

# NEW ENGLISHES AND NIGERIA'S LINGUISTIC ECOLOGY: AN APPRAISAL OF NIGERIAN NEWSCASTERS' STRESS PATTERNS AS MODEL FOR STANDARD NIGERIAN ENGLISH

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## Abstract

This study examines whether Nigerian newscasters (NNC) can serve as a model for Nigerian English. One newscaster each from four television stations: Broadcasting Television of Oyo State (BCOS), Television Continental (TVC), Channels TV and Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) served as sampled informants. Disyllabic, trisyllabic, polysyllabic words with different stress patterns from downloaded clips via *YouTube* was recorded on the Speech Filing System (SFS) version 1.4.1 for perceptual and qualitative acoustic analysis. Chomsky's Linguistic performance served as the theoretical framework. Stress placement on the words by the newscasters was compared with the stress placement on the Standard English forms as indicated in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Cumulatively, findings revealed that NNC had 65.8% accuracy in stress placement, with inappropriate use at 34.2%. NNC from Channels had 70%, TVC 73.3% while NTA had 63.3%, BCOS 60%. Thus, newscasters from the private stations outperformed their public counterparts. Results show that NNC can serve as model for standard Nigerian English.

**Keywords:** Word stress, Nigerian newscasters, model for standard Nigerian English, new Englishes, Nigerian English, Nigeria's linguistic situation

## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual nation with five hundred and twenty-two (522) living languages (Lewis, Gary & Charles, 2013). It has been observed that English, which initially came to Nigeria as a foreign language, has been shaped and transformed by subsequent developments into a second language with an official status. English language serves different functions in Nigeria; it is the language of the media and politics, the medium of instruction in schools and a lingua-franca (Adepoju, 2017).

This shows that without the knowledge of this language, it may be impossible people to attain an appreciable social height in the country. The Nigerian society looks up to broadcasters and the language teachers, among others, for the standard version of English language (Adepoju, 2017). Several linguists (Kujore, 1985; Atoye, 1989, Akinjobi, 2002; Akindele, 2008, 2011) have commented on the stress patterns in Nigerian English (NE), and have affirmed the existence of a Nigerian version of word-stress patterns. Part of such claims is that there is a tendency by Nigerian users of English to employ their mother tongue (MT) accent in the production of English words

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(Atoye, 2005a, 2005b; Akindele, 2008). However, the extent of conformity of Nigerian newscasters who have relative competence and proficiency for Standard British English (SBE) and are supposed to serve as model for standard NE has been scantily researched. The objectives of this investigation are to find out the extent of conformity of Nigerian newscasters' stress pattern with Standard English form, and whether Nigerian newscasters can serve as model for Standard NE. To achieve these objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does the English word stress pattern of Nigerian newscasters, private and public, conform to SBE?
2. Is there any difference in the placement of English word stress patterns between private and public Nigerian newscasters?
3. Can Nigerian newscasters' word stress patterns serve as the model for NE word stress?

## **2. New Englishes and Nigeria's Linguistic Ecology**

The spread of the English language globally has brought about the term "new Englishes". Evidence of this world-wide phenomenon of language contact, variation and change is seen through such designations as Nigerian English, Australian English, Cameroon English, etc. The various varieties of "World Englishes" differ from Standard British English (SBE) at different levels of language organization. Adebija (2004) opines that NE differs systematically from SBE at the levels of phonology, vocabulary, syntax and semantics. Thus, some marked differences have been observed with respect to the suprasegmentals of stress, tone, rhythm and intonation in the prosody of SBE and NE (Akinjobi, 2004; Oladipupo, 2008; Akindele, 2011, 2018, 2020; Jowitt, 2020).

Nigeria has a linguistic situation that is complex. The country has an estimated population of over 140 million people (2006 Population Census) with numerous languages and diverse geo-tribal groups. Hansford and Brender-Samuel (1976) posit 394 groups; Crozier and Blench (1993) claim 440; and Bamgbose (1971) and Adebija (1998) suggest about 400. Lewis et al. (2013) mention 522 indigenous living languages as coexisting with the English language which functions as Nigeria's second and official language. The linguistic diversity in Nigeria is so great that there is no uniform accent among speakers of NE. This lack of uniformity can be attributed to the different linguistic systems that interact with English in the Nigerian environment. Based on the observation that the native languages of speakers of NE characteristically influence their accent, NE sub-varieties corresponding to the different ethnic groups have been proposed (Jibril, 1986; Jowitt, 1991).

## **3. English Word Stress**

English word stress has been remarked to have free distribution (Hyman, 1975). Roach (2010) remarks that the distribution (of primary and secondary stress) depends on whether the word is a noun, verb or adjective, where the primary stress could come before the secondary stress or vice versa. He

states further that English word stress is determined by a) the simple or complex (derivatives and compounds) morphological nature of the word, b) the syntactic category of the word, as already indicated, c) the number of syllables in a word, and d) the phonological structure of the syllable.

The rules, however, are complex and have exceptions. So, it seems more adequate for foreign learners to learn the stress patterns of the word when the word is learned. This further reaffirms reasons why second language speakers of English, especially Nigerians, face challenges regarding appropriate stress placement on English words.

#### 4. Stress Assignment in Nigerian English

The characteristic stress patterns in NE are such that almost every syllable is stressed (Atoye, 2005b). This is a consequence of the fact that in many Nigerian languages, it is only the tonic syllable that carries the tone because it is obligatory in a tone unit. NE is regarded as a variety of “World Englishes” which reflects the socio-cultural sensibility of the Nigerian society. It coexists with Nigerian languages in a diglossic relationship (Atoye, 2005b; Bolarinwa, 2016). Kujore (1985) claims that the most striking characteristic of Nigerian pronunciation is the delayed primary stress, a feature which seems to betray the influence of indigenous languages with the rising rhythm as opposed to the falling rhythm of Standard English. Some cited examples include principal stress falling on the last syllable of verbs ending with -ate, -bit, -sel, -ise, and so on. Scholars such as Adeniran (1979), Bamgbose (1982), Adetugbo (1987), Adegbija (1989), Jowitt (1991), Igboanusi (2001), Akinjobi (2004), Atoye (2005b), Akindele (2008, 2012) and Adepoju (2017) claim that the characteristic features of NE reveal that local influence has subjected English in Nigeria to a systematic and ‘marked’ variation from SBE at lexico-semantic, syntactic, phonological, pragmatic or discourse and idiomatic levels. The peculiar patterns of NE, as highlighted in Akindele (2012) are indicated:

- a) There is a shift of the main stress from the first syllable of a disyllabic word (SBE) to the second syllable (NE):

<b>SBE</b>	<b>NE</b>
URban	urBAN
TRANSfer	transFER
PERfume	perFUME

- b) There is a shift of the main stress from the first syllable of a trisyllabic word in SBE to the medial syllable in NE:

<b>SE</b>	<b>NE</b>
CHARacter	chaRActer
HOSPital	hosPital
INteresting	inteREsting

- c) In some other cases there is a shift of the main stress from the first syllable of a tri-syllabic word in SE to the final syllable in NE. Thus:

<b>SE</b>	<b>NE</b>
TELEphone	telePHONE
EDUcate	eduCATE
Urinate	uriNATE
Interview	interVIEW

## 5. Methodology

The participants in this study consisted of four newscasters purposively sampled from Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), Television Continental (TVC), Channels TV and Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Newscasters from these TV stations were preferred based on a number of notions: a) they are assumed to have crossed the hurdle of mother tongue interference; b) they have been trained and re-trained through regular drilling and workshops as newscasters or journalists who are expected to speak and use the standard form; c) they form the proposition of the classification of spoken English of variety III which gains universal acceptability within the geographical framework of Nigeria, and possess a fairly high level of international intelligibility (cf. Banjo, 1971); d) they represent a crucial part that would influence the future of Standard NE as a variety of “new Englishes”. In addition, the selected stations are assumed to have a wide coverage. One newscaster was selected from each of the stations, while the stress placement of the extracted words was placed at parallel with the Standard English forms obtainable in *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* as control. The test items used were audio-visual clips downloaded through *YouTube* into Speech Filing System (SFS) version 1.4.1 for perceptual and instrumental analysis. Each of the four newscasters’ news production of thirty items was extracted for analysis. The total number of test items of stress placement for all correspondents was  $4 \times 30 = 120$ . Frequency count of the appropriate stress placement on English words as rendered by the newscasters was carried out and their performance calculated using simple percentages.

## 6. Theoretical Framework: Linguistic Competence and Performance

Linguistic competence is the speakers’ unconscious knowledge of the grammar of their native language while linguistic performance has to do with the actual production and comprehension of utterances (de Valenzuela, 1998; Akinjobi, 2012). Chomsky and Halle (1968) opine that:

Linguistic competence is the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language which makes it possible for speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language and to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences (p. 169).

Chomsky and Halle (1968) differentiate linguistic competence from linguistic performance; he claims that the latter has to do with the use of language. He identifies “competence” as an idealized capacity, from the production of actual utterances, “performance”, and that competence, being an ideal,

is a psychological or mental property or function. Akinjobi (2012) therefore notes that the concept will not be appropriate in relation to English in Nigeria where it is a second language, often learnt in school and rarely acquired naturally. The concepts “competence” and “performance” are therefore redefined in relation to communicative competence in the Nigerian context. The fact that English for most Nigerians is a second language implies that the linguistic competence described in generative grammar can only be achieved in their mother tongues, not in English (Akinjobi, 2012; Muhammed, 2017). This study therefore addresses competence in NE from a communicative point of view. A media communicator has often been assessed as a model for language use, which is as result of training and exposure to the appropriate forms of language use through training, retraining and auditioning. This study hinges on the theory of communicative competence as appropriate for the current study.

## 7. Data Analysis

Table 1 and Figure 1 present all the word types elicited from each category across the television stations.

Table 1: Cumulative analysis of the correspondent’s comparative stress placement on word types

Word Types	No of Items	Actual Score	Percentage
Disyllabic	46	32	69.5%
Trisyllabic	26	14	53.8%
Polysyllabic	19	13	68.4%
Compound	21	13	61.9%
Disyllabic variable words	08	07	87.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>65.8%</b>

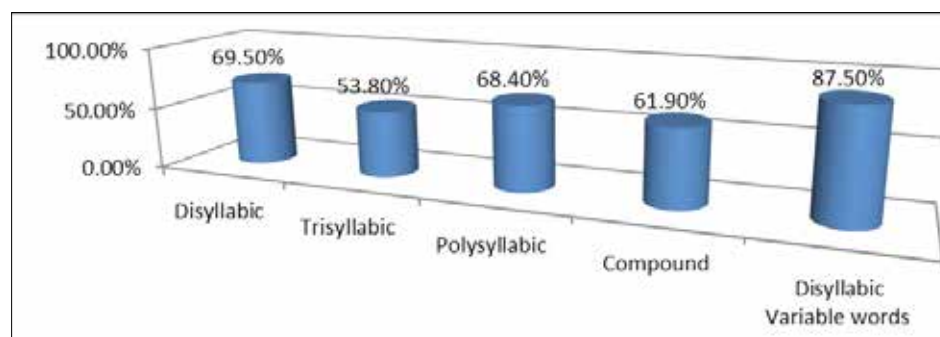


Figure 1: Cumulative analysis of correspondent’s comparative stress placement on word types

The results presented in Table 1 and in Figure 1 show the correspondence cumulative performance across word types: English trisyllabic words was articulated at 53.8%, compound words at 61.9%, polysyllabic words at 68.4%,

disyllabic words at 69.5% and disyllabic variable words at 87.5%.

Table 2 shows correspondents' analysis and results:

Table 2: Correspondents analysis and results.

No	Television Station	Sector	Percentage
1	Channels TV	Private	70%
2.	TVC	Private	73.3%
2	BCOS	Public	60%
3	NTA	Public	63.3%

As can be seen from Table 2, the newscasters from Channels TV and TVC performed excellently, with a percentage of 70% and 73.3%, respectively, while newscasters from NTA and BCOS TV had 60% and 63.3% respectively. Table 2 also shows that newscasters from the private sector performed better than the newscasters from the public sector.

Table 3 presents results of comparative stress placement on the word types for the participant from Channels TV:

Table 3: Analysis of correspondence comparative stress placement on word types for the participant from Channels TV

Word Types	No of Items	Actual Score		Percentage
		SBE	NNC	
Disyllabic	12	12	09	75%%
Trisyllabic	04	04	02	50%
Polysyllabic	03	03	02	66.7%
Compound	08	08	06	75%
Disyllabic variable words	03	03	02	66.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>70%</b>

Table 3 shows that at 70%, the correspondent from Channels TV had appropriate performance on the word types. Out of 12 disyllabic words extracted, correspondent had 9 appropriate use at 75% while 2 appropriate use (50%) was observed for trisyllabic words out of 4. For English polysyllabic words, out of 3 articulated items, 2 (66.7%) was produced appropriately. English compounds had appropriate use of 75% while 66.7% appropriate use was elicited for variable English words.

Table 4 presents results of comparative stress placement on the word types for the participant from TVC correspondent:

Table 4: Analysis of correspondence comparative stress placement on word types for the participant from TVC

Word Types	No of Items	Actual Score		Percentage
		SBE	NNC	
Disyllabic	15	15	12	80%
Trisyllabic	07	07	04	57.1%
Polysyllabic	04	04	03	75%
Compound	03	03	02	66.7%
Disyllabic Variable words	01	01	01	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>73.3%</b>

According to Table 4, the correspondent appropriately stressed 12 (80%) out of 15 items for disyllabic words. For trisyllabic words, the correspondent stressed appropriately four (57.1%) out of seven items. Polysyllabic items had 75% of appropriate use while compounds had 66.7% of appropriate use, and disyllabic variable words had 100% appropriate use. Total appropriate use for English items was 73.3% for the TVC correspondent.

Table 5 presents results of comparative stress placement on the word types for the participant from NTA correspondent:

Table 5: Analysis of correspondence comparative stress placement on word types for the participant from NTA

Word Types	No of Items	Actual Score		Percentage
		SBE	NNC	
Disyllabic	10	10	05	50%
Trisyllabic	07	07	06	85.7%
Polysyllabic	03	03	02	66.7%
Compound	08	08	04	50%
Disyllabic variable words	02	02	02	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>63.3%</b>

According to Table 5, the NTA correspondent stressed appropriately five (50%) out of 10 items for disyllabic words. For trisyllabic words, the correspondent articulated six (85.7%) correctly out of the seven items while polysyllabic words had appropriate use of two (66.7%) items out of three articulated items. For compound words, out of eight words the correspondent appropriately stressed four (50%) items. Disyllabic variable words had appropriate use of 100%.

Table 6 presents results of comparative stress placement on the word types for the participant from the Broadcasting Television of Oyo State correspondent.

Table 6: Analysis of correspondence comparative stress placement on word types for the participant from the Broadcasting Television of Oyo State

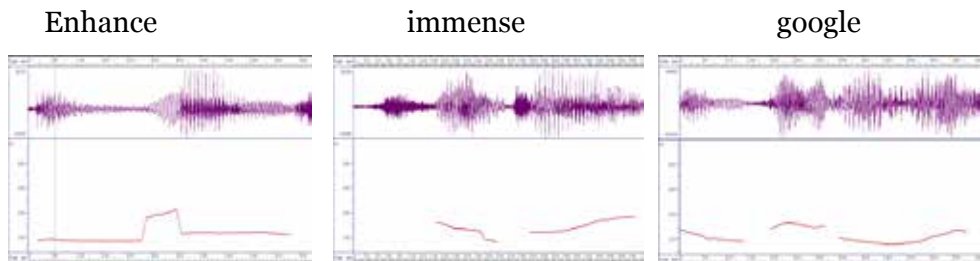
Word types	No of Items	Actual Score		Percentage
		SBE	NNC	
Disyllabic	10	10	05	50%
Trisyllabic	07	07	06	85.7%
Polysyllabic	03	03	02	66.7%
Compound	08	08	03	37.5%
Disyllabic variable words	02	02	02	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>60%</b>

According to Table 6, the correspondent stressed appropriately only five (50%) out of 10 items for disyllabic words. For trisyllabic words, the subject stressed six (85.7%) correctly out of the seven items. For polysyllabic words, the correspondent stressed appropriately two (66.7%) words out of the three items. For compound words, the correspondent stressed appropriately three (37.5%) out of the eight articulated items.

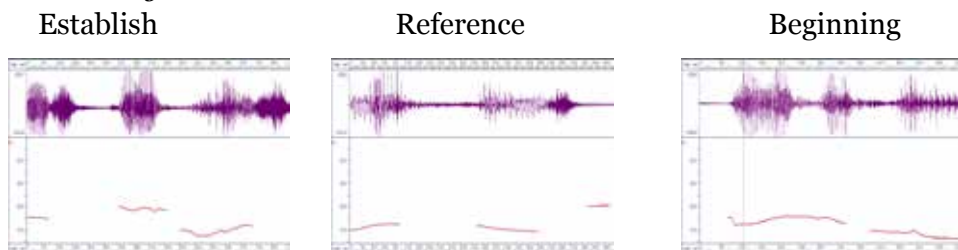
### 8. Instrumental Analysis of Nigerian Newscasters Word Stress Patterns

#### 8.1 Channels TV Correspondent Pitch Modulation

##### 8.1.1 Disyllabic words



##### 8.1.2 Trisyllabic words



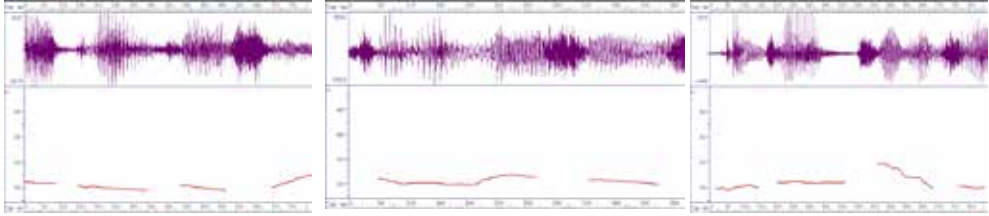


8.1.3 Polysyllabic words

Organization

Television

Interactivity

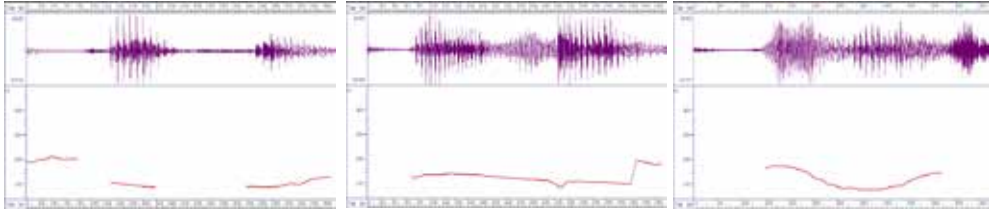


8.1.4 Compound words

Website

Platform

Online



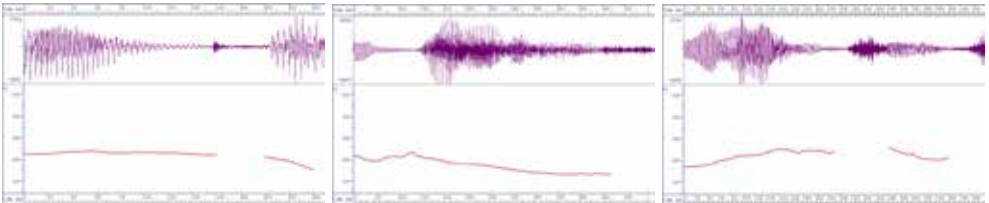
8.2 TVC Correspondent Modulation

8.2.1 Disyllabic words

Powers

Latest

Famous

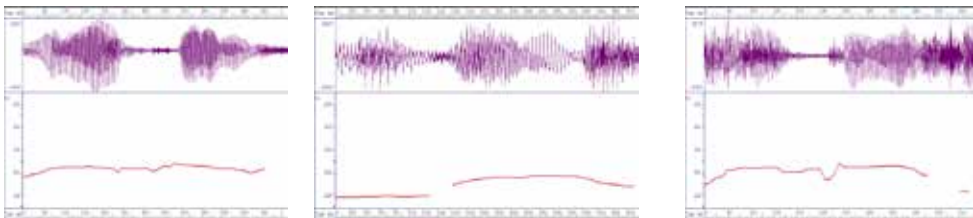


8.2.2 Trisyllabic words

Miracle

Visitor

Vehicle

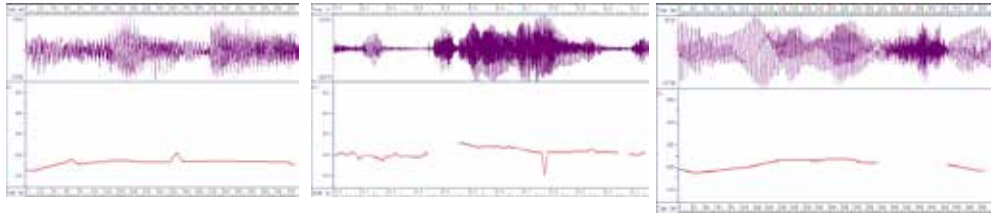


8.2.3 Polysyllabic words

Usually

Materialized

Community

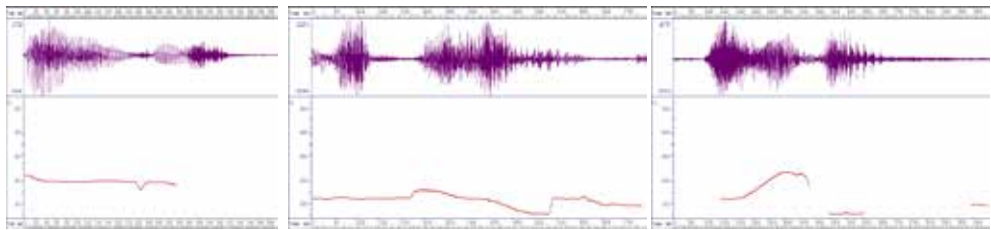


8.2.4 Compound words

South East

Overpowering

However



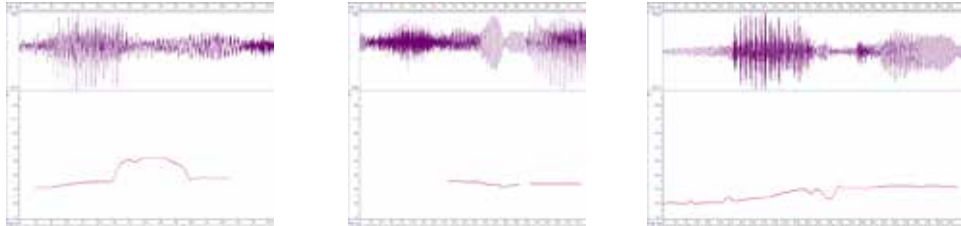
8.3 *NTA Correspondent Pitch Modulation*

8.3.1 Disyllabic words

Centre

Heavy

Traffic

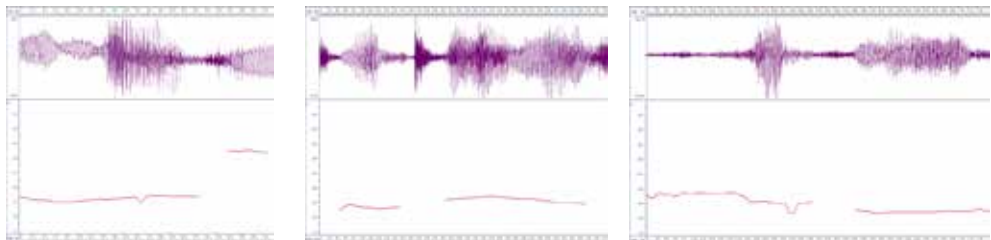


8.3.2 Trisyllabic words

Excellence

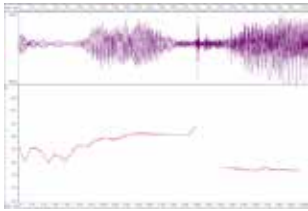
Imagine

Notorious

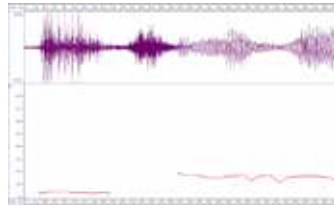


8.3.3 Polysyllabic words

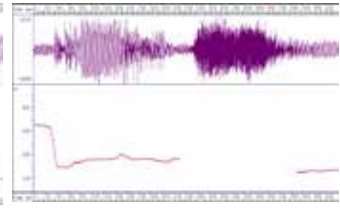
Vehicular



Absolutely

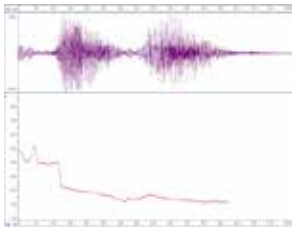


Necessarily

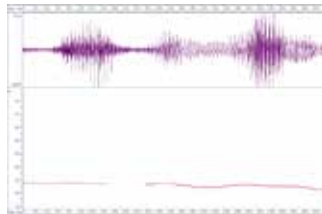


8.3.4 Compound words

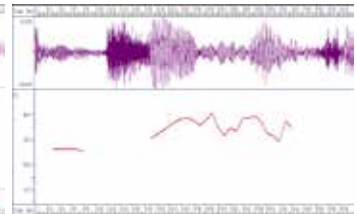
Flashpoint



Motor park



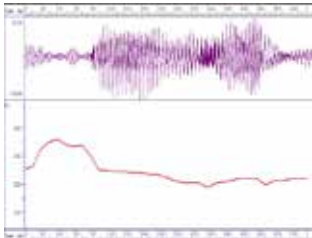
Highway



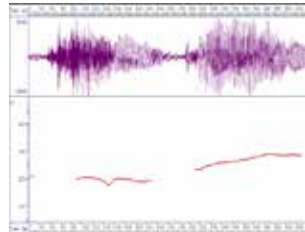
8.4 BCOS Correspondent Pitch Modulation

8.4.1 Disyllabic words

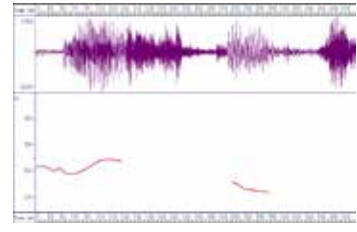
Campaign



Basket

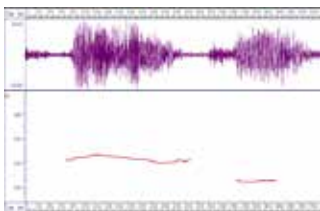


Office

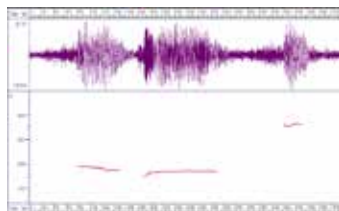


8.4.2 Trisyllabic words

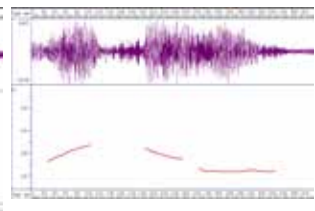
Vehicle



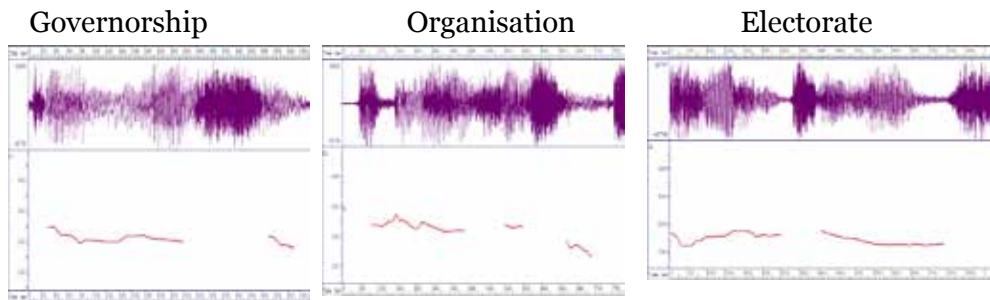
Progressive



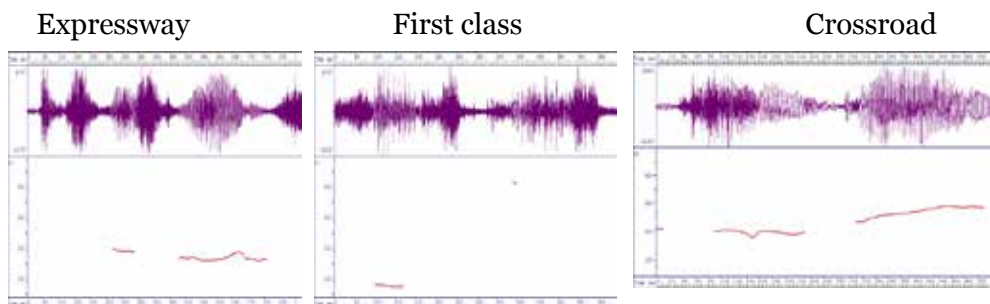
Motorist



### 8.4.3 Polysyllabic words



### 8.4.4 Compound words



## 9. Findings and Discussion

The study found that word stress patterns of Nigerian newscasters revealed a total performance of 79 appropriate use out of 120 (65.8 %) elicited English items. This performance shows that both private and public Nigerian newscasters stress patterns differ from those of SBE in 34.2% of the cases. This indicates that appropriate use of Nigerian newscasters' stress placement is higher compared to the inappropriate use. It also shows that Nigerian newscasters' performance is above average.

It is evident from the findings of this study that there is a bit of difference in the placement of stress on English words between newscasters in the public sector and those in the private sector; newscasters from the private sector were more proficient in stress articulation. The Channels TV correspondent had 70%, the TVC correspondent 73.3%, NTA 66.7% and BCOS 60% appropriate use.

The overall performance of the sampled Nigerian newscasters from public and private showed a 65.8% appropriate use. Acoustic analysis of the correspondents also showed relative application of modulation on the elicited English words, which is a significant phenomenon of English word stress. This performance clearly reveals that Nigerian newscasters can serve as model for Standard NE, especially considering the fact that the "new Englishes" is not devoid of regional variation.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the extent of conformity of NNC to BSE stress patterns and whether NNC can serve as models for the articulation of standard NE. Thirty English disyllabic, trisyllabic, polysyllabic, compound and variable words were elicited from four newscasters from four television stations (TVC, NTA, Channels TV and BCOS) via *YouTube*. The overall performance of the sampled newscasters showed 65.8% performance. With this performance, NNC can certainly serve as model(s) for NE word stress patterns. However, the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission should incorporate newscasters from radio and television media to undergo regular training and be workshopped regularly on developing their spoken English. Special workshops could be fixed with some of the world reckoned newscasters to create more insights on inter/intra-media developments. Furthermore, it was observed that despite the newscasters urge to improve their articulation the elicited words, the production of the news is sometimes visually scrambled or its audio unclear for listeners to recognise or perceive the articulated words. This could inhibit the credibility of the newscasters, as provision of qualitative equipment for transmission of information and communication in the media is also very necessary for qualitative voice production.

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