

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRESS ASSIGNMENT IN NIGERIAN NEWSCASTS AND NEWS REPORTS

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Abstract

Existing studies have observed that stress as one of the English suprasegmentals constitutes a major challenge to Nigerian users of English and that there is a marked difference in the use of stress in Nigerian English and Standard British English (hence SBE). Newscasters and news reporters however are assumed to be models for good pronunciation in the second language context. This research sets out to examine, through a comparative approach, whether Nigerian newscasters or news reporters approximate closely to the SBE in the appropriate use of stress. It also aims to find out whether news reporters and newscasters of private TV stations (hence TVS) do better than public TV stations newscasters and news reporters in the appropriate assignment of stress. Metrical theory guides the analysis in showing how stress is assigned by the newscasters and news reporters. Data was collected through the extraction of news from a recording of newscasts and news reports of six different television stations, that is, three public and three private TV stations. Data was derived from the counting of occurring instances of appropriate stress assignment of words and deviations from SBE pronunciation. This was subjected to perceptual, statistical, and metrical analysis. The results show that newscasters from both private and public TV Stations approximate closer to the SBE in stress assignment than news reporters. The results also show that private TV station newscasters and news reporters generally performed better in the appropriate assignment of stress than Public TV Stations newscasters and news reporters. Thus, this study concludes that Nigerian newscasters from private TV stations (though non-native speakers of English) are models for Standard Nigerian English pronunciation because they all performed better in their level of compliance with the SBE pronunciation.

Keywords: Stress assignment, suprasegmentals, standard Nigerian English, standard British English, Nigerian newscasts/news reports

1. Introduction

Existing studies have confirmed that ‘stress’ as one of the suprasegmental features of English, is not well managed, and poses a challenge to Nigerians as second language users of English. In Nigeria, the English language, which is the medium of communication in business, commerce, mass media, etc., can be said to be situated in a major political history - the settlement of the British in Nigeria as evident during the colonial and post-colonial era. The brand of English known as the Nigerian English can then be said to be a direct product of linguistic nativization of the English language. Nigerian English is also described not only as one of the new varieties of the English language developing all over the world, but as Akinjobi and Oladipupo

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describe it, “a linguistic process which scholars have differently tagged domestication, acculturation, indigenization and Nigerianization of English” (see Akinjobi & Oladipupo 2005, p. 2). The duo referencing other scholars, point out that the local linguistic influences of indigenous languages have subjected the use of English in Nigeria to systematic and marked variation from the SBE at lexico-semantic, syntactic, phonological, pragmatic, and idiomatic levels. This is referenced in the work of other scholars which points at different levels of variation at different linguistic levels (see Adeniran 1979; Adetugbo 1987; Adegbija 1989; Jowitt 1991; Igboanusi 2001; Akinjobi 2012). This view corroborated by Akere (1982:85) also hinted at the idea of ‘Nigerianization of English’ by pointing out that ‘Nigerian English is an aggregate of heterogeneous grammatical structures common to Nigerian use of varying pronunciation peculiarities as well as socially constrained usage of some lexical item.’ This refers to the notion that English as used by Nigerians has varying peculiarities at the syntactic, phonological, and pragmatic levels. The pragmatic level refers to socially accepted norms of reference to a lexical item. For example, the word ‘dress’ means ‘shift’ in the Nigerian context. In the same vein, tracing the reason for the phonological and other peculiarities in English usage in Nigeria, Bamgbose (1971) mentions that this is due to the transfer of features from local (indigenous) languages, where the use of a second language is bound to be influenced by its linguistic environment.

2. Statement of the Problem

Several scholars have explored stress assignment in Nigerian English (Atoye, 1991; 2005; Bobda, 2010; Akindele, 2011; Akinjobi, 2012); prosody in news texts (Alabi 2005) and intonation in news reports (Akinjobi & Oladipupo, 2005). However, there is paucity of literature when it comes to a comparative study of stress assignment in Nigerian news reports and newscasts. This study aims to fill this gap.

3. Aims and Objectives

There is a general assumption by Nigerians that Nigerian newscasters approximate closer to the SBE pronunciation than news reporters. This is possibly so, because newscasters read an edited news draft on the screen, while news reporters interview people or describe events on the spot. This study aims to investigate Nigerian news reports and newscasts, by providing a comparative analysis of these two with a view to ascertaining whether newscasters or news reporters approximate closer to the SBE in the appropriate use of stress. The objective is to achieve this through a comparative analysis that will reflect whether news reporters or newscasters should be considered as suitable models for Standard Nigerian English pronunciation or not.

4. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions.

1. Is the stress assignment in Nigerian news reports markedly different from that of Nigerian newscasts?
2. To what extent does stress assignment in Nigerian news reports share similarities with Nigerian newscasts?
3. Is there any significant difference in the assignment of stress to appropriate syllables of English content words between newscasters/news reporters and the SBE pronunciation?
4. Is/are there any significant difference(s) between the performances of newscasters of public TV stations and newscasters of private TV stations in assigning stress to appropriate syllables of content words in English?
5. Is/are there any significant difference(s) between the performances of news reporters of public TV stations and news reporters of private TV stations in assigning stress to appropriate syllables of content words in English.

5. Situating the study

Going by the classifications of spoken English varieties in Nigeria, both newscasters and news reporters are expected to have crossed the hurdle of mother tongue interference because they have been trained as journalists to use the educated variety which qualifies automatically as Standard Nigerian English.

Examining existing research on spoken English varieties used in the media, Akinjobi and Oladipupo (2005), report an investigation of English intonation patterns of forty Nigerian television reporters from eight television stations in Lagos State. The research investigates intonation peculiarities as well as the extent to which these intonation patterns vary from that of SBE. Their findings reveal a predominant use of the falling tune in sentence final intonation groups of declarative statements and *wh*-questions. It also reveals a predominant use of the rising tune in all instances of sentence non-final intonation groups used within declarative statements, as *well as* polar questions. In addition, the authors reported that news reporters generally demonstrated a deficiency in the use of complex tunes such as the fall-rise and rise-fall tunes. On this basis, Akinjobi and Oladipupo's (2005) study, concludes that "television reporters in Nigeria do not have challenges with the grammatical use of the simple intonation tunes of Standard English but with the complex combined tunes." By this, the duo meant that the news reporters demonstrated appropriate use of the falling tune in *wh*-questions and final positions of declarative statements. However, in cases where they should use a fall-rise tune such as in non-final position in declarative statements, they predominantly use the rising tune. This they describe as "peculiar patterns of intonation existent within the 'Nigerian English linguistic and socio-cultural milieu' (p. 1).

Alabi (2005) further explored the prosodic configuration of select Nigerian news text using the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) news text

as a candidate for Standard Nigerian English. According to Alabi, “in the variety of English typified as Nigerian, the rhythmic variation from the native variety is not that pronounced (cf. Odumuh, 1987, p. 52–54) especially when users render words with correct and appropriate stress patterns in connected speech.” Also, as posited by Alabi, the “correct rendition of word stress stems from the background that every word in the English lexicon normally has its natural stress patterns which users, whether native or foreign, acquire and use” (p. 142). However, he proposed further that “there is only a slight difference in timing which is occasionally observable when a more scientific approach is adopted.” This, he explained, is realized such that “ordinarily, monosyllabic grammatical words should not receive stress prominence in connected speech. However, owing to the constraints of English as a foreign language in Nigeria, speakers seek to use contrastive and emphatic stress a lot, where such are not needed” (p. 142). This explains why a difference in timing may be observed when a scientific approach is used in analyzing English words used by Nigerian speakers.

Furthermore, Leeuwen (1992:239-240) cited in Alabi (2005), also asserted that the “newsreaders and announcers on radio seem to be in the habit of making almost everything they say sound significant, which is done by placing ‘emphasis’ on unimportant words probably to create a sense of excitement that is not truly present in the material in front of them.” According to Alabi (2005) “this pervasive influence becomes absorbed by average Nigerians who see media as models.” They, therefore, “complement the efforts of media workers by internalising and, at the same time, disseminating the ‘artificial prosody’ of the English language in Nigeria as a foreign context” (p. 143). This view according to him is corroborated by Odumuh (1987:54) who notes that, “what seems to be a practically accurate description of the happening in Standard Nigerian English is that the timing is inelastic” (p. 143). The implication of the foregoing according to Alabi is that “prominence is given to a hitherto silent syllable and the effect is that more time is expended on the phonetic stretch” of a word (see Alabi 2005:143).

Alabi (2005) concluded his research by opining that “the phonological features which typify Nigerian English, whether at the level of segmental or suprasegmental system, owe allegiance to the native languages.” These native languages “have similar features of suprasegmentals and tend to influence the prosody of English as a foreign language almost in a similar manner.” Thus, “the Nigerian English syllable system, the phonotactics, the rhythm and the tonal patterns exhibit peculiar traits which mirror the more general patterns of indigenous languages” (p. 151).

Alabi’s (ibid) sentiment is also corroborated in Ufomata (1996) who highlighted that the range of ‘proficiency in English within Nigeria’ is ‘infinite’ (p. 1). According to Ufomata (1996) there is a large difference between ‘mainstream educated spoken Nigerian English, and other varieties which can be defined negatively when examined in relation to standard accents. However, she opined that within educated spoken Nigerian English

for example, it is the accent used by newscasters and presenters which is a near native speaker accent. Ufomata (1996) further observes that this accent is used because it is one of the demands of journalism as a profession. Furthermore, regarding the accusations of sounding foreign and affected, Ufomata (ibid) reported that the newscasters' and reporters' response is that if Nigerian names are pronounced with the right Nigerian accent, their speech cannot be termed foreign (see Ufomata, 1996). In other words, most media practitioners found "nothing wrong with native speakers' accent provided it is comfortably managed by the user; what might be intolerable are people who use this accent with obvious difficulty and sound affected" (p. 1). Ufomata (ibid) concludes that, 'in general, the accent used in the electronic media is not uniform, and that newscasters and news reporters at the national level (urban areas) tend to be closer to native speakers' accent of English than those based in the regions (local areas). Implications of the foregoing is that there is no regularity or consistency in terms of Standard English accent among the media in Nigeria. Also, the English language in Nigeria is heavily influenced by infiltrations from the indigenous languages and therefore it cuts across all aspects of English use such as the syntax, phonology, pragmatics etc.

Akindele (2020) examined Nigerian newscasters from four TV stations in Nigeria. She found that Nigerian newscasters had influence from indigenous languages, and they show a cumulative accuracy of 65.8% in accurate stress placement. She also discovered that private TV stations outperformed their public counterparts in accurate stress placement. Furthermore, Melefa (2018) studied stress and rhythmic pattern in the speech of selected Nigerian television newscasters. His research reveals two patterns found among Nigerians newscasters- the standard accent group and the non-standard accent group. The pattern found in the standard accent group of Nigerian newscasters suggest 'stress timing', while those in the non-standard accent group suggests 'syllable timing.' In addition, extending the research to other African countries where English is not the first language, Lomotey (2018) examined stress placement in Ghanaian English discourse. The research shows that Ghanaians show fluidity and variation in English stress placement. Also, Safotso (2018) studied Chadian learners and speakers of English pronunciation and found that Chadian learners and speakers of English have an English pronunciation that is heavily influenced by French nasal consonants and a rhythm that suggests a syllable timed rhythm. Considering the foregoing, the studies discussed above suggest a case of 're interpretation' (see Alabi 2007:86). This is a situation where a bilingual reorganizes the phonemes of a second language through the phonotactic constraints of their L1.

6. Metrical Phonology

Metrical theory (Lieberman and Prince, 1977) emerged as an offshoot of Generative phonology (Chomsky and Halle, 1968). Lieberman and Prince (1977) initiated Metrical phonology as an alternative approach to stress

description because there was dissatisfaction with the notions of ‘the Sound Pattern of English (SPE) model of Generative phonology (Chomsky and Halle, 1968) which considers stress as a feature of sound. SPE claims that sounds could be described using the binary approach, i.e., as [+stress] or [-stress]. However, Metrical phonology does not see stress as a feature from the binary perspective of [+ stress] or [-stress] but views it as the hierarchical rhythmic organization of utterances. It proposes the following regarding the organization of utterances: segments are organized into syllables and syllables are organized into feet (see MCarthy, 1979). These syllables and feet are replaced by a system in which stress is defined on a tree structure in which nodes are used. These nodes are divided into Strong (S) and Weak (W) nodes. Sister nodes are labelled [S W] or [W S] (see MCarthy, 1979, p. 450).

7. Research Methodology

The method of data gathering involves audio recording of three newscasts and three news reports from six television stations. Three were private and three were public TV stations. These are presented in the table below.

Table 1. TV Stations for News reports and Newscasts

Public TVS News reports	Public TVS Newscasts
PTS 1 - Ogun State Television (OGTV)	PTS 7 - Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)
PTS 2 - Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)	PTS 8 - Ogun State Television (OGTV)
PTS 3 - Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo state (BCOS)	PTS 9 - Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo state (BCOS)
Private TVS News reports	Private TVS Newscasts
PTS 4 - African independent television (AIT)	PTS 10 - Channels TV
PTS 5 - Channels TV	PTS 11- African independent television (AIT)
PTS 6 – Galaxy TV	PTS 12 - Galaxy TV

I gathered data by extracting three hundred English content words from three newscasts and three news reports from each of the TV station’s news extracts. Also, I perceptually counted the number of deviations and words that were appropriately stressed as used in SBE, and those that were not. The words were consequently cross-checked as appropriately assigned word stress in line with Jones et al. (2003).

The research design was mixed, that is, qualitative and quantitative. It was quantitative as it shows a range of numerical data that was used for the statistical analysis of the subjects’ performance in assigning stress to English content words. It was also qualitative as it provides insight into the use of stress through observation drawn from the perceptual analysis. Metrical theory (Liberman and Prince, 1977) was also used in the study, to corroborate the findings from the statistical analysis. The metrical analysis shows how ‘stress’ is assigned by newscasters and news reporters. The column chart was

used to show a graphical representation of the percentage of appropriately assigned English word stress, and the percentage of deviations for each. Those with the highest percentage of approximation, to the SBE stress assignment (that is, newscasters or news reporters from private or public TV stations) were regarded as acceptable models that represent the realization of Standard English pronunciation.

8. Analysis

To determine the percentage of appropriately assigned word stress variable, the total number of appropriately assigned variable items was divided by the total number of test items and multiplied by 100. This is statistically represented thus:

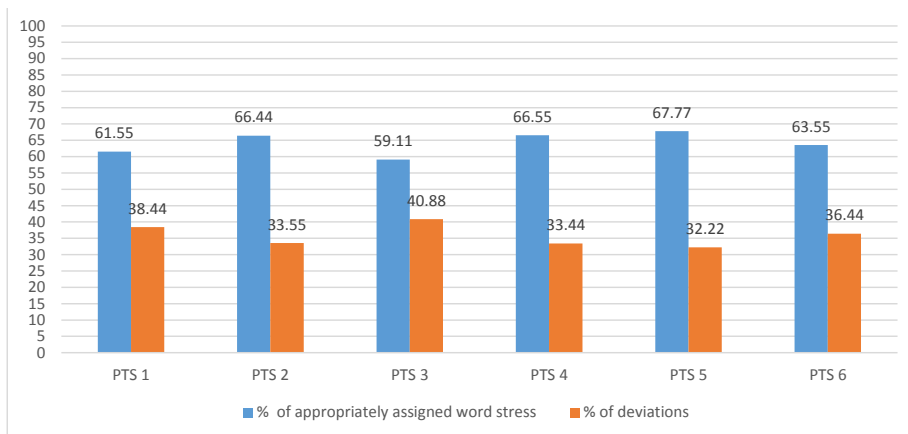
$$\frac{\text{Total number of appropriately assigned word stress}}{\text{Total number of test items (900) words}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

The analysis and findings from the research are presented in the table and figure below, beginning with the news reporters' performance in the assignment of stress to appropriate syllables of English content words.

Table 2: Summary of the Data on News reports for Public and Private Television Stations

S/N	TV Station	Category	Total number of words	Total number of appropriately assigned word stress	Deviation	Percentage of appropriately assigned word stress	Percentage of deviations
PTS 1	OGTV	Public	900	554	346	61.55	38.44
PTS 2	NTA	Public	900	598	302	66.44	33.55
PTS 3	BCOS	Public	900	532	368	59.11	40.88
Total	Nine news reports	3	2700	1684	1016	62.37	37.62
PTS 4	AIT	Private	900	599	301	66.55	33.44
PTS 5	CHANNELS	Private	900	610	290	67.77	32.22
PTS 6	GAL-AXY	Private	900	572	328	63.55	36.44
Total	Nine news reports	3	2700	1781	919	65.96	34.03

Figure 1: Column Chart for the Data on Public and Private TVS News reports



The table and figure above show a summary of the data on news reports for public and private television stations. From the table above, the news reports of public TV stations have an overall compliance percentage of 62.37, while news reports of private TV stations show an overall conformity percentage of 65.96. To calculate the differences between private & public television stations news reports, the TV stations with the higher percentage of conformity i.e. (private TV station) was subtracted from the TV stations with the lower percentage of conformity. Thus, the differences in appropriate word stress assignment of private and public TV stations is 3.59%. This means that there is only a slight difference between private and public TV stations news reports in the appropriate assignment of stress to English content words.

The data in figure 1, shows that PTS 5 (Channels TV- a private TV station) has the highest SBE compliance in stress assignments at 67.7%, with 32.2% deviations. This is followed by PTS 4, (AIT- another private TV station) with 66.5% compliance rate and 33.5% deviations. PTS 6 (Galaxy TV) had the least score with a percentage of accurate stress assignment of 63.55% and 36.44% deviations. However, among the public TV Stations, PTS 2, (the Nigerian Television Authority) has the highest compliance rate to SBE stress assignment at 66.4% and 33.5% deviations. PTS 1 (OGTV) followed as the next in range with 61.55% and deviations of 38.4%. PTS 3 (BCOS) had the least score at 59.11% accurate stress assignment and 40.88% deviations. From these data we conclude that private TV stations news reporters are doing slightly better in accurate stress assignment than their public counterparts.

To show the metrical analysis, some examples are illustrated in the metrical grid below:

SBE:	x				Public Television stations				x
	x		x		News reports:				x
	x	x	x			x		x	x
	pa	ci	fy			pa		ci	fy
	x								x
	x		x			x			x
	se		wage			se			wage

SBE:					Private Television stations				
					News reports:				
			x						x
			x			x			x
	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
	e	lim	i	nate		e	li	mi	
	nate								
			x						x
			x			x			x
	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
	po	lit	i	cize		po	li	ti	cize

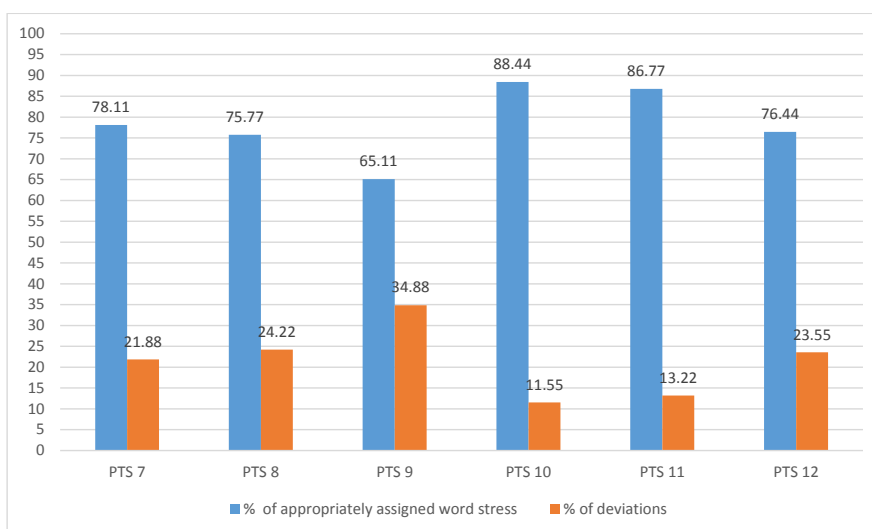
The metrical grid above shows a rhythmic alternation of stronger and weaker syllables in a word, taking the syllable with the highest rows of grid as the most prominent syllable. From the metrical analysis above, both private and public TV stations news reporters shift stress to the right. This corroborates findings from previous scholars such as Jowitt (1991) who postulate that Nigerians in their use of English tend to shift primary stress to the right. The findings also reveal that there is a marked difference in Nigerian English stress assignment as against that of the SBE. This corroborates various studies (Jowitt, 1991; Kujore, 1985; Sunday, 2005; Atoyé, 1991; Akinjobi, 2012; Akindele, 2011) that found that there are instances of stress pattern alteration or reversal, which is attributed to the tonal pattern of most Nigerian languages. Next, I consider the data on newscasts for private and public TV stations.

Table 3: Summary of the Data on Newscasts for Private and Public Television Stations

S/N	TV Station	Category	Total Number of words	Total number of appropriately assigned word stress	Deviation	Percentage of appropriately assigned word stress	Percentage of Deviations
PTS7.	NTA	Public	900	703	197	78.11	21.88

PTS 8.	OGTV	Public	900	682	218	75.77	24.22
PTS 9.	BCOS	Public	900	586	314	65.11	34.88
Total	N i n e News-casts	3	2700	1971	729	73	27
PTS 10.	CHAN-NELS	Private	900	796	104	88.44	11.55
PTS 11.	AIT	Private	900	781	119	86.77	13.22
PTS 12.	G A L - AXY	Private	900	688	212	76.44	23.55
Total	N i n e news-casts	3	2700	2265	435	83.9	16.11

Figure 2: Column Chart for the Data on Public and Private TVS Newscasts



The table and figure above provide a summary of the data on newscasts for public and private television stations. From the table above, the newscasts of public TV stations have an overall conformity percentage of 73%, while newscasts of private TV stations show an overall compliance percentage of 83.9%. The difference between both is 10.9%. This shows that for newscasts, there is a considerable difference between private and public TV stations in the appropriate assignment of stress to English content words. Furthermore, the result of the analysis as presented in table 3, shows that PTS 10 (Channels TV- a private TV Station) has the highest percentage (88.4%) of conformity with SBE in the use of word stress assignment and only 11.55% deviations. Next in rank, is PTS 11 (AIT), with a percentage of 86.77% of accurate stress assignment and deviations of 13.22%. PTS 12 (Galaxy TV) had the least

score with a percentage of accurate stress assignment of 76.44% and 23.55% deviations. Also, among the public TV stations, the table and figure show that PTS 7 (NTA), has the highest compliance in stress assignment as used in the SBE, with a percentage of 78.11, and 21.88% deviations. PTS 8 (OGTV) at 75.77% and 24.22% deviations is next in compliance with SBE word stress assignment. PTS 9 (BCOS) has a lower percentage of 65.1%, and deviations of 34.8%. From this analysis, we conclude that for newscasts, private TV Stations have a higher percentage of conformity to SBE in stress assignment than public TV Stations. To further corroborate the findings, a metrical grid is provided below.

SBE:

x		
x		x
x	x	x
cer	ti	fy

x		
x	x	
x	x	x
so	lic	it

Public Television stations

News casts:

x		
x		x
x	x	x
cer	ti	fy

		x
		x
x	x	x
so	li	cit

SBE:

x		
x		x
x	x	x
ex	ca	vate

Private Television stations

Newscasts:

		x
		x
x	x	x
ex	ca	vate

From the metrical analysis above, both private and public TV stations newscasters again tend to shift stress to the right which corroborates findings from previous scholars such as Jowitt (1991) mentioned earlier. The findings also reveal that there is a marked difference in Nigerian English stress assignment among the media as newscasters perform better than news reporters in appropriate stress assignment to English content words. This corroborates earlier findings such as Ufomata (1996) who contends that there is a lack of uniformity in Nigerian English used in the media. Moreover, on a general note, there is a marked difference in Nigerian English stress assignment when compared with that of SBE. This is what Amayo (1980) & Atoye (1991) describe as 'Tonal English' or a result of interference from native language phonology where bilinguals interpret sounds or suprasegmentals through the filter of their L1 phonology (see Wode, 1978; Akindele, 2011).

9. Discussions

The trends observed from the findings in this paper indicate that stress

assignment in Nigerian news reports is markedly different from that of Nigerian newscasts. This is realized in the analysis where the news reports of public and private TV stations have an overall compliance percentage of 62.37% and 65.96%, while newscasts of public and private TV stations show an overall conformity percentage of 73%, and 83.9%. Also, stress assignment in Nigerian news reports share similarities with Nigerian newscasts in the sense that in the cases of deviations from SBE in stress assignment, both tend to shift primary stress to the right. This is observed in the metrical analyses.

Furthermore, there is considerable difference in the assignment of stress to appropriate syllables of English content words between newscasters and news reporters and the SBE pronunciation; that is, there are deviations observed in both newscasts and news reports. This may be traced to the complex nature of stress, its rules, exceptions, and the inability of newscasters and news reporters to apply them. In addition, there is also a considerable difference between the performances of newscasters of public TV stations and newscasters of private TV stations in assigning stress to appropriate syllables of content words in English. In this regard, private TV stations newscasters perform better than public TV stations newscasters. For instance, public TV stations newscast reveal an overall conformity percentage of 73%, while private TV newscasts show an overall compliance percentage of 83.9%. However, for news reports, there is only a slight difference between the performances of news reporters of public TV stations and private TV stations. Despite this, private TV stations news reporters approximate better to stress assignment as used in the SBE than public TV stations news reporters. For example, an analysis of the data shows that public TV stations news reports show an overall conformity percentage of 62.37%, while private TV stations news reports show an overall compliance of 65.96%,

The findings thereby corroborate findings of recent studies that there is a marked difference in Nigerian English stress assignment compared to the SBE (see Melefa, 2018; Akindede, 2020; Jowitt, 2023). The findings from this study also revealed that non-spontaneous productions such as newscasts portray a better proficiency in appropriate word stress assignment than spontaneous production, that is, news reports.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis has shown that Nigerian news reporters and newscasters demonstrate a certain degree of proficiency in the use of appropriate stress assignments. Thus, the news reporters and newscasters can be considered as acceptable models of Standard Nigerian English pronunciation. This can be traced to the fact that Nigerian journalists, though non-native speakers of the English language, yet can demonstrate between 60% and 90% proficiency in stress assignment in comparison with SBE. This is above average ratings. Therefore, Nigerian journalists may be regarded as acceptable models for the realization of good pronunciation in Standard Nigerian English.

Abbreviations

TV	Television
TVS	Television Station
SBE	Standard British English
PTS	Private/Public TV Stations

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