Educated Ikwerre English (Eie) Speakers' Stress Assignment in English Disyllabic and Polysyllabic Words
By

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Abstract

Stress is quite germane to effective communication, especially for national and international comprehension and intelligibility. Phonology researchers, especially in the aspect of stress, have revealed that little or no attention is being paid to the Nigerian minor languages. On this background, this study sets out to find out whether the patterns of Ikwerre English (being one of the Nigerian minor languages) and Standard English stress patterns have common features or not.

Liberman and Prince's (1977) Metrical Phonology was used as the theoretical framework for the research. One hundred and four (104) Ikwerre speakers of English were randomly selected for the study. Five (5) disyllabic words and five (5) polysyllabic words served as the tools used for the collection of the data. They were read by one hundred and four (104) Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) participants into a computerised software laboratory-SFS/WASP. The participants' responses were scored, counted and the data were subjected to statistical, metrical and acoustic analyses.

In 520 potential scores of disyllabic words produced by the EIES, 464 (89.2%) assigned the stress correctly, while 56 (10.8%) stressed them wrongly. In polysyllabic words, out of 520 instances, 389 (74.8%) produced them correctly, however 131 (25.2%) did not assign the stress correctly. This shows that the EIES' assignment of stress does conform to the Standard English stress because most of the words are stressed on the first syllables which made it easy for the EIES to realise the stress on the first syllable. The acoustic display indicated that there is an apparent contrast between EIES' waves and contours and those of the native baseline in the read words.

Ikwerre English speakers' stress patterns in the production of disyllabic and polysyllabic words, with specific regard to the results above, kind of conform to Standard English stress patterns since there is no obvious contrast between their patterns and that of Standard English patterns.

1.1 Background to the Study

Kachru's (1992) eccentric model of English has positioned Nigeria within the outer circle, thereby showing the status English as a second language in Nigeria. Grieve (1982) postulates that English is 'a second language and not a foreign language in Nigeria'. Kachru (1982) believes that Nigerian English is a vital component of world Englishes which has been indigenized to suit local conditions to express local experiences and to cater for the local Nigerians' environment. Okon et al (1990:24) submit that 'language learnt in contact may often exhibit some kinds of language mixing, some stretch

of speech or at different times. Lado (1957) asserts that: 'the student who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult'. This is as a result of the fact that most of the Nigerian languages are likely equivalent to the number of Englishes being spoken in the country-Nigeria. Also, those aspects of the English language that are similar to the learners' native language will be simple for the learners and those elements that are different will be uneasy to come by. This uneasiness is popular with the phonology of English.

In consequence, several researchers have carried out countless researches in a bid to finding out whether the elements that are different will be difficult as postulated by language experts and phonologists or not. These scholars (Udofot, 2004; Akinjobi; 2009, 2012; Bamgbose, 1971; Jowitt,2000; and Akindele,2011) have attested to the assertion that there exists Nigerian English (NE), which is the variety of the Standard English. They have added by way of confirming that the phonology of Nigerian English is remarkably different from the Standard English Phonology. This difference reflects more in both the segmental and supra-segmental aspects of phonology. Researchers, in the past, had focused on the major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) but there is a dearth of literature on the minor languages of the minority in Nigeria. But of recent, new researchers have renewed their focus on some of these minor languages (Isoko, Ikwerre, Urhobo, etc) so as to prove whether their pronunciation is standard or not. They are not but they are termed as the sub-types/varieties. In a bid to further add to the body of knowledge in describing the Nigerian English towards the standardisation of Nigerian English, the present study centers on Educated Ikwerre English speakers' (EIE) stress assignment in English disyllabic and polysyllabic words.

The ability to speak understandable Standard English accent is synonymous to acceptable pronunciation which can directly affect

negatively or positively world standard acceptable English accent. Therefore, this study is set to investigate the Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) speakers' stress assignment in English disyllabic and polysyllabic words so as to find out how acceptable the accent of the Ikwerre English speakers is. This would help to describe the features of the phonological usages of the Educated Ikwerre English (especially in the area of English stress) towards the standardisation of Nigerian English which has often been said to have lacked national acceptability and world comprehensibility.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

Several researches on phonology of English abound. Some of these scholars (Udofot, 2004; Akinjobi, 2012; Bamgbose, 1971; Jowitt, 2000; and Akindele, 2011) have researched, specifically, into the L2 English language stress as a way of describing the Nigerian English (NE) language stress patterns towards the standardisation of the Nigerian English. The results of their researches have revealed that NE stress patterns are different from that of the Standard English language stress patterns (Spencer,1962; Bamgbose, 1990; Bamgbose,1998; Ekpe, 2007; Adeniran,2005; Yates, 1992; Bamgbose, 1991; Akindele and Adegbite, 2005; Babajide, 2002; Asoba, 2000; Awonusi, 2009; Awobuluyi, 1998; Olofin, 2012; Emenanjo, 1990; Asoba, 2000; Ayeni, 2015; Fafunwa, 1987; Emenanjo, 1990; Bamgbose,1991).

According to them, the patterns are different remarkably in that Nigerian pronunciation lacks national acceptability and international intelligibility. This has attracted more researches over time. Despite these several research works, the Nigerian English is still acclaimed not standard, especially in the area of pronunciation. Consequently, the present study considered the stress assignment of Ikwerre English speakers in (Ikwerre, the language of the minority speakers in the country, Nigeria) English disyllabic and polysyllabic words so as to further the course of description of Nigerian

English towards its standardisation (Yule, 2007; Akindele and Adegbite 2009; Medubi, 1999).

1.3   Research Objective

This study describes stress in Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) so as to find out whether it is conformed with standard English stress patterns or not. The objectives of the study were designed to:

    i.   investigate whether Educated Ikwerre English speakers' assignment of stress in English disyllabic words is appropriate or not;

    ii.   find out whether Educated Ikwerre English speakers' stress assignment in certain English polysyllabic words is appropriate or not.

1.4   Research Questions

    i.   Is Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) speakers' assignment of stress in English disyllabic words appropriate or not?

    ii.   Do Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) speakers assign stress in certain English polysyllabic words appropriately or not?

1.5   English Stress

Roach (1992) states that it seems more likely that stressed syllables are produced with greater effort than unstressed syllables which are manifested in the air pressure generated in the lungs for producing the syllable and also in the articulator movements in the vocal tract. Pitch prominence is one of the determinants of stress in English. Stress is the force given to a word or syllable in speech. Jones (1972) emphasises that it isthe degree of force with which a speaker pronounces a sound or syllable'.

Ladefoged (1975) corroborates the claims above when he maintains that we produce a stressed syllable when we push more air out of the lungs. Stress

is perceived as differences in loudness; therefore, it makes some syllables more prominent than the other. In any English utterance with several syllables, some of the syllables will have a higher degree of force than the other. The one with higher degree of force is the stressed syllable because it is uttered with greater energy than the rest. Thus, stress gives an English sentence its characteristic rhythmic pattern again, stress has meaning and it is not just an ornament (Ogunsiji and Farinde, 2010; Uzoezie, 1992).

Stress has to do with pitch prominence, exertion of more muscular energy, greater degree of articulation, loudness, and often, length on a particular syllable of an English Language word. A stressed syllable of English will stand out among other syllables. The prominence associated with stress may be achieved via: greater muscular energy, loudness and pitch. Since stress is placed on syllables in English words, and for the purpose of this study, disyllabic and polysyllabic words are discussed below.

1.5.1   Disyllabic Words and Stress

In disyllable, 'di' means 'two'. While disyllable is a noun, disyllabic is an adjective. Hence, disyllabic words are words that have two syllables. Such words take stress differently. Take for instance, disyllabic words that have more than one part of speech could take the stress on either first or second syllable. Such words include; refuse: REfuse (Noun) – reFUSE (Verb), CEment (Noun) – ceMENT (Verb), among many others. There are no fast and fixed rules regarding how English disyllabic words should be stressed. However, phonologists have been able to suggest that most nominal and adjectival words are stressed on the first syllable, while verbs, adverbs, prepositions are stressed on the second syllable.

1.5.2   Polysyllabic Words and Stress

Polysyllable is a noun, while polysyllabic is an adjective. In the word polysyllable, 'poly' means 'many'. In essence, polysyllable is used to describe words that have more than two syllables. Such words have syllables ranging from three and above. There are no static rules in stressing such polysyllabic words except for some patterns that do serve as guide. Take for instance, words that end with –ate, -al, -ant, -ance, -ent, -ence, -y, -ity could be stressed on the third to the last syllable, counting from the right (back) to the left (front), while words with –ion, -ic, -ious,-ous take the stress on the second to the last syllable, counting from the left (front) to the right (back). (Roach, 1992, 2004).

1.6   Nigerian English Phonology

Adetugbo (1977) and Bamgbose (1982) describe Nigeria English (NE) as syllable-timed because of the influence of the syllable- timing of Nigerian languages. They further stated that Nigerian learners tend to rely on the Mother Tongue (MT) models for rhythmic organisation. Akinjobi (2002) adds that some principal signs of NE rhythm are different from SBE rhythm; hence, a major deviation from SBE usage by Nigerian speakers of English is in the realisation of vowels and syllables that occur in unstressed positions. The scholars here have also observed, regarding intonation, that most of the Nigerian indigenous languages are tonal language, while English is described as an intonational language. Therefore, Nigerian English reflects the prosodic structure of the speaker's native language and stressed syllables are associated with a high tone and unstressed syllables with a low tone (Atoye, 1994, Akinjobi, 2004; Akindele & Adegbite, 2005; Awonusi, 2005; Akindele, 2010 and Aina, 2014).

Stress is an important elements of the pronunciation of English words and utterances. Cruttenden (2001) and Roach (2010) described stress as prominence in pronunciation which usually results from four factors:

loudness, length, pitch and quality operating individually or in combination. Hence, English is a stress-timed language possessing a speech rhythm in which the stressed syllables recur at equal intervals of time (Richards et al. 1985). On the contrary, Nigerian languages are syllable-timed thus having a speech rhythm in which all the syllables recur at equal intervals of time. This difference creates problems to the Nigerian English learners as it is almost every syllable that is stressed (Kujore, 1985 and Akindele and Adegbite, 2005). Kujore (1985) also opined that there is no clear distinction between nouns and verbs in the assignment of stress among Nigerian English learners. English native speakers show that stress placement varies according to grammatical categories. For example, as nouns, the following words receive stress on the first syllable while the stress is on the second syllable when they are used as verbs: import, convict, and export, contrast, insult, rebel, conduct, contract, produce, insult, and so on. Kujore (1985) and Udofot (2004) state that Nigerian English pronunciation is characterized by ''delayed primary stress''.

There are more accented syllables than expected in the SBE pronunciation. Akinjobi (2004:89) notes that there is a striking resemblance between the analysis of Kujore (1985) and Jowitt (1991) but pointed out that the latter says there is a tendency to shift the primary stress to the right in Nigerian English. Jowitt opines that the shifting of stress assignment is more systematic with verbs than with nouns and adjectives. There is the tendency to shift stress as far to the right as possible in compound words and complex noun phrases with pre-modification. This, according to him, applies to stress assignment at the sentence level.

1.7   Statistical, Metrical and Acoustic Analyses and Results

### 1.7.1 Statistical Analyses and Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do EIE speakers assign stress appropriately to Disyllabic English words?

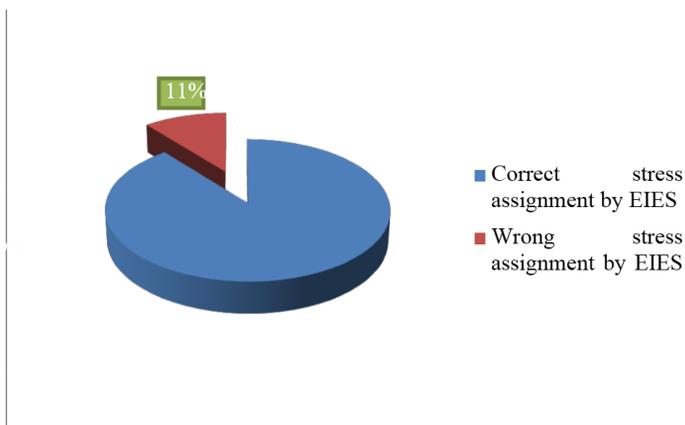**Table 1:   Analysis of stress assignment of EIE in disyllabic words**

S/N	Disyllabic Words	Potential Score	Correct Pronunciation	Wrong Pronunciation	% Correct	% Wrong
1	'regards	104	96	8	92.3	7.7
2	'area	104	89	15	85.6	14.4
3	'people	104	98	6	94.2	5.8
4	per'form	104	95	9	91.3	8.7
5	e'nough	104	86	18	82.7	17.3
	TOTAL	**520**	**464**	**56**	**89.2**	**10.8**

From the Table1 above, the EIE speakers' correct rendition is four hundred and sixty four (464), giving 89.2%, while the wrong rendition of the disyllabic words by the EIE respondents is fifty six(56),giving10.8%.Forthet-test,a p-value reads 0.000, portraying a significant distinction between SBE and EIE at 0.05 level of significance. The percentage of the correct pronunciation is more than that of the wrongly stressed ones. Thus, the EIE speakers' pronunciation of the variable items is somewhat close to SBE.

Bar Chart1: EIE stress assignment in disyllabic words
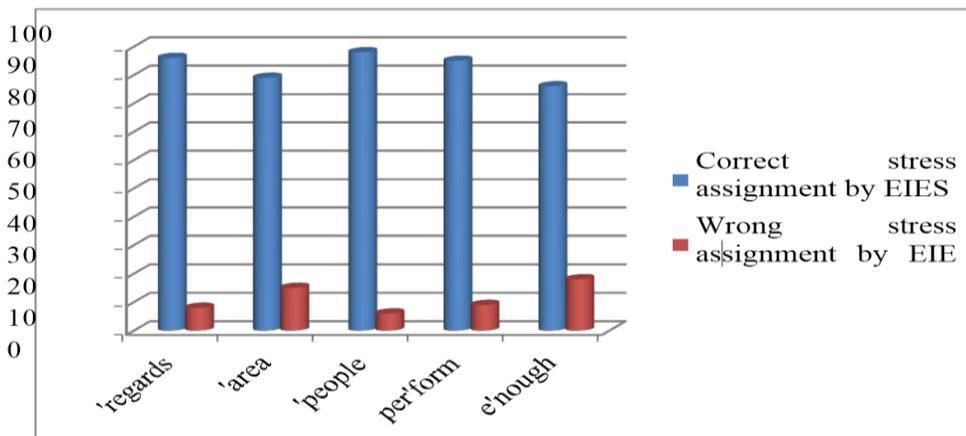
## Pie Chart 1: Stress assignment of EIE participants' performance in disyllabic words

Research Question 2: Is Stress assigned appropriately in polysyllabic words by EIE speakers?

Table 2: EIES' performance analysis in stress assignment in polysyllabic words

S/N	Polysyllabic Words	Potential Score	Correct Pronunciation	Wrong Pronunciation	% Correct	% Wrong
1	Ni'gerians	104	64	40	61.5	38.5
2	con'clusion	104	54	50	51.9	48.1
3	'comfortable	104	95	9	91.3	8.7
4	'governance	104	84	20	80.8	19.2
5	'general	104	92	12	88.5	11.5
	TOTAL	**520**	**389**	**131**	**74.8**	**25.2**

The Table 2 above reveals the performance of Educated Ikwerre English Speakers in the placement of stress in polysyllabic English words. It can be safely said, considering the results, that EIES apportions stress appropriately to the polysyllabic words with three hundred and eighty nine scores (389),giving the percentage of 74.8%, while only insignificant amount of one hundred and thirty one (131) is rendered incorrect, giving 25.2%. A tap-value of 0.002, thereby showing as insignificant difference between the correctly stressed and wrongly stressed of the EIES at the level of 0.05 significance. The percentage of correctly stressed is more which implies that the EIE speakers'pronunciation is somewhat close to the SBE.

Pie Chart 2: EIES' stress assignment in polysyllabic words
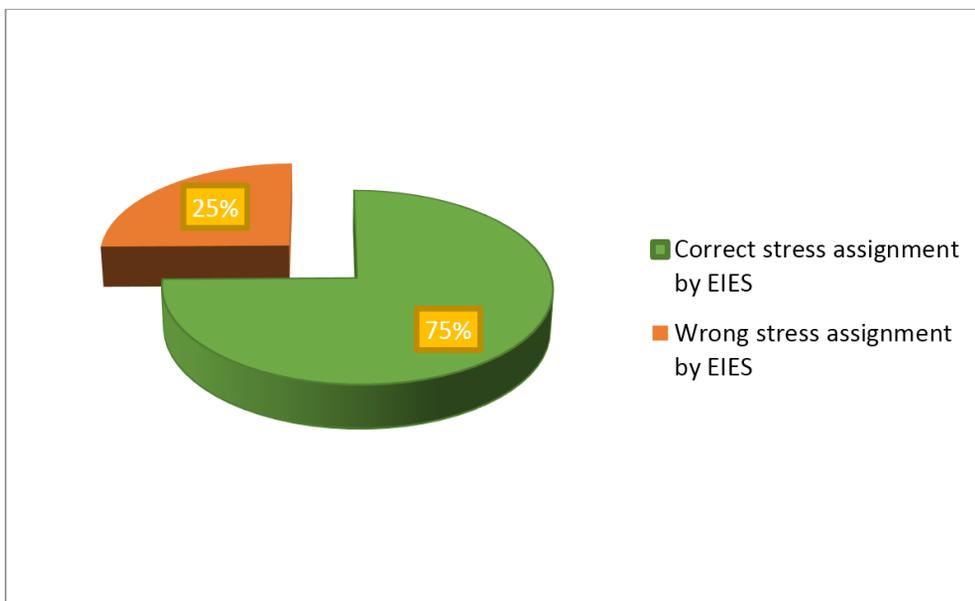
1.7.2. Metrical Grid Analyses

1. Metrical grid analysis of disyllabic words

SBE: EIES:

1.   3   3
      1   2   1   2

      'REgards   'REgards

The grids above reveal that the words should take the stress on the first syllable and the EIES assigned the tress correctly.

2. SBE: EIES:

   3   3

  1   2   1   2

   'Area   'Area

The EIES, in accordance with the Standard English, assigned the stress appropriately.

3.   SBE: EIES:

   3   3

  1   2   1   2

    PEOple   PEOple

In the word ,'people' ,the grid shows that it is correctly stressed by EIES.

4. SBE: 3   EIES: 3

    1   2   1   2

   perFORM   perFORM

The stressed syllable in 'perform' is the one in capital letter in the second syllable and the grid reveals a correct stress assignment by the EIES.

5. SBE   3   EIES: 3   4

    1   2   1   2

   eNOUGH   ENOUGH

In 'enough', the stressed syllable eNOUGH' as shown by the grid but the EIES render the two syllables the same way, giving both equal prominence. Hence, they are wrongly realised.

2. Metrical grid analysis of polysyllabic words

1. SBE: EIES:
4   5   4   5
1 2 3   1   2   3

GEneral   GENeral

2. SBE: EIES:
6
4   5   4   5   6
1   2   3   1   2   3
COMFORtable   COMFORtable

3. SBE: EIES:
      6
 4   5   4   5   6
 1   2   3   1   2   3
 conCLUsion   CONCLUSION

Following the control above, General and COMFORtable take the prominence on the first syllables, but conCLUsion has the prominence on the second syllable. As against this background, the EIES' assignment of the stress in the first syllables of the first two words is correct but it is not correctly stressed in conclusion and comfortable.

1.7.3   ACOUSTIC ANALYSES AND RESULTS
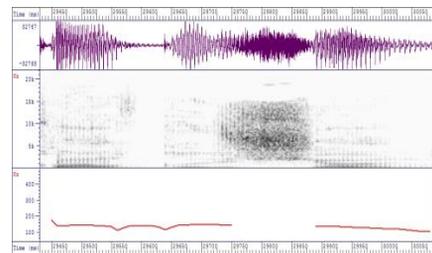
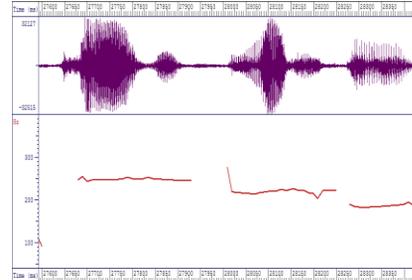NATIVE BASELINE: Ni′gerians   EIES: Ni′gerians
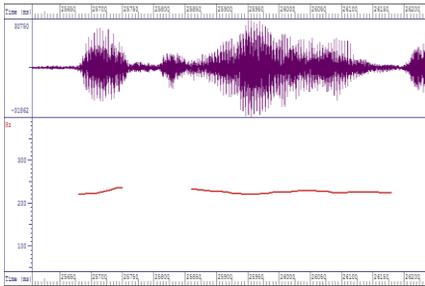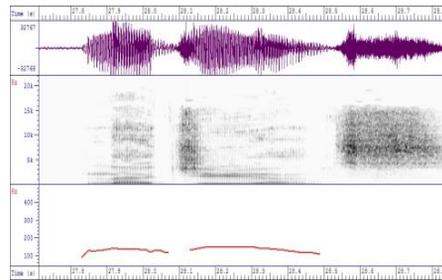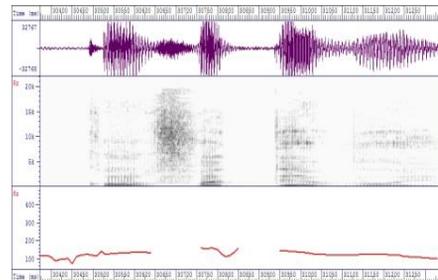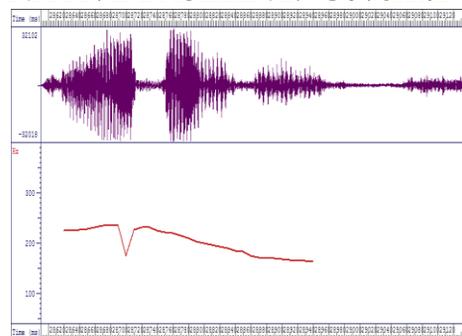

NATIVE BASELINE: Con′clusion   EIES: Con′clusion
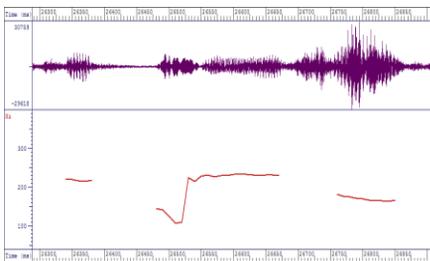
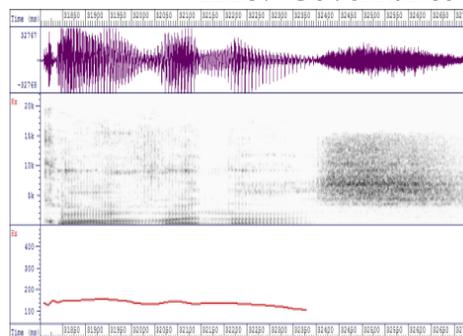NATIVE BASELINE: ′Comfortable   EIES: ′Comfortable
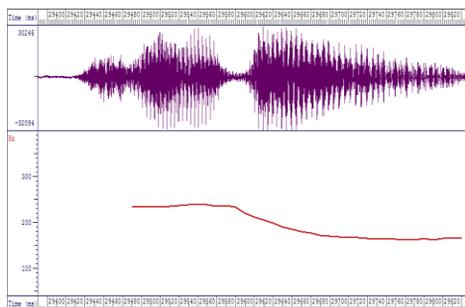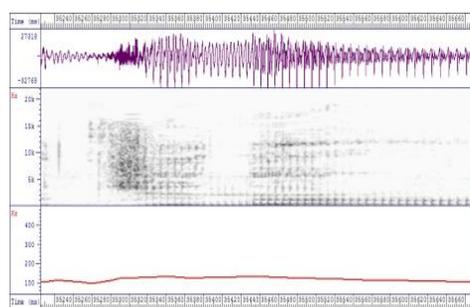
NATIVE BASELINE: 'Governance

EIES: 'Governance

NATIVE BASELINE: 'General

EIES: 'General

The pitch contours of the EIES as shown above are quite flat when placed side by side with the modulating contours of the controls which are typical of Standard English form. This indicates that the prominence assigned by the participants' contrast with another syllable in the same positions. The perceptual cues of this prominence can be as a result of changing pitch, vowel quality, greater intensity, or length. The combination of all these in SBE makes syllable prominent from another surrounding syllable in English words. Educated Ikwerre English Speakers, who are second language users, might find it uneasy to apply this rule. The reason for this is because of the absence of those attributes in L2.

1.8   Conclusion and summary

It is crystal clear from the study that the results of the perceptual/statistical, metrical and acoustic analyses that the EIE speakers who are also Nigerians might have only been learning the English without paying a particular attention to it accentual pattern. This shows that the type of English spoken by the participants is not the standard model of pronunciation but just a sub-variety of the varieties of Nigerian English (NE). This is obviously revealed in some of the performances of the renditions. Even though, there is a sort of improvement in the assignment of the stress in some of the English words which is traceable to the fact that the participants must have unconsciously stressed appropriate some of the research tools whose stress requires the stress mark on the first syllable. This actually led to the improved performance of the participants.

Therefore, EIE speakers' speeches is in a way approximated to the standard form of English pronunciation, though this is not 100% approved due to the fact that the performances are not totally equivalent to the Standard English. Hence, international intelligibility can be impeded whenever they speak. This readily supports the works of scholars like Kujore (1985, 1991), being emphasised by Akinjobi (2004), that the phonological aspect of the Standard English is an hurdle which virtually second language learners/speakers have found difficult to cross. Hence, international intelligibility is often impeded whenever they speak. In conclusion, judging by the reviewed empirical studies phonologists above and the outcomes of this present study, it can be concluded that EIE speakers' English stress structural patterns may be said to be partially conformed to the Standard English stress structural patterns.

1.9   Recommendation

The Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) speakers should watch TV stations such as BBC, VOA, DSTV, among other beneficial stations where the correct accent and pronunciation are employed. Also, the English language should

be used for official purpose only. It should however be used at regular occasion for perfection. Listening to foreign speeches could also be of help here.

1.10   Further studies

The English language has a wide range of topics, ranging from grammar, vocabulary, semantics, to phonology that this present study could not cover due to time constraints and other factors. In fact, the phonological aspect has areas like stress, rhythm, intonation. The study paid attention to word stress-disyllabic and polysyllabic- leaving out compound stress, phrasal stress, and contrastive stress, among others. The research results of the present study cannot be used as the yardstick to conclude that the Educated Ikwerre English (EIE) speakers' accent is outright equivalent to the Standard English. It is therefore advised that researchers can cover some of the aspects yet uncovered by this present study so as to have holistic description of the Nigerian English towards its standardisation.

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