The study suggested that further research should be done to validate the present one. This could be achieved by involving not only respondents with an Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba background, but also others such as Edo, Efik, Urhobo, Ijo, Ogori, Tiv, Ebira, Nupe and Fulfude. The data from them could be analysed by various other speech tools and programs. Lastly, it was suggested that a study of this type be done among other English speaking countries in Africa to investigate the possibility of an emerging African English.



# CHAPTER ONE:

## *INTRODUCTION*

### 1.1 English in Nigeria

Following the scramble for and partition of the African and Asian states among the European powers, there was a series of meetings between 1884 and 1887. These meetings usually referred to historically as the Berlin Conference settled, amicably, the disagreements among the European powers over the control of an already occupied territory; Otto von Bismarck of Germany headed the conference. This meeting sealed the agreement that brought Nigeria (then Niger Area) under the authority of the British Empire. After this period, Nigeria became "...the largest British Colonial Territory" (Odumuh 1987:9).

However, long before this legal partitioning, Nigeria had had contacts with Europe, as early as the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Odumuh (1987) reports that the first set of English ships visited Nigeria in 1553 (p. 9); Kachru (1995) corroborates this when he reports that Nigeria and Europe had established trade contacts, especially in precious metals, ivory and salves, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By these contacts, there was no doubt that a language of communication had to be forged, thus English emerged as this tool, and began to be used in the country.

Experts have explained the various factors that promoted the introduction, establishment and expansion of English in Nigeria one of which was through the administrative policy introduced by the colonial officers. Odumuh (1987) reports that:

The English language (and English Culture) is analogous (sic) to the District Commissioners (later known as the District Officers): it constituted an unelectable consideration in every thought, word and move. It was as ubiquitous. The colonial administration remains the single greatest carrier of English Language and Culture (p.10).

What Odumuh claims here is that, of all the factors that contributed to the growth of English in Nigeria, the colonial administration alone seemed to have played the most role in

the introduction and establishment of English language in Nigeria. The language of the rulers was English, and as there was the obvious need for constant interaction between the ruled and the rulers, English served this purpose. For official purposes, District Officers used English with the workers to write letters and memos, records and diaries. During the day-to-day running of office business, English was the medium of communication among the whites and the native workers. Back at home, in various quarters of the colonial administrators and members of their families, many Nigerians were engaged at various levels to give a helping hand to the whites. A number were employed as stewards, laundry-men and cooks, while others as guards, gardeners, horsemen and animal tenders. In communicating with this domestic staff, English was spoken even if the latter did not understand it. However, with constant use accompanied by occasional informal and formal training, the native Nigerians gradually started using English. In this manner, English made its in-road into Nigeria, beginning its establishment and expansion. Odumuh (1987) captures the situation in this summary:

The language of the Colonial Administration (the Civil Service) was English. Not only did the administrators help to spread English language using bureaucratese and officialese: but more importantly in their homes they again did in their interaction with domestic staff-guards, gardeners, stewards etc. (p. 11).

Another path for the introduction and expansion of the English language in Nigeria were the activities of the Christian missionaries, which started at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as reported by Banjo (1995); they were mainly from Britain, Canada and America. For their primary aim, which was the propagation of the Christian religion, English as well as Latin was used by the missionaries with their congregation to preach, pray, and do other church activities. Before the translation of books had begun in Nigeria in about the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English Bibles and hymnbooks were used in Churches. Interpreters often aided the duties of these English-speaking missionaries, but when such interpreters were not on hand, the white clergymen and the natives interacted directly, forcing both interlocutors to acquire the language of their counterparts. Missionary activities often required that the missionaries visit many towns, villages and settlements in the hinterland. During such visits, the whites often interacted with the inhabitants, chiefs and leaders of opinion with eagerness and deep enthusiasm. So, apart from the members of their congregation, the British missionaries communicated in English with all these groups. The missionaries who were able to penetrate the hinterland could be described as ‘transporters’ of the English language. In fact, they even travelled to places where the influence of the British Administration was not seriously felt (Biobaku, 1955). Consequently, through the

roving nature of these English-speaking missionaries, the language was further spread across the country, thereby helping to establish and expand English in Nigeria.

In documenting the establishment of English in Nigeria, the presence and activities of the colonial army, need to be mentioned. Odumuh (1987) reports that between 1920 and 1960 there were about 406 military officers who served in the colonial army in Nigeria. The army was called the West African Frontier Force, and all members were British. 1920 and 1950 was the period of occupation when the colonial administration went through the Niger Area subjugating the occupants to the rule of the British. For these raids, members of the West African Frontier Force were largely used, thereby moving and settling at various places in the country. Some of these areas were Lagos, Calabar, Enugu, Ibadan, Zaria and Zuru. In these different parts of the country, the British army officers communicated in English with the people they lived with. In markets and trading, English was used to request and purchase goods. At home and in the barracks, the main language of communication was English. Equally, English was largely used on parade grounds and in the Officers' Mess. In this way, the British soldiers established the English language in Nigeria as interaction and understanding increased between them and the African staff employed as clerks, batmen, orderlies, cleaners, etc.

Furthermore, through trade and commerce, there was an expansion in the transplantation of English into Nigeria as British traders spread across the corners of the country for commercial activities. These traders specialised in the purchase of animal skin and hides, elephant ivory, trophies, groundnuts, tobacco, cotton and cocoa to fulfil the yearning industrial needs of the European countries. Kachru (1995) further establishes that there were trade contacts between Nigeria and Europe. Such trade transactions often involved, among other things, precious stones and ivory. These were materials highly needed on the export markets. In exchange, finished goods such as soap, pomade, beverages and cloth were imported into the country. To purchase these raw materials, the European traders often searched and wandered far into farmlands and villages. Odumuh (1987) reports that for the purpose of exchange in the buying and selling processes, English language was largely used. In a bid to 'do business' with the British, the local natives were very enthusiastic in learning English, which was of course often rewarded by the white traders. In this manner, trade and commerce can be considered as one other factor that aided the spread of English in Nigeria.

Education, as introduced and pursued by the colonial administration and the Christian missionaries, was another important factor that aided the introduction, establishment and expansion of English in Nigeria was. The colonial administration as well as the Christian missionaries reasoned that one way of successfully capturing the entire people of the Niger Area was to introduce a means of bringing some level of literacy to the inhabitants of the area. For the former, it would equip the young natives with the

wherewithal to supply the manpower that was needed by a newly colonised state; while to the latter, a measure of literacy would definitely enhance evangelism. Consequently, both agencies: the colonial administration and the missionaries, took the business of educating the Nigerian natives seriously as efforts were geared towards the acquisition of the 3Rs - Writing, Reading and (A)rithmetic. Above all the other school subjects, the study and acquisition of the English language was given prominence by the colonial administration and the voluntary agencies - Christian Missionaries Societies (CMS). This was evident in the various educational ordinances in Nigeria between 1928 and 1960. Even after Nigerian Independence, the same trend persists, and in a few other Anglophone countries, the English language received the greatest prominence. 'Eastern Nigeria Today' (1957) reports that between 1931 and 1964, there was a total number of 70 British Education Officers with numerous British teachers in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. Of course, in all these schools, apart from English being one of the school core subjects, it was equally the language of instruction at all levels. In addition, between 1940 and 1954 there were establishments of a University and tertiary institutions such as University College, Ibadan (1948), University Teaching Hospital (1954), Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria (1952), Enugu (1953) and Ibadan (1954). In all these Nigerian institutions, the textbooks used to study were published in English; the language of teaching was in English, and most lecturers were, indeed, English-speakers. Furthermore, by 1950, there was the need to train Nigerian natives to begin to hold some key positions in the colonial administration and to handle some professional posts in the growing industries in the nation. Thus, according to Odumuh (1987):

There was a constant stream of able and experienced Nigerians on Government scholarships going to the United Kingdom and America for one year or more: as at 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1954 they numbered 332 in U.K. and 69 in North America and Canada. In addition, there were private students from Nigeria studying in these countries, in July 1954, they numbered 2,064 in U.K. and 214 in North America and Canada (p. 15).

The Nigerians that were sent abroad on Government Scholarships were bonded to return to Nigeria; and on their return took up jobs in the Federal Civil Service at senior cadres especially at Education Departments and Diplomatic Services. In this way, English speakers increased in number nationwide. Underlying this is that they served as an influential model exhibiting good usage at work, home and in their towns and villages. Furthermore, it is interesting at this point to share the feelings of Adekunle (1995) when he discusses the introduction and importance of English in Northern Nigeria. He recounts that:

In 1940, after many years of opposition to the introduction of English into the educational system in Northern Nigeria, the Emirs of six emirates (Daura, Katsina, Hadejia, Gumel, Kano and Kazaure) at a meeting told the Governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, that although they recognised the religious importance of Arabic, “knowledge of English is ‘Ci gaba’, i.e. progress” (file 31727, KNA). English teaching was then allowed in Elementary three (p. 63).

This decision by these wise Emirs finally removed the last barrier that stood against the total conquest of the country by English. On the same page, Adekunle concludes that: “This favourable attitude, which had existed in the other regions of the country before this declaration, persists all over the country today”.

In conclusion, this section has attempted to establish that, since the first contact with Europe in the 16th century, Nigeria has had to cope with English, moving from a foreign language to a second language and finally to the lingua franca of the country. English is so important in the country until the present moment that a credit pass at secondary school final year examination is a major prerequisite for admission into any higher institution.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

It is now obvious that there is no escape route for any Nigerian who desires education above the secondary level from the serious study of English. This has become more compelling by the introduction of a compulsory One Hour Paper in Tests of Oral English by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in West African Anglophone countries, and the National Examination Council (NECO) in Nigeria. Yet, it has been reported that Nigerian users of English bring into the English language the syllable-timed phenomenon of their indigenous languages, thereby committing stress deviations, which have been observed as one of the impediments to intelligibility in English. Fudge (1984:4) observes that:

Because English rhythm is stress-timed, a wrong stressing will lead to a wrong and misleading rhythm, even if the *principle* of stress-timing is correctly handled by the speaker. Comprehensibility depends on rhythm, and therefore, the placing of stress within words can play a large part in determining how well a native English hearer will understand the foreign speaker.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the manner of stress placement on English syllables by the Nigerian users of the language with the aim of finding out the metrical pattern and if this pattern is consistent in Nigerian English. Assuming that the

metrical pattern is homogeneous across the various linguistic regions in Nigeria, this study equally hopes to generate descriptive rules that are capable of predicting and capturing the nuances in the metrical system of our identified variety of English vis-à-vis Received Pronunciation (RP). This, however, does not make this research a contrastive study between Nigerian English and RP. RP has only been selected as an option to serve as a reference standard for the purpose of the study. My overall purpose is the identification and further codification of Nigerian English; but first, I must be certain of the manner of stress specification and determine the extent of homogeneity or heterogeneity among almost all users of English in Nigeria through graphical and acoustic evidence. This constitutes the focus of the study.

### **1.3 Discussion of the Problem**

Nigeria, as a country, covers a surface area of 923, 768km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 100 million, while about 160 million is claimed in public statements by the Nigerian government (Ahile, 2005). It hosts over 400 different languages within its surface area although Gut (2004: 218) has claimed 505. The majority of these languages fall under three different phyla, namely: Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger. Evidently, each of these languages has inherent distinctive features that make one, remarkably, different from the other. One may therefore not be surprised if Nigerian users of English manifest different types deviations since first languages obviously have an influence on second languages.

It has been suggested that stress specification by an average Nigerian user of English does not conform to that of native speakers. This deviation is said to manifest at various discourse levels. Researchers have observed the phenomenon at the word and phrasal levels (Jibril, 1982; Kujore, 1985; Odumuh, 1987, Oyebade & Kawu, 1995; Oyebade, 1999; Simo Bobda, 1995; and Gut, 2005). As an element of lexical identification, stress in English is capable of changing meaning, or making ambiguous some spoken or written utterances if inappropriately applied. Because of this, a number of problems have arisen, some of which this research investigates.

In contrast to previous research, which was only based on little empirical evidence, the current study intends to empirically and acoustically verify the hypothesis that Nigerian users of English exhibit significant stress deviation with the aid of copious data. Another objective of this study is to find out if Nigerian users of English exhibit the same metrical deviations and if stress specification is arbitrary or ordered. In other words, for a given utterance, do the majority of Nigerian users of English award primary stress on the same syllable, or do they manifest arbitrariness in the main stress placement? Supposing that the main stress specification on an English syllable by Nigerian users of the language is ordered