

Prosodic structures in New Englishes: Evidence from Nigerian English

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Language contact ranges from dialect continua via multi-dialectal or multi-lingual communities to dominant languages in substrate or adstrate language environments. After briefly illustrating prosodic contact effects in the first two situations, I will concentrate on the third situation in the context of New Englishes, with Nigerian English as the main case.

The phonology of New Englishes will result from the matching the phonetic forms of British English with native phonetic forms that resemble them. Their phonological representations are the building blocks of the new phonological grammar. Even though this grammar may be rather different from that of BrE, the overall phonetic forms it produces should be expected to resemble the phonetic forms of BrE reasonably well. NigE illustrates this imbalance between the phonological and the phonetic similarities with superstrate English. In this talk I will summarize my slowly developing understanding of the NigE grammar, which was helped both by my collaboration with Inyang Udofot and a number of fact-finding experiments.

Taking the typological features of BrE as a starting point, I will establish how these have been interpreted in NigE. Intonational structures arise from sequences of word prosodic structures, so that both word prosody and sentence prosody need to be addressed. As for word prosody, English has trochaic feet from the right word edge, creating stressed and segmentally reduced unstressed syllables, has at most one unstressed syllable at the word beginning, has footless function words, and distinguishes between primary and secondary stress. NigE has left-edge stress, either initial or peninitial. It has unstressed function words, without the distributional restriction on unreduced vowels in unstressed syllables.

As for the post-lexical prosody of BrE, I assume maximum accentuation of stressed syllables in non-compound words, causing e.g. *Adi'ron dacks* to be *ADiRONdacks*. Morphological derivations and post-lexical rules produce a slew of accent deletions, producing minimal pairs like *the WHITE House/HOUSE*, *an old/OLD ENGLISH teacher*, *DOGS must be carried/CARRied*, and *LONdon? I've never BEEN in the city/been in the CIty*. In addition, it has tonally distinct pitch accents, like H*L, L*, etc., whose starred tone associates with the accented syllables. All other tones remain floating. Optional downstep creates sequences of descending targets of H*-tones. Interpolations between tonal targets ignore boundaries within the intonational phrase. NigE invariably inserts a LH* pitch accent on every non-function word, with H* going to the stressed syllable and spreading right to the word end. Function words have L. LH* is an obligatory trigger of downstep, whereby L uniquely remains floating in words with initial stress. Final L% and H% are used in statements and questions, respectively. After the formation of non-function words, there are no morphological or postlexical tone or stress rules.

The pitch contours of BrE downstepping utterances are very much like NigE contours. Still, the structural differences will reveal themselves. From the point of view of NigE, the floating status of the non-starred intonational tones in BrE leaves many syllables tonally unspecified. Quite unlike the continuing interpolations of BrE, every NigE non-function word is marked by a pitch drop and every function word is either followed by level pitch, as before a word with peninitial stress, or a pitch upstep. However, there is no research indicating that this affects word recognition for NigE listeners to BrE speech. From the point of view of BrE, the absence of any post-lexical tonal deletions gives NigE a rhythmic character, with too many 'stresses'.