

Stress Patterns and Intonations among the Annang Language Speaking Students of Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University

Sediong Ekeruke

Department of English

Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus

E-mail: sediongekeruke@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to evaluate stress patterns and intonations. It focuses on the aspects of stress forms and intonations on the pronunciation of the English Language by the Annang language speaking Students of the Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University. This study tested Twenty (20) Annang students of the Faculty of Arts across all Departments. There have always been some challenges by the non-natives on the segmental nature of the pronunciation of English words, the sounds and sound change. Unarguably, the highest percentage of the problems is the aspects of non-segmental phonology. Annang Students of Akwa Ibom State University do not use English often, thereby exposing them to pronunciation problems as there is no fluency and accuracy in their speeches. This study uses the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to study English Stress and Intonation patterns among Annang students of Akwa Ibom State University, Faculty of Arts. The most common mistake of intonation among participants is the use of the wrong pitch; wrong stress patterns and intonation cause misunderstanding and even an unfavourable impression of a person. The Students' poor performance in English communication was attributed to linguistic prosody.

Keywords: Non-natives, Annang, Stress and Intonation, Contrastive Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonations and do not use the right pitch to convey feelings (Irma Rusadze 2018). Stress patterns, at both the word level and the sentence level, are important for intelligibility, and offer a useful starting point for teaching pronunciation, particularly with a class of students from different L1 backgrounds (Benrabah 1997; Chela-Flores 2001). The etymology of the English language can be traced to North-Western Germany; it belongs to the low West Germanic family which is a subgroup of the Indo-European family. Owing to the spread of the English language into different parts of the world. The English

language possesses what can be called 'local colouration' languages in contact (Edem, 2015b, 2018 and 2020).

Annang is one of the tribes whose accent has much interference with the pronunciation of English. Research carries it that Annang has twenty (20) consonant sounds and eleven (11) vowel sounds and these are //kp, p, b, t, d, k, g, f, m, n, ŋ, l, r, w, h, dz, tʃ, ʃ, s/ and /i, i:, ʊ, u:, o, e, ə, ɒ, ʌ, æ, a:/ They do not have enough sounds in their sound system as that of English sounds (Udondata, 2001; 2006 and Edem, 2015). This study examines the non-segmental phonological elements: stress patterns and intonations among the Annang speakers of English.

Over the years, there has always existed the problem of pronunciation among English language learners. Some of these problems exist due to languages in contact, some are caused by the environment, and some are caused by peer groups (Edem 2005, Edem 2015a, Edem 2016). However, it is not out of place as it is known generally that language learned is often problematic unlike language acquired. It should be noted that the lack of qualified teachers to coach these learners at their primary and secondary levels can also bring a problem in how well they can speak. This can be checked by ensuring that qualified teachers are given to coach the young learners of the English language (Enang and Edem 2022)

Every language has its intonation system; certain correlations exist between intonation patterns with special meanings. Research shows that the difficulties in learning L2 intonation patterns are often due to the non-equivalence of the intonation structure of the learners' L1 and the L2 structure (Cruz-Ferreira, 1983, Edem, 2020; Edem 2022). Poor pronunciation can make a foreign language learner very difficult to understand. Language teachers have become more aware of this and have shifted the focus of their pronunciation teaching. It is therefore crucial for language teachers to be aware of current research findings in foreign (second) language learning.

In linguistics, intonation is the variation of pitch when speaking. Intonation and Stress are two main elements of linguistic prosody. Intonation is the "music" of a language and is perhaps the most important element of a good accent. Intonation – the rise and fall of pitch in our voice plays a crucial role in expressing meaning (Udofot and Edem, 2018 and Edem 2024). Intonation is the main element of linguistic prosody. Poor intonation can cause misunderstanding and even produce an unfavourable impression of a person. The most common intonation mistakes are no rising pitch and the wrong pitch. Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonation and do not use the right pitch to convey feelings (Rusadze & Chikovani, 2018). Munro and Derwing (1999) suggest that intonation is more important for how easy relatively advanced speakers are to understand than for how far they are understood.

Stress patterns, at both the word level and the sentence level, are important for intelligibility, and offer a useful starting point for teaching pronunciation, particularly with a class of students from different L1 backgrounds (Benrabah 1997; Chela-Flores 2001, Edem 2005, 2015, 2016, 2023a). It is noted that most speakers of English language have defaulted the rules governing the accuracy of English Stress and Intonation. This can easily be spotted in an unconscious reading of a passage or interaction using the English language. This turns out to be a problem for University students as little effort has been made on the aspects of the segmental features rather than the non-segmental features.

Many researchers have studied the area of native language interference in the target language. Harrison (1973 and Edem 2015) observe that the effect of L1 interference on L2 learners points to the fact that the system of LI in sound and structure is acquired so well in childhood. Constant and frequent use afterwards makes it problematic for the language learner and teacher. The L.2 speakers of English should guard against the influence of the mother tongue in language learning because grammatical notions such as tense, voice and gender are subject to wrong interference. Interference can affect expressive and impressive speech sounds and is inherent in a foreign language (Verboj 1971). The problem of mother tongue interference or effect is not attributed to learners or pupils alone but it also affects teachers. This is affirmed by Bamgbose (1975) and Edem (2015). Grammatical and linguistic problems are caused by mother tongue interference and are encountered by teachers and learners. Both of them have some phonological challenges peculiar to their ethnic group and these affect their effective acquisition of the language (Bamgbose 1975).

Annang language lacks many features of the English language. Some of the features of English are absent in Annang. This results in the outright replacement of some of these features that are absent with whatever is obtainable in the mother tongue. Many of the Annang speakers of English only try hard to gain competence in English pronunciation.

Adult learners often acquire second languages through a mix of written and oral inputs, and in some cases, written input may even be predominant (Bassetti 2008). The written forms of words are far less subject to variability than their oral form thereby providing a firm anchor for learners. It has been shown that written input facilitates the learning of the phonological form of words in a novel language (Erdener & Burnham 2005) and the perceptual discrimination of L2 phonological contrasts (Escudero, Hayes-Harb & Mitterer 2008; Escudero & Wanrooij 2010).

It is therefore not surprising that orthographic forms can affect the learners pronounce a second language. Spelling does not always have an effect (Simon, Cambless & Alves 2010), and can sometimes lead to non-native-like productions (Bassetti, Hayes-Harb & Escudero 2015). Previous research in this field has

documented the effects of orthography on the L2 speech production of learners of some languages (Paolo Mairano, Bene Bassetti, 2018).

It is observed that Annang shares more dissimilarities than similarities with English and this leads to difficulties in second language learning. For instance, the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is often produced as /f/ by the Annang speakers. Dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are sometimes realized as alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ respectively. All these are effects of L1 on the pronunciation of L2 sounds.

This study seeks to address some problems responsible for the poor performance of Annang speakers of English in stress and intonation; and suggest some possible solutions. The objectives are to examine the pronunciation of Annang speakers of English; determine the causes of poor performance of Annang speakers of English in the pronunciation of English words and suggest ways in which Annang speakers of English can improve their performance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis founded by Robert Lado (1957). The theory is on second language learning/teaching. The theory claims that the errors and difficulties encountered in our Language learning and use of foreign languages are from the interference of our mother tongue. The theory further states that the structure of the target language (L2) is at variance with that of L1. It implies some difficulties in learning and errors in performance. The theory also states that if there are many similarities between the language learned and acquired, then less problem exists. The theory states that the nature of the mother tongue poses difficulties, problems, and challenges to language learners. And that the problematic and the less complicated nature of a second language (language learned) determines the differences and similarities.

3. RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The data collection instrument used for this study was a reading test, in which ten (10) expressions were to test the aspects of stress and phrase; another ten sentences were to test for intonation. A sound recorder was used to record the subjects. The research attention was on the stress and intonation. It focuses on the performance of Twenty Annang students of the Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University. Four students from each Department were selected and tested across five Departments in the faculty. It makes a total of twenty participants. This research used a simple random sampling technique to analyse the data. Each correct item carries a mark. The subjects were coded A to J. The scoring was carried out based on the accuracy of articulation of the

segment tested. The score of each subject was calculated out of the total number of scores expected. For instance, in the test for stress and phrasing, each correct item has a mark. Where a subject has the right marks in all the assertions that equal ten (10) marks. Where the subject had less, the number was divided by 10 and multiplied by 100 to have the percentage. For example, the score for subject A is 5. The computation in percentage is $5,10 \times 100,1-50\%$.

4. Presentation of Data

Table 1 showing the performance of subjects in stress and phrasing:

SN.	Item Informant/Score	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	remember 'that 'period	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
2	to 'take their 'children to school	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
3	'shepherded by their 'parents	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1		
14	the 'book of some 'school	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
5	a 'miserable 'floating 'population	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
6	'happened to 'live 'near the 'school	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
7	which had 'nothing in 'common	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
8	with the un'known	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
9	we 'were 'those 'children	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
10	'not 'easy to for'get	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
	Total Scores	5	4	6	5	6	5	7	5	6	3
	Percentage	50	40	60	50	60	50	70	50	60	30

Table 2 shows the performance of subjects in intonation. They were tested using the sentences below:

1. He went to the stream, had a bath, and fetched some water.
2. Who is that lady? He asked gently.
3. Walk out of this room, she ordered sternly.
4. When she had collected her salary, she went to the village.
5. Jane is my wife, not yours.
6. Do you like rice? She asked sweetly.
7. When I finish my examination, I shall travel to Lagos, find a job, and settle down.
8. "Leave my presence", he ordered angrily.
9. My father gave me a new dress, a pair of shoes, some pieces of jewellery and a handbag for Christmas.
10. You feel better, don't you?

Table 2: Performance of Intonation

SN	Items	Informants/Scores									
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Sentence 1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
2	Sentence 2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
3	Sentence 3	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
4	Sentence 4	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
5	Sentence 5	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
6	Sentence 6	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
7	Sentence 7	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
8	Sentence 8	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
9	Sentence 9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Sentence 10	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
	Total	6	4	5	6	5	4	4	4	3	5
	Percentage	60	40	50	60	50	40	40	40	30	50

Data Analysis

The performance of Annang speakers of English in the non-segmental aspects of phonology is poor. The first table above shows the performance of subjects in stress and phrasing. The accuracy in articulation for stress and phrasing, giving the stress where necessary and observing pauses where necessary are tested. As can be seen, their performance in this aspects was poor as the highest percentage scored was 70%, which subjects G had. In other words, the highest number is not a good or an excellent percentage as should be expected from university students. It would have been considered a fair attempt if the subjects were in the secondary schools. However, subjects C, E and I scored 60%, while subjects A, D, F and H scored 50%; subjects B scored 40% and J scored 30%. It points to the fact that "stress" concerns everyday communication among Annang students is highly problematic. In other words, in conscious and unconscious reading and communication from Students of Akwa Ibom State University, word and sentence stress are not observed, making it problematic and needs to be addressed.

As regards communication among Annang students, this study affirms intonation is problematic. This aspect tested for the tone of the voice used in reading some sentences. The pitch (the rising and the falling) of sound adds meaning to the stretch of utterances. By this, it means that the tone used in articulating to form words adds more explanation to the meaning. Table 2 shows the performance of subjects in intonation, and frequency scored was 60% by Subjects A, D and H. Subjects C, E, and J scored 50% while subjects B, F and G scored 40% and subject I scored 30%.

Generally, the performance of Annang speakers of English at Akwa Ibom State University in intonation was highly problematic as the performance was not fair enough. The reason for this poor performance is the poor foundation, that is, the kind of school they attended in their primary education, the quality of teachers and the method of teaching; the family one finds himself, and a very remarkable one is the fact that most communities in Annang use vernacular often. To them, English is used in teaching Vernery in class (even the English spoken in class may still be the nonstandard variety), making the use of English very rare. This analogy is in Udofot (2004) and Edem (2023b). With all these, there is a problem of articulation of English non-segmentals.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper looked at the speech production of Annang speakers of English in the aspects of stress and intonation among students of the faculty of Arts at Akwa Ibom State University. It shows the similarities and dissimilarities of English sounds and that of Annang. The study, however, has it that the general performance of Annang speakers of English is poor, especially in the aspects of stress and intonation. The way they speak shows high incompetence and incapability in the English language. Most Annang students at Akwa Ibom State University are conscious vernacular users and Nigerian English in everyday communication. The Annang speakers of English made little or no attempt to use proper English in communicating with peers. The problem begins at home as parents do not teach them simple and correct English to communicate. The teachers handling this course in Secondary Schools are not well-trained in this field. One would see a teacher of Physics teaching the English Language. This work agrees that teachers do not come to classes often; the little time they come to teach English, they will only dwell on grammar but not oral. It has instilled in them the inability to articulate English.

It recommends that qualified teachers of English are employed to teach all aspects of English Language Usage. Parents should also encourage their children to communicate in English. Schools should endeavour to make communication with friends the official language - English. New books should be given to students, especially those whose mother tongue has influenced them to a large extent. By these, there shall be a remarkable improvement in the pronunciation of English in stress and intonation.

REFERENCES

- Bamgbose, A. (1975). English Language and the Nigerian Environment. In Bamgbose, Ayo et al (Eds), *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*. Mosuro Publishers and Booksellers.
- Bassetti, B. (2008). Orthographic input and second language phonology. In Piske, T. and Young-Scholten, M. (eds.), *Input Matters in SLA* (pp. 191-206). *Multilingual Matters*
- Bassetti, B., Escudero, P., & Hayes-Harb, R. (2015). Second language phonology at the interface between acoustic and orthographic input [Editorial]. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 36(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716414000393>
- Benrabah, M. (1997). Word-Stress – A Source of Unintelligibility in English. *IRAL - International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 35(3), 157-165
- Chela-Flores, B. (2001). Pronunciation and language learning: An integrative approach. *IRAL - International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.39.2.85>
- Cruz-Ferreira, M. (1983). Non-native comprehension of intonation patterns in Portuguese and in English. PhD Thesis, University of Manchester
- Edem, E. (2005), *Language and Social Mobilization: The case of MAMSER Campaign Text*. A Ph.D Dissertation, University of Uyo.
- Edem, E. (2015a). Mother Tongue Interference in the Pronouncement of English among Ibibio Students in Uyo Urban: Problems and Prospects. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Academic Excellence*. 12(1)
- Edem, E. (2015b). Language and Social Development: A Syntactic and Semantic Analysis of MAMSER Campaign Texts. *Journal of Assertiveness*, 9(1).
- Edem, E. (2016), A survey of the syntactic features of Educated Nigerian English. *International Journal of Academia* 2(1): 84-101
- Edem, E. (2018). Nativisation of English Language in a Multilingual and Cultural Settings: The Nigerian Experience. *Akwa Ibom State University Journal of Arts (AKSUJA)*. 1(1): 154-165.
- Edem, E. (2020). Language and National Development: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Obasanjo's Letters to Jonathan and Buhari. In *Essays in Language and Literature*. A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Uwemedimo Enobong Iwokedok Department of English, University of Jos.
-

- Edem, E. (2022). Stylistico-Semantic Study of Eyoh Etim's Virtual Chants. In the International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics, London 1(7): 49-56.
- Edem, E. (2023a). A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Eyoh Etim's "Don't Marry Angelica". International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics, London 6(1):32-45.
- Edem, E. (2023b). A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of HelonHabla's "Oil on Water". International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics, 6(2):90-101.
- Edem, E. (2024). Semantic Extension and Re-duplication in speeches of final year students of Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus. Journal of Communication and Culture (JCC)-icidr.org.ng
- Enang, E. and Edem E. (2022). Language Learning and Acquisition (SLA) in a Multilingual Environment: A Case of English and Anaang from the Universal Grammar Considerations on Research and Pedagogical Innovations. Dutsin-ma Journal of English and Literature 5 (1): 442-465.
- Erdener, V. D. & Burnham D. K. (2005). The Role of Audiovisual Speech and Orthographic Information in Nonnative Speech Production. *Language Learning* 55 (2), 191-228
- Escudero, P., & Wanrooij, K. (2010). The effect of L1 orthography on non-native vowel perception. *Language and Speech*, 53(3), 343-365.
- Escudero, P., Hayes-Harb, R. & Mitterer, H. (2008). Novel second-language words and asymmetric lexical access. *Journal of Phonetics*, 36(2), 345-360.
- Harrison, P. (1973). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across Cultures Applied Linguistics and Language Teachers*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Paolo Mairano, Bene Bassetti, Mirjana Sokolović-Perović, Tania Cerni (2018). Effects of L1 orthography and L1 phonology on L2 English pronunciation. *Revue française de linguistique appliquée* /1 (Vol. XXIII), p. 45-57
- Rusadze, Irma & Chikovani, Mariam. (2018). *Approaches To Active Listening For EFL Learners*
- Simon, E., Chambless, D. & Alves, U.K. (2010). Understanding the role of orthography in the acquisition of a non-native vowel contrast. *Language sciences*, 32 (3), 380-394
-

- Udofot, I. and Edem, E. (2018). Manipulation in political language: A Semantic Analysis of the Speeches of Two Nigerian Presidents. *AKSU Journal of English* 1(1)
- Udofot, I.M. (2004). Varieties of Spoken Nigerian English in S. Awonusi and E.A. Babalola (Eds), *The Domestication of English in Nigeria: A Festschrift in Honour of Abjodun Adetugbo* (p. 93).
- Udodata, J. (2001). Structural Consideration and Grammaticality in Annang Language. *British Journal of English Linguistics*. Vol. 5(2), 51-68.
- Udodata, J. (2006). *A Grammar of Annang Language*. Joe Graph.
- Veroboj V. (1971). *Multilingualism*. A.W. Sythof