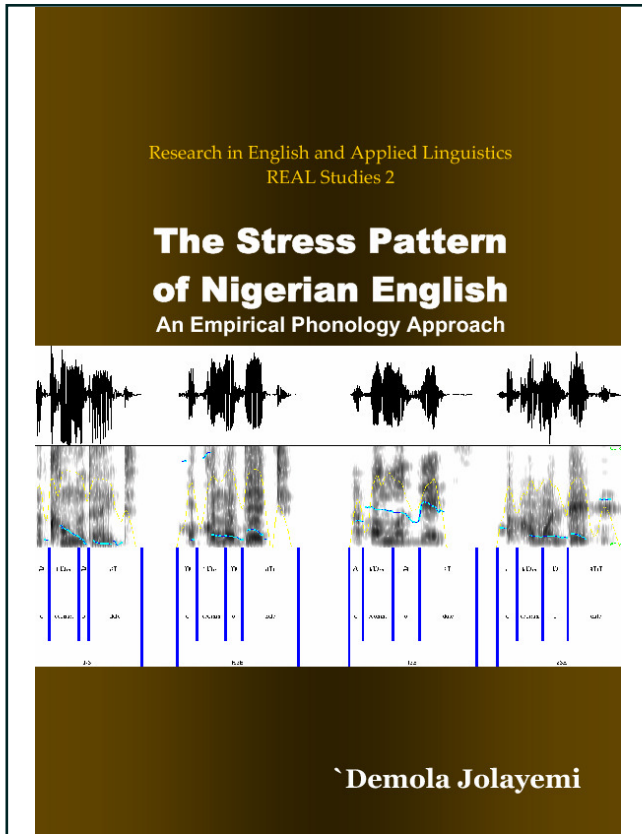




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**Stress Pattern of Nigerian English**  
An Empirical Phonology Approach



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# 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, laundrymen 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

or arbitrary, could there be acoustic evidence to support this from the available phonological data?

Another major problem for this study is to analyse the manner of stress specification on English syllables or words. Stress deviation on a word or phrase in English may appear in two major manners. The first manner of stress deviation is forward stress shift (stress towards the final position) or what Weisser (2001:38) refers to as “right-shift”. Here, a user of English may transfer from the normal position on to the next one or two syllables the stress pattern of a particular word or phrase, thereby shifting forward the stress from its normal position. Inversely, stress deviation may manifest in the form of backward stress shift or what Weisser (2001:38) describes as “left-shift”. In this reverse order, the user of English transfers backward by one or two syllables the normal position for stress specification. Thus, two types of potential stress assignments have been identified one of the problems is to identify in this study the type or types of stress deviation.

Traditionally, function words such as prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, etc. are not usually given primary stress. However, content words in the categories of noun, verb, adjective and adverb are usually assigned primary stress. Therefore, another focus of investigation here is the extent of stress deviation in the above content words. The study will equally investigate the derivatives of these content words as well the metrical pattern of phrases constructed by these content words. This will lead to the investigation of noun phrases, adjectival phrases, verb phrases and adverbial phrases. The last major objective of the study is to generate stress rules that will account for and describe the differences found between RP and the Nigerian English stress patterns. This exercise will be based on the theoretical framework of metrical phonology in generative linguistics.

It has already been established that Nigeria has over 400 indigenous languages spread across the nation. Most of these languages, as reported by experts, belong to three main phyla namely: Afroasiatic, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan (Appendix 5). However, the respondents from whom the data for this study had been collected were speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, which, in the geo-po-linguistic situation in the country, are regarded as the languages of the majority. The Hausa speakers of English in Nigeria mainly reside in the Northern part of the country and have a spread or what can be regarded as areas of influence towards the Middle belt of the country by the boundaries of Rivers Niger in the West and Benue in the East, with Hausa as a lingua franca. Igbo speakers of English reside mainly in the Eastern part of the country with their own areas of influence touching the eastern part of the River Niger by the west, a little part away southward of the River Benue by the north, and spreading close to the Niger Delta. Yoruba speakers of English reside mainly in the Western part of Nigeria. For ease of location, I have attempted to present these spreads in a map in Appendix Six. The linguistic divisions in the map are my own innovation and should not be taken strictly accurate, because doing so may generate



unnecessary controversy, as there has not yet been such an accurate map that shows such divisions. As the discussion of this study progresses, some names of Nigerian towns, linguistic or ethnic groups and the population spread are mentioned. For ease of identification and location, three more Nigerian maps are found to be necessary; these are presented in Appendices Seven (names of Nigerian major towns), Eight (linguistic or ethnic groups in Nigeria) and Nine (the population spread in Nigeria).

#### **1.4 Justification of the Study**

There is an avalanche of the literature on the concept of Nigerian English. Various researchers have done much work on the identification of Nigerian English and published in academic journal articles; (see: Afolayan, 1982; Adeniran, 1974; Bamgbose, 1971; 1983; 1995; Banjo, 1971; 1995; Gut, 2004; 2005; etc.). Equally, a number of studies have been carried out on Nigerian English, which have been reported in various theses and doctoral dissertations, see: Adesanoye (1973), Amafah (1990), Jibril (1982), Odumosu (1991), Ugwu (1990); etc. In addition to the above, a further identification and codification of Nigerian English has been written in many published textbooks, see: Kujore (1985), Odumuh (1987), Jowitt (1991), Igboanusi and Peter (2005), etc. From the above, there is no doubt that there is a rich literature on this variety of English called Nigerian English. However, many of these studies rely solely on intuition rather than scientific deductions. In addition, there is no clear evidence from some of these listed studies that their sampling techniques really cut across the various linguistic units in the country. For instance, Odumuh's (1987) respondents seemed to be sectional, as there is clear evidence that his respondents were mainly speakers of English from Northern Nigeria. Evidence abounds, too, to point to the fact that among studies that can be considered empirical, the sample population does not, at all, represent the target population for the studies. The respondents for the data collection did not represent the social-geographical status of the Nigerian population. For instance, the sample population of Adesanoye (1973) consisted of Chief Judges, High Court Judges and Magistrates (p. 118), while Jibril (1982) admitted about his respondents that "most of the people were public figures" (p. 53). One wonders how this elitist randomisation technique could be a fair representation of Nigerians. Consequently, the extent to which the English proficiency of this group of people constitutes a fair representation of Nigerian English leaves much in question.

Equally, most of the previous research has taken a "holistic" approach in discussing Nigerian English, which make them deficient in rendering a detailed account of individual aspects of Nigerian English. Many levels of Nigerian English (phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic) have been discussed simultaneously, thereby denying the

opportunity of dedicating sufficient time and space for a detailed discussion of each of the levels of Nigerian English. The closest work to what we have in mind is that of Jibril (1982), who examines the phonological variation in Nigerian English. Even then, his work does not reflect a detailed account of the comprehensibility and complexity of the various aspects of the phonological variation in Nigerian English. Neither does he attempt to suggest any descriptive rule that will capture the variations of Nigerian English he identified.

Having considered all the above inadequacies, this study intends to use a more differentiated approach to investigate just one aspect of the phonological variation in Nigerian English. This phonological aspect is the metrical structure of the Nigerian English prosodic features. It is expected that this approach will help to investigate, in greater detail, and account for wider variables concerning the stress pattern across the country among a variety of Nigerian users of English. This is because the study is structured to reflect different geographical regions, languages, ages and educational attainments. Thus, a discrete approach as opposed to the holistic one, it is expected, will ensure a detailed account of the metrical phonology for a valid Nigerian English.

## **1.5 Methodology of the Research**

The phonology of a language has many components, namely: consonants, vowels (the segmental features); and pitch, intonation, tone, prominence and length (the suprasegmental features) or what Goldsmith (1976:23-66) calls autosegmental features. Because of the discreteness of my approach, this study is concerned with the identification of the stress (prominence) specification on the English syllables by the average Nigerian user of the language. Thus, the attempt here is to study the stress pattern of Nigerian English using the model of metrical phonology in generative linguistics. The justification of these sets and types of respondents is explicit in chapter three of this study.

Altogether, a total number of 901 respondents were involved in this study. This number was made up of 300 Hausa users of English drawn from the Junior Secondary three (JS 3), Senior Secondary three (SS 3) in Kano and final year undergraduates from the Bayero University, Kano (BUK), Nigeria. These were of equal number of 100 each. The same type and number of respondents were equally drawn among the Igbo speakers of English from the Junior Secondary three (JS 3), Senior Secondary three (SS 3) in Enugu and final year undergraduates from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Nigeria. A similar type and number of respondents were also drawn among the Yoruba speakers of English from the Junior Secondary three (JS 3), Senior Secondary three (SS 3) in Oyo and Ibadan, and final year undergraduates from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan (UI), Nigeria.