



**WAJER**

ISSN 1119-4650

# WEST AFRICA JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

2002

VOLUME 5

NUMBER 1

APRIL 2002 EDITION



**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR**



## COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND INTONATION AMONG NIGERIAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

BY

BASSEY A. OKON (Ph.D)  
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR  
CALABAR

### ABSTRACT

*The wrong application of intonation (i.e, the melodic pattern of voice fluctuation which a speaker applies while speaking) can result in breakdown in communication or lack of intelligibility. Since this is often the case, the study seeks to find out if there is any difference in intonation between the male and female when they communicate in English. From the two hypotheses used for the study, no significance difference between the male and female speakers of English language was found. Moreover there was no difference in the competence of the Nigerian speakers of English (administrative staff, students and lecturers / different professions) on the intonation tests. The "no-difference" result may be attributed to the fact that the English language does not have its origins in Nigeria. In spite of the "no-difference" in the result of this study it was, however, recommended that the teaching of intonation should start at the pre-primary and primary levels of education.*

### INTRODUCTION

In a multilingual country like Nigeria, English is a medium of communication, administration and education. The English language as a medium of communication must integrate itself into the linguistic and socio-cultural environment of Nigeria so that the Nigerian learner of English can achieve a certain level of communicative competence.

Competence occurs at various linguistic levels viz: phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Communicative competence, according to Williams (1990), is the ability to use language in its socio-cultural, interpersonal aspects, beyond the sentence. He further asserts that communicative competence involves the use of language in extended discourse for various

kinds of social interaction. Communicative competence as a form of knowledge performs a major role as it determines what forms are used and in what ways they are used in production.

To further buttress the notion of communicative competence, Schachter (1990) asserts that competence is a system (or systems) of constitutive rules that provide the speaker with criteria to decide what is grammatical, acceptable and appropriate and what is not. Here, the concept of appropriateness plays a major part in communicative competence because appropriateness employs a tacit knowledge of the language.

Miller (1984) states that there are four components of communicative competence viz: grammatical or linguistic

competence, phonological socio-linguistic and acquired. In addition, Schachter (1990) also notes the existence of another component described as pragmatic competence. Based on the foregoing, the Nigerian speaker of English must imbibe the different components of communicative competence in order to use the English language effectively in a non-native environment such as in Nigeria. In agreement with Miller, Brumfit and Mitchell (1990:137) who cite Davies (1989) state that though communicative competence itself is language use, it should specifically reflect,

**The use of language rules which is in part knowledge... and in part control of fluency.**

From the foregoing, communicative competence is integrative as it combines the attitudes, values and motivation of a speaker (Hymes 1972). Therefore, for a Nigerian learner of English to achieve communicative competence She/he must apply the rules of phonology, syntax, semantics as well as the socio-cultural rules in the environment. The socio-cultural rules involve the appropriate use of language (Stevick 1988). This appropriateness takes into consideration the social context in which language is used. That is to say, the learner must note the significance of these factors, participants (status and roles), purpose of interaction, by knowing what to say and how to say it.

Intonation on the other hand, is the melodic pattern produced by the variation in pitch of the voice during speech. Intonation embraces accent and it varies in terms of pitch direction and pitch

range, variation in loudness, duration and rhythm (Crystal 1973). In this case, the pitch of the voice moves upwards or downwards, that is, it could move first upwards and then downwards. This change is made possible in that the movement can begin on a stressed syllable and end on the unstressed syllable. The stress always on the word(s) or syllable(s) that, give prominence to the sentence. O'Connor and Arnold (1973:40) define intonation as:

**Pitch patterns of spoken English, the speech tunes or melodies, the musical features of English**

They illustrate three basic elements in the nature of intonation thus: "it is significant, is systematic and is characteristic". Intonation, as observed by O'Connor and Arnold performs basic functions. In agreement with Kingdon, (1958) O'Connor and Arnold (1973) observe that intonation can be used to differentiate utterances into distinct classes such as: questions, statements, imperatives, salutations, apologies and exclamations. These are not the only functions of intonation for as Cruttenden (1986, 1992) asserts, the placement of intonation on a particular element is to indicate attention or focus in a sentence.

Focus can be categorized into two viz: the broad focus and the narrow focus. Whereas the broad focus refers to information that is "all new" or "out-of-the-blue" or is said in response to "what happened"?, the narrow focus is only centred on a grammatical constituent which is a small part in the sentence. To elucidate more on this point of 'new', Cruttenden (1986) says that a piece of information, which is new, is

contrastive and would fall within the scope of focus.

To further buttress the significant role of intonation, McCarthy (1991) observes that good intonation has a wash-back effect on articulation. That is to say, in English there is a rhythm or regularity associated with its spoken form. This rhythm is the effect of intonation and its concomitant features. Rhythmicality occurs in various degrees in stretches of speech for example: broadcast talks, fluent reading aloud, speeches and monologues as well as ordinary conversation. In addition McCarthy (1991) views intonation as performing an interactive role as it signals the "state of play" in discourse. Here, the speaker decides how to deliver his/her speech through the various means of application of either upward movement (rise), downward movement (fall) or the level pitch.

From the foregoing, we have discussed communicative competence, intonation and their functions. This section is a foundation to the type of data that will be used and analyzed in this paper.

### **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses guided this study:

1. There will be no significant difference between the communicative competence of female and male subjects in intonation tests.
2. There will be no significant difference among the communicative competence of administrative staff, students and lecturers on the intonation tests.

The two basic concepts in the hypotheses are gender versus intonation, and environment versus intonation. The reason why this study was carried is that some researchers have revealed the difference in the speech patterns of male and female. For example: Morgan, King and Robinson (1979:535) state as follows:

**Girls excel in verbal ability... Beginning about age 11, girls show an increasing advantage in both receptive and expressive language, in both simpler and complex verbal skills.**

In agreement with the above statement, Freeborn, French and Langford (1993:75) state thus:

**Recent research has shown that within any social class, men show a greater tendency than women to use the 'broadest; most regionally marked, pronunciation.**

The present study sets out to find out if the above statements are true of Nigerian (male and female) speakers of English.

### **MODUS OPERANDI**

Thirty subjects were randomly selected from six states of the federation to read aloud texts (sentences as well as speak on the topic "The cost of living in Nigeria". The subjects comprised fifteen females and fifteen males. They were students and members of staff of a Nigerian University.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

For the two hypotheses stated above, t-test was used for hypothesis 1, while for hypothesis 2, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to analyse competence and intonation among Nigerian speakers of English.

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no significant difference between the competence of female and male subject in intonation tests.

The alpha value or level of significance was set at the normal

0.05. The decision rule is reject the null hypothesis if the t-ratio is greater than or equal to the critical value. The result is shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE**  
**NIGERIAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH COMPETENCE ON INTONATION**  
**TESTS**

Variable	N	df	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-ratio	t-crit.
Female	15	28	104.33	52.33	0.6323	2.048
Male	15		95.33	17.33		

$P > 0.05$

With the alpha value at 0.05, and the degree of freedom at 28, the critical value of 2.048 is greater than the t-ratio which is 0.6323. Going by the decision rule, the hypothesis is accepted since the t-ratio is not greater than but less than the critical value. Accepting the hypothesis means that there is no significant difference between the competence of male and female subjects on intonation. In other words gender has no relationship with intonational competence for Nigerian speakers of English. The reason could be adduced that English is a second language in Nigeria and is learnt in the classroom. It could be due to the fact that since most Nigerian languages are tonal therefore both the male and females speak with

the influence of tone on the English language. Because, equal amount of time is spent on teaching both groups the application of intonation.

H<sub>02</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the competence of administrative staff, students and lecturers on the intonation tests.

This null hypothesis was tested statistically using the ONE-WAY ANOVA method. There are three groups: administrative staff, students and lecturers. The scores of these three groups were compared using ANOVA. There were six administrative staff, twelve students and twelve lecturers. The alpha value was 0.05 and the test was two-tailed. The result is shown on table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE IN THE COMPETENCE OF**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, STUDENTS AND LECTURERS**

Source	df	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F-ratio	Critical val
Between groups	2	10359.25	5176.33	1.44	3.33
Within groups	28	97347.58	3605.47		
Total	30	107706.83			

From the table, we can see that the F-ratio (1.44) is less than the critical F-value (3.33). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. That is to say, there is no significant difference in the competence of the administrative staff, students and lecturers on the intonation tests. The implication of this is that the choice of intonational patterns on these three groups does not manifest any significant difference. This result supports Freeborn *et al* (1993:75) observation:

**The higher up the social and occupational ladder... the fewer regional features we find. Thus, although people in professional jobs from different areas of the country may have some pronunciation features that are regional, the differences between them are less marked.**

### PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

It is essential to discuss the pedagogical implication of teaching intonation in Nigerian institutions of learning. Intonation is in-born in the native speaker of English, therefore, the model for a Nigerian learner of English must reflect the local environment and not the Received pronunciation (RP) which is just a social feature even in Britain. The emphasis must be on acquiring the ability to apply

intonation appropriately at the formal and informal levels. The teaching of pronunciation, according to Roach (1991:6):

**... is not popular all the time with teachers and language-teaching theorists, and in recent years it has been fashionable to treat it (intonation) as a rather outdated activity.**

A look at Roach's statement above shows that the teaching of pronunciation (intonation) is not a problem to only non-native teachers of English but also a problem to native speakers of English who are teachers. May it be stated that though, the teaching of intonation is not an easy task, if the teaching and learning can start right from the pre-primary or at the primary levels as the case may be, for both the private and public schools there is bound to be some degree of achievement. For instance, the learner will imbibe the act of using the falling tune when statements commands and also for questions which begin with a question word, that is, 'wh' questions, are uttered.

On the other hand, the rising tune is used for other types of questions, for statements that express doubt or politeness. Furthermore, Taylor (1983:2) states that teaching models should be

based primarily on the communicative intention of the speaker. In addition, the curricula and all the textbooks recommended for English language must provide equal sections to oral English especially the suprasegmentals as they provide in other areas of English language, for example, comprehension, writing etc. We are aware that some English textbooks like intensive English series: JSS1 – 3, SSS1 – 3 take care of the suprasegmentals (intonation among others).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing analysis, we observed that communicative competence which as Schachter (1990:40) asserts is a system (or systems) of constitutive rules that provide the speaker with criteria to decide what is grammatical, acceptable and appropriate and what is not. Intonation is an important and an integral aspect of spoken English, which involves communicative competence, and it must be taught effectively. We would like to state that since the subjects are Nigerians within the Nigerian speech community, the linguistic and socio-cultural elements play important roles in the speech of Nigerian speakers of English. This statement affirms the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in competence of both the Nigerian female and male speakers of English on the intonation test (cf. Hypothesis 1). Similarly, the influence of environment does not affect the performance of the subjects on the intonation tests (c.f. hypothesis 2). In addition, most of

the models in spoken English are Nigerians, therefore, there is bound to be little or no difference in the intonation of the subjects under the study (Okon, 2000:196).

The Nigerian speakers of English display knowledge of communicative competence in their use of cultural conventions and appropriate grammatical choices as was observed in the topic of the study. We have also discussed the pedagogical implication of communicative competence and intonation for educational administration in Nigeria.

## REFERENCES

- Brumfit, C. & R. Mitchell, (1990). Communicative competence revisited. *Language teaching journal for language teachers and applied linguistics* 23 (3), 137 – 138.
- Cruttenden, A. (1986). *Intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cruttenden, A. (1992). Prosody and meaning. In W. Bright (Ed). *International encyclopedia of linguistics* 2. Oxford: Oxford, University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1973). Non-segmental phonology in language acquisition: A review of the issue: *Lingua* 32 (1-2), 1-45.
- Freeborn, D., French, P Langford S. D (1993). *Varieties of English: An introduction to the study of language*. 2nd ed. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Hymes, D. (1972). Communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J Holmes (Ed). *Sociolinguistics*. Hammandsworth: Penguin.



- Kingdon, R. (1968). *The ground work of english language intonation*. London: Long mans Group Ltd.
- Mccarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press
- Miller, N. (1984). Language use in bilingual communities. In N. Miller (Ed.) *Bilingualism and language disability: Assessment and remediation*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Morgan, c. t., King R. A & Robinson N. M. (1979). *Introduction to Psychology* 6th Ed. Tokyo: Mcgraw-Hill Kogakusha Ltd.
- O' Connor J. D & Arnold G. F. (1973). *Intonation of colloquial english. A practical handbook*. London: Longmans Group Ltd.
- Oluikpe, B. O., T. Y. Obah, E. J. Otagburuagu & M. K. Okole (1993). *Intensive English for junior secondary school*. Onitsha: Africana FEP publishers Ltd.
- Oluikpe, B. O., Anasiudu N. B., Otagburuagu S. Onuigbo E. A Ogbonna. (2001). *Intensive english 3 for senior secondary schools*. Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers Ltd.
- Okon, B. A. (2000). The intonational structure of Nigerian English. An *Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation*, University of Ibadan.
- Roach, P. (1991). *English phonetics and phonology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University,press.
- Schachter, J. (1990). Communicative competence revisited. In B. Harley, P. Allen, J. Cummins, & M. Swain. (Eds.). *The development of second language proficiency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stevick, E. W. (1988). *Teaching and language*. Cambridge. CUP.
- Taylor, B. (1983). Teaching ESL: Incorporating a communicative student centred component *TESOL Quarterly* 17 (1) 69-88.
- Williams, D. (1990). *English language teacher. An integrated approach*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.