

Phonological Variation and Intelligibility of Generative Phonology in Nigerian Variety of English Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper assumes that the English language provides interconnectivity between communities and persons in the global village and enhances global interconnectivity through cooperation and appreciation of English as a Global Language (EGL). Linguistic globalization is the worldwide interdependence of people and countries on language, especially English, for communication and cooperation. The non-native speakers of the English language are more than their native speakers. This development has called for a reassessment of the status of English. The rate at which English spreads has brought a lot of consequences upon it. Its status has changed from the language of England. Phonological variants of English have described the pronunciation and speech of a speaker and indicate the speaker's community. Variation, therefore, has a cultural value. Native speakers cannot afford to be arrogant about the variety of English spoken by non-native speakers, as the variants do not significantly hinder intelligibility. The paper calls on English teachers to teach the norms of native speakers and expose the students to the accents and variants of other peoples' cultures and the universal standard of EGL. In this way, learners will appreciate their variants as part of the global intelligibility of English.

Keywords: *Phonological variation, intelligibility, generative phonology, Nigerian variety of English Language, global village and global interconnectivity*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic globalization is the growing worldwide interdependence of people and countries on language, especially the English Language, for communication and cooperation (Edem, 2001, 2015). The non-native English speakers are more than native speakers. This development has called for a reassessment of the status of English. The rate at which English spreads has brought a lot of consequences upon it. Its status has changed from the language of England conveniently (Enang, Eshiet and Udoka, 2013). Native speakers (a negligible number compared to those who speak

English globally) cannot be arrogant about the variety of non-native English speakers. English has justifiably undergone a metamorphosis, a nativization characterizing different cultures.

Some factors led to the birth of new children from the parent stock. Such factors include migration of native speakers, colonization and business activities in North America, Australia, India and West Africa; especially those linked with the exploits of Prince Henry, Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama and others; the Industrial Revolution, which brought about discoveries in science and technology; missionary activities as well as the publication of non-native literature in English. Globalization accelerates the spread of English. Strevens (1987 and Enang 2017) refer to these children as American English, Indian English, West African English, Singapore English and Australian English with British English as their mother. Today, these children have given birth to other children who have in turn had their children courtesy of their different cultures and environments. According to Edem (2024), the dimension is complex. For example, in Nigeria, a variety like Zeburudiasm may not be easily understood even by Nigerians. Nigeria's plural-ethnicism and its consequent multilingualism witnessed a multiplication of our English both in the oral and written mediums. English has travelled to almost all the corners of the world and wherever it goes, it has built itself a home and has settled down comfortably.

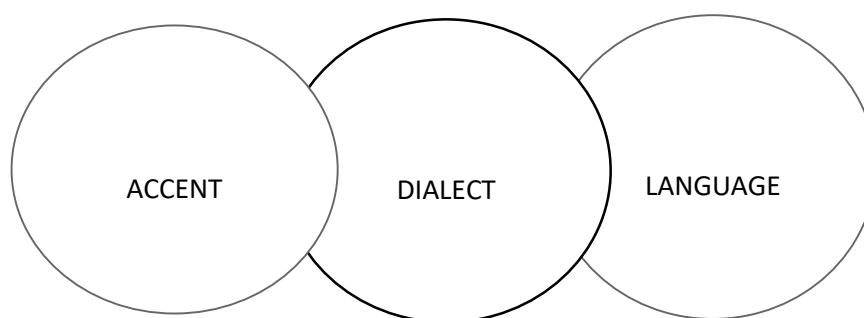


Fig. 1: Dialect, accent and language

There are diversifications in the literature concerning the use of these terms. Here is a summary of the views (Enang 2017 and Utin 2023) on dialectology.

- A dialect could be a variety of a language:
American dialect of English
Yorkshire dialect of English
British dialect of English

- It could be any user-defined variety of a language in male/female variety, ethnic variety or social class variety (upper-class or middle-class dialects in England).
- It could be unwritten or non-standard forms of speech associated with people lacking prestige or formal education and culturally subordinated to other groups. These contrast with standardized, prestigious varieties are known as languages. Here, we must note that language is a natural endowment, which needs no artificial impositions to make it what it is. Moreover, dialects along the super-ordinate/subordinate continuum are political and a source of conflict.
- A dialect could also mean an individual unit comprising the language it belongs to, as we have dialects of English variants.

Linguistic Hierarchy of Variants Diagram 1

The use of isoglosses helps in the identification of dialects. Here, a dialect geography undertakes and draws differential lines on the map showing areas where different variant forms occur. The dialect continuum makes such a map unreliable (Enang, Eshiet and Udoka, 2013). Ward (1972), Utin and Enang (2017; 2020) discuss a language as a linguistic norm or a group of related norms and dialect as one of the norms. It emphasizes the form of departure of the variant from the norm. The author further explains that in English, dialect could mean any of the following: local varieties of English, informal speech or lower-class or rural speech. The term depends on political or social factors (Ward, 1972). Based on such parameters, Enang, Eshiet and Udoka (2013) distinguish between a language and a dialect of a language. Hudson (2001) also argues that Standard English is a dialect of English.

Accent relates to language as a regional variant of pronunciation. Yule (1996) and Enang (2017) opine that an accent describes aspects of the pronunciation of a speaker and identifies where he comes from (socially or regionally). Accents are subsumed in dialects (Lyons, 1981; Roach, 2000, and Enang, 2020). This aspect of our discussion has demonstrated that while accents and dialects are the regional variants of different languages, accents are the pronunciation variants of dialects. They form an interdependent hierarchy on the linguistic continuum.

Linguistic variability is an indispensable phenomenon in the speech behaviour of human beings. There are identifiable linguistic dichotomies between language and dialects and accents (Enang, Eshiet and Udoka, 2013).

At the phonological level, there are identifiable variants. Idiosyncratic variants involve the speaker's inconsistency in his articulation (Enang, 2017) and (Enang, 2020). For example, if a speaker is to produce the word "passed" /pæst/ several times,

one would be baffled at the different realizations of the four phonemes. Apart from individual idiosyncrasies in articulation, there are various phonological variants (Edem, 2005).

The attitude of native speakers of English is also a problem. They insist that English should not mix idiosyncratic, regional or dialectal variants. The Received Pronunciation (RP) is the yardstick with which every English pronunciation should be measured (Enang, 2017) (Enang, 2020) and Utin, 2023).

The attitude of non-native speakers of English is not encouraging. For many speakers, especially in countries colonized by Britain, English is a reminder of the traumatic experience of colonialism. Teachers of English are diverse in learners of English - R. P. or regional variants. These constitute hindrances to English as a Global Language (EGL). This paper intends to proffer solutions to these problems.

Phonological Variations and Global Intelligibility in English Variety

Every language exists in some varieties or norms. Hudson (2002), Enang (2017) and Utin (2024) consider a variety as a set of linguistic items with similar distribution. Each norm, therefore, is peculiar in its items and their distribution. Edem (2005) Enang (2017, 2020) and Edem (2022) have a broader concept of variety as the author delves into the synchronic and semantic aspects of language in his definition of variety as:

Anybody of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogeneous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description and which has a repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all formal communication.

Each norm must be functional and open to analyses under given synchronic parameters.

Variety involves;

1. Linguistic items (sounds, words, sentences).
2. Human speech (grammatical features).
3. External factors (geographical area or social group).

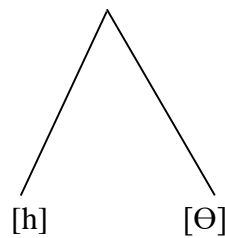
There can be no linguistic variety when there are no distinctive features to differentiate one form of language from another. Enang (2017) refers to dialectal variations as varieties of a language (Edem 2016, Enang 2017 and Enang 2020).

A linguistic variety, according to Edem (2005) and Utin (2024), could be a language distinct from other languages; a dialect that is separate from another dialect of the same language or is separate from the parent's language; or a style - that is the peculiar manifestation of an individual speaker or writer. Linguistic variety helps the

individual to create systems for his verbal behaviour to identify with members of his linguistic group (Enang 2020, Edem 2016 and Utin 2023).

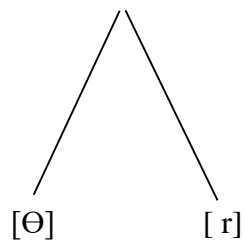
A variable is a linguistic item with identifiable variants. Nigeria's multilingualism, for example, has had many such variants; Igbo speakers use [ia:] for /i:/ as in 'real' [rial]. Yoruba speakers use [a] for /ɜ:/ in 'earth' [aθ]. Hausa speakers use [kw] for /k/ as in 'condition' [kwandifn]. Enang (2017) and Edem (2020) state that phonological variation departs from standard usage or norm. It is noticeable in many regional varieties of different languages. Utin (2023), Enang and Edem (2022) have cited the loss of the glottal fricative /h/ among English speakers of the Northern city of Bradford as:

Hammer /hæmə/ > [æmə]

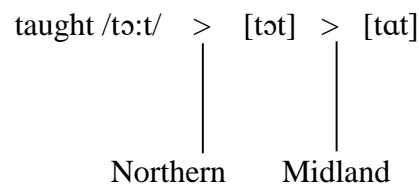


Hudson (2001), Utin and Enang (2020), Enang and Edem (2022) cited New York as a typical region where its inhabitants realize /r/ in such words as “farm” and “car”.

farm /fɑ:m/ > [fɑ:rm]



Yule (1980) and Enang (2017) and Edem (2020) have distinguished English speakers and Upper Midland of the United States of America and those from the Northern part of the country in their production of the word “taught”.



Edem (2020), Enang (2020) and Utin (2024) have a consensus on the study undertaken by Labov on the use of /r/ in the New York speech community. The discovery was complex and interesting. Using the word ‘floor’, Edem (2016) and Enang (2017) discovered that some respondents used \emptyset while others used [r]. Some used [r] consistently in all circumstances, but some used it occasionally (Enang and Utin, 2023, Enang and Edem, 2022 and Utin 2023).

English went to America in the 17th Century since neither America nor the English language has had any rest. Phonological variants between British and American English have been significant (Enang and Edem, 2022; Utin, 2023). An example is the American deletion of /j/ in the production of the following word:

British English (BE)	American English (AE)
assume /æsju:m/	[æsu:m]
news /nju:z/	[nu:z]
tune /tju:n/	[tu:n]
due /dju:/	[du:]
nephew /fju:/	[fiu:]

Variation between Indian English and British English is easily noticed in the following:

Indian English:	[vɒt ɑ kæn du: fə ju:]
British English:	/vɒt kæn ɑ du: fə ju:/

Two variations are involved here: phonological variation and syntactic variation. Phonological variation is an aspect of our daily lives in different regions and circumstances. English can never be spoken with a global norm (Edem, 2016). It would be ignoring the ingredients of culture, which forms part of every natural language (Edem, 2005; Enang and Edem, 2022). The relationship between every language, its speakers and their relationship with the external world are expressed in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, especially in the concepts of linguistic relativity and determinism (Ward, 1972; Lyons, 1990; Yule, 1997 and Enang and Utin, 2023).

Global Co-operation and Understanding

We need a change of attitude if we employ English as a global language. We must accept the fact of global dominance by English (Smith, 1983; Jenkins, 1998; Edem, 2005). According to Enang and Edem (2022) and Utin (2024), phonological variations of English are noticeable in various regions of the world. Such variations are aspects of linguistic and cultural identity. Hudson (1981), Edem (2020) Utin and Enang (2020) suggest that the area are very illuminating:

Standard English subsumes a wide range of varieties and has no clear boundaries vis-à-vis nonstandard varieties. In particular, there are many different ways of pronouncing Standard English (diverse accents), one particularly prestigious in England and Wales, namely "Received Pronunciation".

Wallwork (1969), Ward (1972), Edem (2020), Enang and Utin (2023) and Utin (2024) suggest that it may not be at all easy for us to define Standard English because of a failure to agree about the norm or norms that should apply.

Teachers of English will expose their students to RP. They will, at the same time, make them aware of the different phonological variants in our globe. Edem (2020) states that our world is becoming one melting pot of culture. In such a circumstance, we would naturally expect multi-dimensional manifestations. This opinion corroborates Smith (1983) and Enang and Utin (2023). English is the language of the Internet, trade transactions, political summits and conferences (Crystal, 1992; Enang, 2017; Enang and Edem, 2022).

In light of these observations, native speakers must learn to give up, while non-native speakers must learn to appreciate the usefulness of English. Wherever the two will meet will mark the beginning of the globalization of English (Edem, 2005; Utin, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Within this brief compass, this paper tried to give reasons for English as a Global Language (EGL). It has also dwelt on accent, dialect and language and how they contribute to phonological variations. We have identified the problems that face the acceptance and use of English as a Global Language including discrepancies relating to idiosyncratic and regional phonological variants, the attitude of both the native and non-native speakers of English as well as the attitude of teachers of English (Edem, 2016; Utin and Enang, 2020).

The conclusion borrows from the literature that English is a global language despite all pretences to the contrary. Phonological variations in English are an inclusive occurrence and do not significantly hinder intelligibility in communication in English between whatever cadres of speakers (Edem, 2016). Variations are cultural signals which must be identified and appreciated by teachers and students, native and non-native speakers of English. Standard is not easy to come by. These are basic facts.

Finally, we will not describe variant forms as *bad*, *incorrect*, *deviant* or *informed*; but will accept them as productive in the development of a world language for global communication and intelligibility in the face of a proliferation of languages.

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