

# Journal of HUMANITIES

VOLUME 2, SEPTEMBER 1992

- \* Juncture Modification in Nigeria English
- \* Underspecification and the Morphophonemics of Ibibio /k/
- \* Concept and Context in Utterance Interpretation
- \* Standardizing Nigerian English: Problems and Prospects
- \* Linguistic Interference and the Teaching of French in Nigeria.
- \* Case Grammar Today
- \* Functionality of Basic Literacy in Nigeria
- \* Emanation: A Logico-Theological Conundrum
- \* The Canonization of the Old Testament
- \* Interpersonal Communication and Behaviour Modification in the Organizational Setting.
- \* Dimensions of Meaning in Nonverbal Communication
- \* The Traditional Objective of the Mass Media and Views of News Determination: Myth or Reality?
- \* Sembene Ousmane and Family Planning in Africa: The Xala Example
- \* Poetry and the Critical Labour: Language as a Mediating Factor.
- \* Kete-krachi-Hausa Trade and Conflict in the Brong Region Revisited.
- \* Creative Arts: A prerequisite for Science and Technology.

Journal of Humanities Vol. 2 September 1992

## JUNCTURE MODIFICATION IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH

BY

David EKA

### Abstract

It is now generally known that Nigerian English exists as a dynamic and legitimate variety comparable to other new Englishes in the world. The variety is used by Nigerian speakers of English particularly those who are born into, and have grown up in, the Nigerian environment.

There is no doubt that many studies have been carried out into this variety of English. When it comes to features identification however, some available investigations have included sections on juncture raising but the more embracing phenomenon - juncture modification - is apparently a neglected area. It is in this neglected area that this article strives to make a contribution.

As a starting point, the article revisits important matters relating to juncture modification. It then discusses the major issue in detail and comments on its nature of occurrence. The article concludes that juncture modification is the hyponym under which juncture raising occurs. It also summarizes the effect of this phenomenon on speech flow in Nigerian English.

### 1. Introduction

One fact which Nigerians hardly ever deny is that English is one of the languages used in Nigeria. The fact which many Nigerians acquainted with the nature and scope of early European Missionary activities in our country also know is that the English language has been in Nigeria for at least four centuries, its presence being particularly significant during the past two centuries. Yet, the fact which only a few Nigerians now appear prepared to accept is that there exists a legitimate variety of English, which, in keeping with paralleled events in other geographical regions, must be referred to as *Nigerian English*.

It would appear that parts of the problem rest with a good number of Nigerian speakers of English: performance in the language is, as many of us know, quite often below the minimum levels of national and international intelligibility and acceptability. The result is that whenever the variety: *Nigerian English* is mentioned, a suggestion about phonological, syntactic and semantic errors comes to mind. Since Nigeria is a justifiably proud nation in many ways, it makes some sense to try to avoid mentioning or accepting anything that seems below the dignity of the "giant of Africa." Such thinking is attitudinal however, and is therefore irrelevant in a purely linguistic and to a large extent logical matter such as this.



Two short illustrations - one logical, the other linguistic - will readily provide enlightenment. First, if we restructured the first three sentences of this introduction into propositions, we would have the following:

- (i) English is used in Nigeria.
- (ii) It has been with us for at least four centuries.
- (iii) Therefore, English in Nigeria has not developed features which can mark it out as Nigerian English. Anybody who has an idea about the structure of a logical argument will see that in the above structure, the conclusion (third proposition) does not follow from the two preceding propositions (premises).

The argument is therefore invalid. To ensure that the conclusion follows from the premises, we must remove the negation and thus have the conclusion: "Therefore, English in Nigeria has developed features which mark it out as Nigerian English." By this argument (now made valid) we are pointing out that the existence of Nigerian English is an inescapable fact. Secondly, if we went by the normal behaviour of languages in contact, we would see that any language that gets in contact with another language outside its original home is bound to acquire the characteristics (cultural and physical) of its new environment. Since English has been with us in Nigeria from about the 16th century, it is bound to acquire the characteristics of the Nigerian environment.

If the argument is that there are very many Nigerian languages all of which influence the English language making it difficult for one to imagine one Nigerian variety of English, then the explanation is: no spoken language ever exists in a unified form. In Nigeria however, despite the numerous ethnolinguistic influences, Nigerian English still has common core features. It would, of course, be a different language if it did not have links with the other world Englishes.

Actually, debates about the existence of a Nigerian variety of English were popular in the 1960s and the 1970s. But we have revisited the issue because we are convinced that there is a need to reawaken interest in the matter even today: some of my colleagues (particularly those in other disciplines), some of my students and some of my friends in responsible positions still think they speak British English, BBC English, Queen's English and worse still, Received Pronunciation (RP)! Revisiting the issue will then serve as a reminder that it is, for example, neither possible nor necessary for any Nigerian bilingual (speaking his mother tongue and English) to speak English like a British national. BBC English, Queen's English and RP are ideal standards which even many speakers of English as a first languages ( $L_1$ ) do not use. RP, for instance, is known to be used by only about 3% of people in Southern London! So we have sufficient linguistic and logical reasons to show that a Nigerian variety of English comparable to other world and new Englishes exists. Further support can be received in this regard from a look at other research materials on this matter<sup>2</sup>.

What this amounts to is that Nigerian English is a linguistic reality. No Nigerian speaker of English (born in Nigeria and brought up in Nigeria), can deny its existence and make logical, linguistic or academic sense.

## 1.2 Further Direction

Our concern then with juncture and its modification naturally presupposes our concern with Spoken Nigerian English. As shown already, no spoken language ever exists in a unified form: it is always a continuum ranging from the performance of those most experienced to those least experienced, in it. In a second language ( $L_2$ ) situation, the continuum has generally tended to be from the nonstandard performance to the one nearest to the target - the  $L_1$  standard. Although our concern in this article is not primarily with the sub-varieties within the variety called Nigerian English, it is important to mention that studies have isolated four sub-varieties - the Nonstandard Variety, the Basic Variety, the Educated Variety and the Sophisticated (Nearnative) variety<sup>3</sup>. Juncture modification will then accordingly be discussed as a nonrandom feature of the Nonstandard and the Basic Varieties respectively and as a random "feature" of the Educated and the Sophisticated varieties<sup>4</sup>. Also, since juncture is essentially a phenomenon relating to the syllable, we shall first briefly discuss syllable structure and syllable juncture in English.

## 1.3 The Syllable: Nature, Structure and Juncture in English

### 1.3.1 Nature and Structure

One way to explain the term "syllable" is to see it as the smallest utterance realized with one pulse of breath. From a consideration of its function at the phonological rank scale, it is the unit that comes between the phoneme and the foot. It has the vowel as the mandatory component of its structure. Thus, if we consider *oh* to be an English word, it would be seen as having a syllable with only a vowel /*ɔʊ* and a structure: O V O. More often however, the syllable in English consists of various combinations of the vowel and the consonant. A few examples of such combinations include:

C V O as in tea	/ti:/
C V C as in bed	/bed/
C C V O as in plea	/pli:/
C C V C as in speed	/spi:d/

The longest syllable in English is generally seen as one with three initial consonants, a vowel and four final consonants. A composite or hypothetical syllable structure in English may then be shown thus:

(C) (C) (C) V (C) (C) (C) (C)

or more precisely as:

$C_{o_3}$  V  $C_{o_4}$

### 1.3.2 Juncture

We have already stated that juncture is concerned mainly with the syllable. However, as the examples cited in 1.3.1 above indicate, it is also concerned with words, particularly monosyllabic ones. The juncture, (the boundary or the division) of the syllable is primarily determined by the chest-pulse during pronunciation. Thus, for words like: *establish*, *essential*, *recognition*, *David*, *Janet*, *guarantee*, *insensibility* the normal chest-pulse will indicate the following junctures:

1. es - tab - lish (three syllables);
2. es - sen - tial (three syllables);



3. rec - og - ni - tion (four syllables);
4. Dav - id (two syllables);
5. Jan - et (two syllables);
6. guar - an - tee (three syllables);
7. in - sen - si - bil - ity (five syllables)'.  
'

In monosyllabic and sometimes disyllabic words such as *Jane, house, book, win, wine, winner, day, foot, pot, stuff* juncture can be discussed only when the words function in association with other words. Thus, we can have the following pairs:

8. win as day,
- 8(a) winners day;
9. that's tough,
- 9(a) that stuff;
10. Hot's pot,
- 10(a) hot spot.
11. See Mabel,
- 11(a) Seemable.
12. It swings,
- 12(a) Its wings.

For words of more than one syllable, it is fairly easy to recognize the syllable juncture particularly when the words are realized in isolation. However, it is not easy to demarcate juncture accurately in spontaneous speech since numerous variables will naturally come into play. Perhaps the use of a machine such as the Oscillomink can guarantee precision in this.

For words in association, it is largely the situation of utterance that can give a fairly accurate idea of word juncture. For instance:

- 8(b) Win as day  
could be the beginning of a wish whose context had been determined by an earlier discussion:
- 8(c) Win as day advances! This would naturally contrast with
- 8(d) winners day  
possibly suggestive of a particular day singled out for winning. Similarly,
- 9(b) that's tough  
cannot normally be confused with
- 9(c) that stuff  
nor can
- 10(b) Hot's pot  
be confused with
- 10(c) hot spot.

As Gimson (1970:299-300) rightly points out, juncture demarcation could signal a few changes in the quality of sounds. Thus, the vowel in *win* would tend to be fairly longer than the initial vowel in *winners*. Also, the vowel in *that's* would tend to be fairly clearer than the vowel in *that*. These juncture realities tend to occur irrespective of the varieties of English concerned. Because of that, they cannot be said to characterize any particular variety of English: they may then be said to be *English-universal!* What is of concern and interest to us in this article

is the kind of juncture modification that singles out Nigerian English speech from the speech of an  $L_1$  speaker of English, for instance.

## 2. Juncture Modification in Nigerian English

### 2.1 Juncture Raising

The juncture modification that contributes to making Nigerian English different from  $L_1$  varieties for instance is the kind that involves a change in the pitch level at syllable or word boundary. Jibril (1982:308) refers to this change as **juncture raising**, and explains that there is an attested tendency for Nigerian speakers of English to raise the pitch of a syllable after an initial low pitch. This characteristic performance, he further explains, is noticeable particularly when two nouns occur together in isolated pairs of words.

The phenomenon of juncture raising certainly obtains in Nigerian English for there is an attested tendency for Nigerian speakers of English to exhibit the following patterns of pitch levels while realizing words like the following:

13. inspectorate class ( $L_1$ ) LHLL H,
- 13(a) in - spec - torate class (NE) LHHH H;
14. redoubtable lad(ies) ( $L_1$ ) LHL H,
- 14(a) re - doubt - able lad - (ies) (NE) LHH H;
15. esteemable reaction ( $L_1$ ) LHL LHL,
- 15.(a) es - teem - able re - ac - tion (NE) LHH LHL.

In examples 13 and 13(a) above, we find that an  $L_1$  speaker normally has a pitch pattern that is Low, High, Low, Low (LHLL) for the four syllables of the word *inspectorate* and a High pattern (H) for the word *class*: a speaker of Nigerian English normally tends to have a pitch pattern that is Low, High, High, High, (LHHH) for the first word and High (H) for the second. In example 14 the  $L_1$  speaker has a Low pitch followed by a High one, a Low one, and a final High Pitch. The Nigerian speaker has an initial Low, followed by three High pitches. In respect of examples 15 and 15 (a), the  $L_1$  speaker has the pitch pattern; Low, High, Low; Low, High, Low, while the Nigerian speaker has the pattern: Low, High, High; Low, High, Low. All these illustrate the occurrence of juncture raising in Nigerian English, the exception of *re-ac-tion* being notable. Thus, in examples 13 - 15 (a) Low pitches at - torate, (example 13); - able (example 14) - able (example 15) are raised, hence the term; juncture raising.

### 2.2 Other Forms of Juncture Modification

A more detailed study of what Nigerians do at syllable and word juncture in English however reveals that there is more to it than just juncture raising after an initial low pitch. First, juncture raising occurs not only after an initial low pitch, but also after an initial high pitch. This can be seen in the following utterances:

16. madam Joyce ( $L_1$ ) HL H,
- 16(a) mad-am Joyce (NE) LL H;
17. professor Paul ( $L_1$ ) LHL H,
- 17(a) pro-fes-sor-paul (NE) LLL H.
18. doctor John ( $L_1$ ) HL H,
- 18(a) doc-tor John (NE) LL H.



It is also necessary to observe that a realization of the initial words in the pairs:

- 16(b) madam Joyce  
17(b) professor Paul

normally reveals innovative prominence in Nigerian English speech, particularly of non-standard and basic sub-varieties:

- 16(c) madAM (NE),  
16(d) MADam (L<sub>1</sub>);  
17(c) PROfessor (NE),  
17(d) profESor (L<sub>1</sub>).

As can be easily observed, these and similar instances of innovative prominence precede the instances of juncture raising and so may best be jointly covered under the term *juncture modification*.

Secondly, instances of juncture lowering are also attested. For instance, with the pairs:

19. calendar month (L<sub>1</sub>) HLL H,  
19(a) cal-en-dar month (NE) LHHL;  
20. incisive show (L<sub>1</sub>) LHL H,  
20(a) in-cis -ive show (NE) LHH L;

a Low pitch followed by two High pitches and a final Low pitch in respect of 19(a) above is contrasted with an initial High pitch, two Low pitches and a final High pitch in respect of the L<sub>1</sub> speaker. In the same way, an initial Low pitch followed by two High pitches and a final Low pitch in respect of 20(a) above is contrasted with an initial Low pitch followed by a High pitch and then a Low pitch and a final High in respect of the L<sub>1</sub> speaker.

Thirdly, instances of juncture levelling are also attested. For instance, with the pairs:

- 21 macabre outlook (L<sub>1</sub>) LH LH,  
21(a) ma-cabre out-look (NE) LHHHL;  
22. reasonable success (L<sub>1</sub>) HLL LH,  
22(a) rea-son-able suc-cess (NE) HHHHL;

we notice that for 21 (a) above we have an initial Low pitch followed by three High pitches and a final Low pitch as contrasted with an initial Low pitch followed by a High pitch, a Low pitch and a final High pitch. With regard to 22 (a) above, we observe that the first four pitches are High followed by a final Low pitch. This contrasts with the L<sub>1</sub> speaker's initial High pitch followed by three Low pitches and a final High pitch.

### 3. Exponents of Juncture Modification in Nigerian English

The occurrence of juncture modification in Nigerian English may be linked with specific exponents from the viewpoints of nonrandom and random characterization. As Adekunle (1976:35 -36) rightly explains, a nonrandom feature is a feature which is widespread and cuts across the performance of a particular group with which it can easily be associated. A random "feature" on the other hand is not generally known to be widespread and may be idiolectal rather than a reflection of the performance of a composite group. Of the varieties of Nigerian English we have referred to in section 1.2, juncture modification features nonrandomly among the Nonstandard and the Basic variety speakers. Within these

groups, the phenomenon is widespread and can often be anticipated. The phenomenon occurs randomly among speakers of the Educated and the Sophisticated (nearnative) varieties. Within these groups the phenomenon tends to occur infrequently and may be associated with the background of the particular speaker. It is also largely unpredictable within these two subvarieties.

### 4. Conclusion

We have reaffirmed in this article that Nigerian English is a realistic linguistic fact and that juncture modification is one of its features at the spoken level. We have also demonstrated that juncture modification is a highly productive and systematic feature within the Nonstandard and Basic subvarieties of Nigerian English. In those varieties, juncture modification functions nonrandomly. In the Educated and the Sophisticated subvarieties juncture modification functions randomly. This feature of Nigerian English is productive and systematic in another way: juncture raising occurs internally, i.e between the initial and the final syllable or word; juncture lowering occurs mainly finally and juncture levelling occurs both internally and finally.

Three things remain to be added, and these are in respect of the effects of this phenomenon on the melody of Nigerian English:

- i) juncture modification results in the introduction of many clear vowels where unclear ones would have contributed to the elastic (and hence fluent) melody normally associated with the speech of the L<sub>1</sub> speaker.
- ii) It results in perceptually minor increases in sound duration and an eventual slowing down of overall tempo in Nigerian English speech.
- iii) In an unmarked speech, juncture modification leads to unpredictable accentuation and melody in all subvarieties of Nigerian English<sup>6</sup>.

### END NOTES

1. Cf. Russ (1982:11).
2. Among the sources in this regard are Adesanoye (1973); Tiffen (1974); Jibril (1982); Odumuh (1981); Bangbose (1982) and Eka (1985).
3. Cf. Banjo (1971); Eka (1987).
4. For a discussion of the terms *random* and *nonrandom* features see section 3 of this article and Adekunle (1979).
5. The syllable juncture indicated here should not be confused with orthographic split. Each word in English has its own specific juncture which should be studied along the lines shown in this article. Analysts know that juncture should not be confused, with the way the words may be *split orthographically*.
6. For more information on the effects of juncture modification on the melody of Nigerian English see a detailed report, Eka (1985).

## REFERENCES

- Adekunle, M. A. (1979). Nonrandom Variation in the Nigerian English. In: Ubahakwe, E. (ed) *Varieties and Functions of English in Nigeria*. African Universities Press; Ibadan, pp. 27-42.
- Adesanoye, F. (1973). A study of Varieties of Written English in Nigeria. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Ibadan University, Ibadan.
- Bamgbose, A. (1982). Standard Nigerian English: Issues of Identification. In: Kachru, B. B. (ed) *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, University of Illinois Press, London; pp. 99 -109.
- Banjo, A. (1971). Towards a Definition of Standard Nigerian Spoken English. *Annales de Universites d'Abidjan* pp 24-28.
- Eka, D. (1985). A Phonological Study of Standard Nigerian English. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Eka, D. (1987). The Phonology of Nigerian English. In: Odumuh, A. E. (ed). *Nigerian English: Selected Essays*, Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd., Zaria, pp. 37-57.
- Gimson, A. C. (1970). *Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (2nd Edition); Edward Arnold, London.
- Jibril, M. (1982). Phonological Variation in Nigerian English. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Lancaster.
- Odumuh, A. E. (1981). *Aspects of the Semantics and Syntax of Educated Nigerian English*. Ph.D. Thesis, Ahmadu University, Zaria. UMI 1982.
- Russ, Charles V. J. (1982). The Geographical and Social Variation of English in England and Wales. In: Bailey, R. W. and Gorlach, M. (ed). *English as a World Language*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor; pp. 11-55.
- Tiffen, B. W. (1974). The Intelligibility of Nigerian English. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of London.