

Original Paper

Exploring the Articulation of Sentence-Stress among Teachers of English in Selected Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

A number of studies on Nigerian English intonation, of which sentence stress is a part, reveal that Nigerian English is devoid of accentuation; it is generally spoken with tone. Even at that, none of these studies has analyzed how teachers of English in Nigeria articulate or utilize sentence stress in speech, whether consciously or unconsciously. This present study focuses, therefore, on the performance of secondary school English teachers in the use of sentence stress for effective communication. Analysis of 24 (12 short and 12 long) elicited English sentences uttered by 32 secondary school English teachers in Lagos State of Nigeria reveal a performance of only 27% correct accentuation and 73% incorrect accentuation. The study concludes that secondary school teachers of English in Nigeria have not adequately mastered the art of accenting the right words in sentences to accurately generate the intended meaning. The study recommends that intensive trainings be organized for teachers of English, thereby creating awareness of the need to treat sentence stress not only as a mere English Language classroom topic, but also as an effective tool of oral communication beyond the shores of Nigeria.

Keywords

intonation, sentence stress, accent/accntuation, articulation, Nigerian-English

1. Introduction

Language is a medium of communication and an effective pedagogic tool used to exchange information and ideas between interlocutors in learning environments such as between teachers and learners. It is also used to impart knowledge to learners in both formal and informal education. However, effective communication cannot be realized if the learner gets a different signal from the intended message of the teacher in a formal learning institution like a secondary school. Thus, Kreidler (1997) submits that any utterance has a meaning, and the speaker intends to convey a message; but communication is successful

only when “the hearer’s interpretation matches the speaker’s intension” (p. 35).

English is the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools; and “although, much work has been done on the English language in Nigeria, there is still need for renewed efforts at examining the way the English language is used to communicate messages in the Nigerian classroom” (Olateju, 2004, p. 20), hence, the motivation for this present study. Phonology is one of the linguistic fields through which effective oral communication between interlocutors is determined, especially the suprasegmental or prosodic aspect, which essentially embraces tone, stress, intonation and rhythm. Hyman (1975, p. 187) posits that the term suprasegments “is used to refer to both phonological and grammatical units larger than the segments”. In Schane’s (1973, p. 14) view, however, prosody entail features such as length, pitch and stress; and they are usually associated with a syllable. We are quick to add, however, that prosody can actually function at the levels of word, sentence and discourse (e.g., Lass, 1984). As this present study progresses, “stress” will be restricted in use to the most prominent syllable at word level while accent/accenuation will encompass “sentence stress” where a whole word in an utterance attains prominence; i.e., where the “meaning-carrying-word” in an utterance is accented (cf. Roach, 2000).

In the discourse of stress placement in an utterance, concepts such as accent or accenuation, emphatic stress and contrastive stress come into play. Aremo (2012, p. 99) points out that, although content words are stressed or accented in a sentence, any word at all may be given extra strong stress for the purpose of emphasizing some points or for contrasting the word with some other words the listener might wrongly assume was used or intended. Thus, accent in an English utterance cannot be separated from the information a listener deduces as the intended message. In consonance with that notion, Bian (2013, p. 1) posits that stress and by extension accent, “plays an important role in intelligibility and comprehensibility”. By this token, the part of a sentence accented and emphasized is assumed by the listener to be significant for meaning. That is, wrong accenuation in sentences may be capable of distorting the listeners’ (especially students’) perception of a lesson; which leads, unavoidably, to lengthening of the time spent on explaining even the simplest term. For instance, if an instructor in a Second Language (L2) English classroom is sensitive to notice that their students do not comprehend the intended message, they may start to introduce more words unconsciously into the discourse to correct the misinterpreted code or to make up for the breakdown in communication resulting from the failure to accent the right word. That way, the time allotted to teaching is wasted and the instructor becomes unable to meet the set-out objectives. This may also result in a shallow impartation of the teaching content. Thus, this paper intends to investigate the extent to which teachers of English in Lagos State of Nigeria are able to accent words as information carriers, when they teach their topics to learners. The specific research objectives guiding the study are:

- (a) to identify the pattern of sentence-stress articulation among selected secondary school teachers of English in Lagos State;
- (b) to determine the implication of the identified pattern in (a) for effective teaching or otherwise in an English as a Second Language (ESL) environment; and

(c) to examine ways to enhance secondary school English teachers' performance in sentence stress articulation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sentence Stress: Accent, Emphasis, Contrast and Focus

Accent as used in this present study differs from Yule's (2010, p. 240) conceptualization of the term as "aspects of pronunciation that identify where an individual speaker is from, regionally or socially". Rather, it is limited to that word that the speaker expends more force or energy on in a bid to attract or focus the listener's attention on it for the overall interpretation of its significance to the encoded meaning. The decision to accent particular words in a sentence rather than others depends on the context of the message and the attitude of the speaker towards some aspect of the message (Sabater, 1991). Intuitively, pitch accents in English indicate that the speaker means to stress the importance of the words they appear on (Gussenhoven, 2008). Thus, sentence stress can be described as the relative degree of force given to the different words in a sentence (Clark & Yallop, 2000; Bian, 2013), especially in order to make the words stand out, thereby signifying their importance in the sentence. Levis and Levis (2011) note that the focus for accentuation usually, should be on the last content word in a sentence. However, it does not necessarily belong on the last word when the context contains contrast. Even the content words, according to Bian, are not of the same significance to the meaning of the syntactic structure. "The relative importance of words, therefore, provides a basis for determining their relative stress" (Bian, 2013, p. 4). Bian notes in other words that a content word may be unstressed when it is less important. By the same token, Aremo (2012, p. 99) points out that, although content words are normally accented in a sentence, any word at all may be given extra strong stress for the purpose of emphasizing some points or for contrasting the word with some other words the listener might wrongly assume was used or intended. Thus, accent in an utterance cannot be separated from the information a listener deduces as the intended message. Aremo notes further that a grammatical word such as a pronoun, a preposition, a conjunction or an interjection can sometimes be accented for the purpose of emphasizing some point or contrasting the word with some other word the listener might wrongly think the speaker had wanted to use. This extra strong stress is indeed what is commonly referred to as emphatic or contrastive stress, depending on what is considered the exact purpose it is made to serve. A function word is thus accented or focused, only when it calls attention to the meaning it conveys (Kupier & Allan, 1996); a presupposition that sentence stress or accentuation can also be regarded as focus (Ladd, 1980; Gussenhoven, 1994; Levis & Levis, 2011; Na, Yuan, & Bin, 2012).

Because the researchers set out to investigate the level of teachers' competence in the mastery of the art of sentence stress within the ambit of the elicited data for the study, both content and function words are accented at the initial, medial or final positions of sentences, in accordance with how important they are to the interpretation of the sentences under study. By maximizing the mobility of accent, in what appears to be the same utterance, Kreidler, (1997) posits that a speaker can create "differences in focus,

which are subtle differences of meaning” (p. 105).

Gussenhoven (1994) posits that English uses pitch accents to mark focus, with special emphasis on the phenomenon of “focus projection” (cf. Levis & Levis, 2011; Na, Yuan, & Bin, 2012). The domain of focus projection is referred to as the “focus domain”; a constituent that can have its focus marked with a single pitch accent, such as focused Argument, Modifier, or Argument-Modifier combination (Gussenhoven, 1994). However, the constituent on which the pitch accent falls is taken to be the focus of the message in the sentence. English is noted to have ‘restricted’ focus projection, i.e. from the argument to its predicate and not extended focus projection which allows focus to be projected to much large constituents. Restricted focus projection is used to refute the assumption that full focus version of a sentence is equivalent to a narrow version with the focus on the last pitch accented word. Na et al.’s (2012) concepts of broad and narrow focus relate closely with Gussenhoven’s (1994) restricted focus projection and extended focus projection. Ladd (1980) and Na et al. (2012) describe broad focus as the focus on whole constituents or sentences, not just on individual words; while narrow focus refers to the cases when one or fewer constituents are put under focus within a sentence. Examples of full and narrow focus versions, adapted from Gussenhoven (1994, p. 4) are:

1. (*What happened?*): BEN tickled CLARK with a FEATHER (Full version)
2. (*What did Ben tickle Clark with?*): Ben tickled Clark with a FEATHER. (Narrow version)

Thus, listeners can determine the structure of a sentence with the presence or absence of non-final pitch accent. In the current study, every constituent in a sentence happens to be a potential focus domain, especially in accordance with Kreidler’s (1997) model which forms the framework for the study (see Sections 3.1 and 4).

2.2 Cross-linguistic Influence of Sentence Stress

English language is a stress-timed language. Hence, the proper use of English word stress and sentence stress by L2 speakers, especially those whose L1 are tonal or syllable-timed, poses great challenge (e.g., Fajobi, 1998; Faleye, 2016; Melefa, 2018; Melefa & Amoniyani, 2019). It has been observed that in Nigerian English, tone is often taken as a correlate of stress, while intonation is devoid of accentuation (Fajobi, 2013). In fact, the common practice, in an attempt to accent, is the “tonologization of English stresses/syllables” (Fajobi, 2008, p. 230). In other words, Nigerian English is a tonal variety of English; it has been generally reported to be spoken with tone rather than stress (e.g., Wells, 1982; Gut & Milde, 2002; Fajobi 2008, 2013; Gussenhoven & Udofot, 2010). Therefore, there may be some sociophonological and cross-linguistic influence of L1 on L2 in the realisation of English sentence stress by L2 speakers whose linguistic backgrounds are syllable-timed as is the case in Nigerian English. Hickey (2004, p. 529) corroborates this with the assertion that “the background languages of countries where English is spoken have had a decisive influence on its manifestation there”. Similarly, Atoye (2005) reports Bansal’s (1976) observation on speakers’ disposition to sentence stress and intonation in Indian English thus:

The sentence stress in Indian English is not always in accordance with the

normal RP pattern and the characteristic rhythm is not maintained. The division of speech into sense groups and tone groups is sometimes faulty, and pauses are made at wrong places. The location of the intonation nucleus is not always at the place where it would be in normal English. The rising tone sometimes used at the end of statements must sound unusual to the RP-speaking listeners.

It is therefore, not surprising that the intonation of non-native English speakers poses serious intelligibility problem to native speakers of the language (Atoye 2005). Bansal (1966; cited in Dyrud, 2001) observed that the pattern of stress placement could also determine the interpretation that a listener gets from the utterance made. For example, Bansal (1966) was said to have presented some native English listeners with the utterance made by Indian speakers of English, who often apply word stress in an unorthodox manner. It was discovered in that study that listeners tended to interpret what they heard to suit the stress pattern. However, what was perceived by the listeners was different from what was uttered by the speakers. For example, the word *yesterday* was perceived as *study*; *atmosphere* as *must fear*; *written* as *retain*; *character* as *director*, *about* as *come out* and *prefer* as *fearful*, etc. Such errors (of stress assignment) however are discovered to be common with non-native speakers of English and the intelligibility problems that result show the importance of internalizing the stress pattern of a language during the language learning process.

Jumani et al. (2011) investigated the effects of native language Saraiki with reference to sentence stress and diphthongs on English pronunciation. The result showed that while the respondents were able to identify well with the English words containing diphthongs, they could not follow the correct pattern of sentence stress. This is as a result of the fact that Saraiki is a syllable-timed language, whereas English is stress-timed. Thus, "Saraiki language interferes and makes no contribution in the development of accurate stress pattern of an English sentence" (Jumani et al., 2011, p. 1). They further observe that expression of oneself in a language other than the native language could be difficult; and an attempt to do such results in three things:

- i) A person fails to express exactly what is wished;
- ii) The expression gains other meanings; and
- iii) A person thinks in native language and expresses in some other one.

Wayland et al. (2006) observe that there is evidence of transfer of L1 stress patterns into English by Thailand speakers of English. Thai, the standard language in Thailand, unlike English, is a tone language. Thus, Wayland et al. (ibid) submitted that the tendency of transferring the knowledge of tone into English intonation or sentence stress articulation is very high. In fact, non-native speakers are said to be at loss when faced with the task of using intonation in their English speech or interpreting it (Atoye, 2005).

Dominguez (2013) compares the sentence stress assignment pattern of English and Spanish. It was observed that prominence in Spanish is strictly sentence-final, in contrast to English where it can occur

at different positions. Using the example of possible English and Spanish responses to the question “*Who eats mangoes?*”, Dominguez observes that while English gives an SVO structure (in an active sentence) with the maximum prominence being on the stressed syllable of the subject, Spanish has a VOS structure; hence, prominence falls on the last element. As a consequence, speakers of English from these two backgrounds will run into the problem of intelligibility because the Spanish-English speaker will inadvertently shift stress from its normal position. In what is similar to Dominguez’s (2013) study, Melefa and Amoniyani (2019) investigated the patterns of word stress among Educated Igbo English speakers in Nigeria. They observed a preponderant “preference for rightward/leftward shift in stress placement by the participants” (p. 9). In the same vein, Chen et al. (2001) compared acoustic characteristics (Fundamental Frequency “ F_0 ”, vowel duration and vowel intensity) of American English sentence stress produced by forty native Mandarin speakers of English with those of forty American English speakers. It was observed that American speakers are able to differentiate stressed and unstressed words according to Fundamental Frequency, duration and intensity. Although Mandarin speakers were able to signal stress in their sentences produced, the acoustic characteristics of stress were not identical to those used by the American speakers. Stressed words were produced by the former with higher Fundamental Frequency and shorter duration compared to the American speakers. Findings in Chen et al.’s (2001) research suggest that although the acoustic differences observed reflect interference of L1 Mandarin in the production of L2 American English, there is no critical divergence between these speakers in the way they implement American English sentence stress. Chen et al., further point out the obvious that English is a non-tone language. But the acoustic correlate of tone in English is the Fundamental Frequency contour and it is usually placed on the last word in the sentence. The choice of rise and fall is made between it. The present researchers are interested in examining the extent to which ESL teachers in Nigeria are able to correctly deploy sentence stress (and its acoustic correlates) as a “compact tool” for information dissemination in formal classroom environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Kreidler’s Tonicity Model forms the theoretical framework for this study. Tonicity, according to Kreidler (1997), is the “position of the accented word within a tone unit”. The word accented in a sentence serves as the focus of the message. Therefore, by maximising the mobility of accent, in what appears to be the same utterance, a speaker can create “differences in focus, which are subtle differences of meaning” (Kreidler 1997, p. 105). Although, function words are naturally unstressed and weak, any word within a sentence can be accented and then it becomes strong. Every tone unit has one accented word, which is the most informative word referred to as the nucleus of the tone unit. Usually, the nucleus occurs at or near the end of the tone unit. However, an utterance can have different tonicity (nuclear word) in different contexts; thus, focusing the listener’s attention on the speaker’s intended message. Once the nucleus of a sentence is identified, the remaining part (onset and/or coda) is

de-accented. To this end, Kreidler (1997) proposes a tone unit structure to cater for the representation of the accented and de-accented parts of a sentence. These are: onset (the element preceding the nucleus), nucleus (the point of focus) and coda (the element after the nucleus). The onset and coda are optional elements, while the nucleus is mandatory. A sentence can therefore have the structure [onset + nucleus] when the “focus” is sentence-final, [nucleus + coda] when the focus is sentence-initial, [onset + nucleus + coda] when the focus is sentence-medial. For example, the tone unit structure for the sentence “I have just bought houses” can be any of the following tone unit structure:

	Onset	Nucleus	Coda
a)	I have	JUST	bought houses
b)		I	have just bought houses
c)	I have just bought	HOUSES	

The semantic implication of each structure differs. In (a), the message obtainable is that the speaker’s buying of houses has taken place at the moment, not necessarily a thing of the distant past. In (b) the speaker is the one projected in contrast to any other person that may come to the mind of the listener. In (c) houses (and not cars) constitute the main focus. Hence, for every element accented, there are other applicable alternatives, against which the listener measures the word accented to arrive at the speaker’s meaning. Accentuation, therefore, has some form of paradigmatic implication. However, when the speaker’s nucleus within the sentence does not represent his intended message and where the listener takes such to be significant for meaning, there is the possibility of a breakdown in communication.

3.2 The Subjects

The respondents for this study are 32 English teachers, purposively selected across four local government areas in Lagos State: Eti Osa, Ikeja, Kosofe and Mushin. These local governments were chosen to be representative of the urban areas (Eti Osa and Ikeja), semi-rural and rural (Kosofe and Mushin) areas of Lagos State. This was done in order to have a more vivid picture of what is obtainable in different parts of Lagos State. Readers need to know that Lagos State used to be the capital of Nigeria for decades after the nation attained independence in 1960. We therefore believe that, since people from different parts of the nation live in it, subjects drawn from the state could be representative of the Nigerian populace.

3.3 Test Items, Test Design and Administration

Participants were asked to react to a structured three-section questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to elicit demographic information, the second part examined the informants’ level of awareness of the significance of sentence stress, while the third part consisted 24 sentences read aloud by the 32 respondents and recorded (see the test items in Section 4). A total of 768 tokens were generated and subjected to acoustic analysis, using PRAAT, in order to determine how effectively the informants were able to use sentence stress to communicate as teachers in the classroom. The sentences in the questionnaire are in two categories: short sentences portraying different intensions of the speaker and long sentences in a dialogue, involving a teacher and a student.

4. Analysis and Findings

The data was analysed using Kreidler's (1997) Tonicity Model, with emphasis placed on the tone unit structure (the onset, nucleus and the coda). The word signifying the intended message in the sentence is taken to be the nucleus, while elements before and after it are regarded as the onset and coda, respectively. Also, the performances of the respondents in the experimental sentences were statistically represented, using descriptive and inferential statistics (frequency tables, simple percentages and figures). An utterance-by-utterance analysis of the respondents' performance in the test items, in accordance with their categories and groups is done below. The first 4 test items analysed in section 4.1 through 4.4 belong to Group A under Category 1; they portray *youthfulness*.

4.1 Respondents' Performance in Test Item 1 (Ti1): Your Attitude was Childish.

The accented word that portrays *youthfulness* and serves as the nucleus in Ti1 is *childish*. Thus, the tone unit structure for the sentence is given as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Your attitude was	childish	_____

The sentence has an onset and a nucleus, with no coda. However, out of the 32 informants tested, 12 (37.5%) accented the right word, having accented the appropriate word and given the sentence its proper onset-nucleus- ϕ structure. 20 (62.5%) respondents missed it. 16 of them accented *attitude* and 1 of them accented *was*; thus, making the sentence to assume an onset-nucleus-coda pattern. The remaining 3 of the respondents accented *Your* and produced the pattern ϕ -nucleus-coda. Figure 1 below shows, acoustically, an example of the performance of informant (Inf) 2 in test item 1. The pitch trace for the informant starts at 158.8Hz, reaches its peak at 181.5Hz (the highest) on the word *attitude* and ends at 108.2Hz. This shows that rather than accent *childish*, he accented *attitude*.

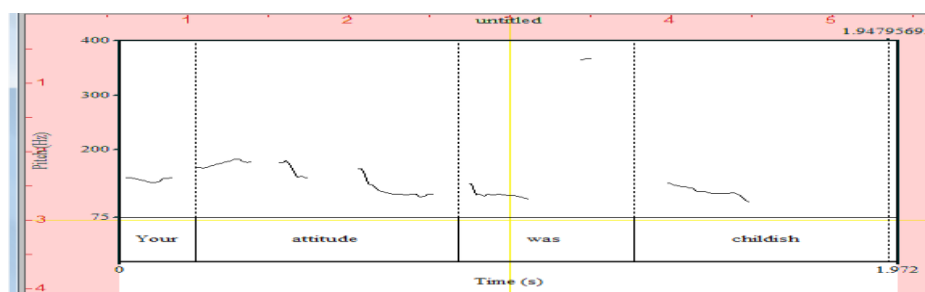


Figure 1. Inf2 Accented the Word Attitude

4.2 Respondents' Performance in Ti2: It Feels Great to be Young.

The accented word and nucleus of this utterance is *young*. The tone unit structure for the utterance is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
It feels great to be	young	_____

Ti2 has an onset and a nucleus with no coda. However, out of the 32 respondents tested, only 2 (6%)

got it right by accenting the appropriate word and producing the onset-nucleus- ϕ structure. 30 (94%) respondents missed it. 3 of them accented the preposition *to*, 3 others accented *great*, while 21 of them accented *feel*, all realizing structure “onset-nucleus-coda”. The remaining 3 accented *it*, realizing the structure ϕ -nucleus-coda. In Figure 2 below, the pitch trace for Inf4’s rendition of the utterance starts at 256.3Hz on *it*, rises to 346.6Hz on *feels*, which is the nucleus and then falls at 174.8Hz on the last word.

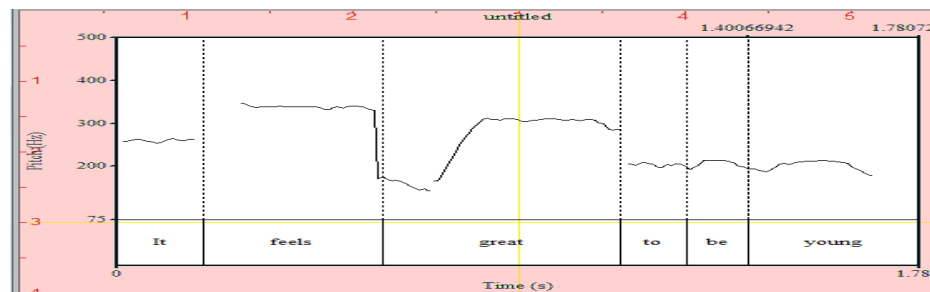


Figure 2. Inf4 Accented the Word *Feels*

4.3 Respondents' Performance in Ti3: *He was Sent to a Juvenile Home*

The word *juvenile* is accented and thus serves as the nucleus of the utterance. The tone unit structure is represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
He was sent to a	juvenile	home

The sentence has an onset, a nucleus and a coda. Yet, only 5 (16%) out of the 32 respondents got it right, as they realized the onset-nucleus-coda structure and accented the appropriate word. 27 (84%) other respondents missed it. 3 of them accented the word *he* and arrived at a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. The remaining realized an onset-nucleus-coda pattern, but missed the accented component; 21 of them accented *sent*, 2 accented *to* and 1 accented *was*. Figure 3 shows an incorrect articulation of the nucleus by Inf8 whose fundamental frequency (F_0) or pitch is highest on the word *sent* rather than on *juvenile*. The pitch trace for Inf8’s performance begins at 138.7Hz, rises to 202Hz on the word *sent* and falls at 122.2Hz, as represented below:

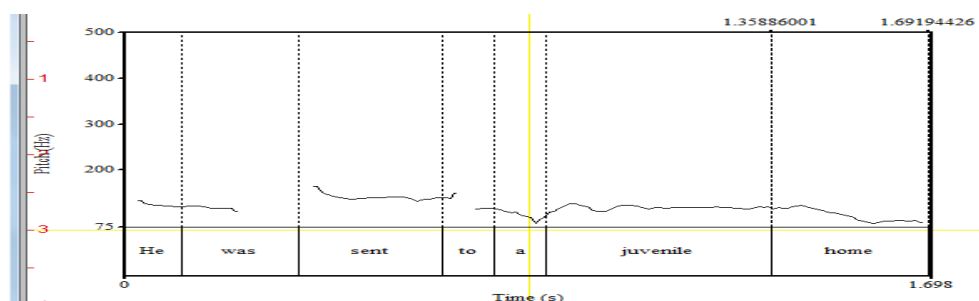


Figure 3. Inf8 Accented the Word *Sent*

4.4 Respondents' Performance in Ti4: *The Youths are Protesting*

The nucleus to be accented in the utterance is *youths*. The tone unit of the utterance is structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
The	youths	are protesting

Ti4 has an onset, a nucleus and a coda. Out of the 32 tested respondents, 20 (62.5%) got it right. They realized the appropriate onset-nucleus-coda structure and accented the correct word. 12 (37.5%) of the respondents missed it. 9 of them accented the word *protesting*, realizing the onset-nucleus structure. The remaining 3 accented *are*. Figure 4 below represents the pitch trace for Inf9, which starts at 184.6Hz, rises to 348.2Hz on the word *protesting* and falls at 163.6Hz. She did not accent the correct word.

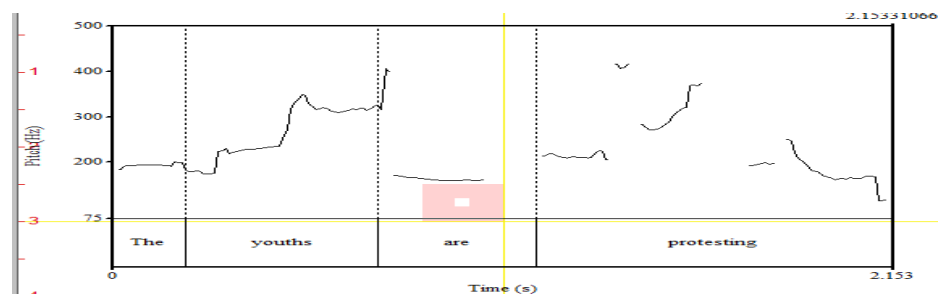


Figure 4. Inf9 Accented the Word *Protesting*

4.5 Respondents' Performance in Ti5: *You must be Ready for the Task*

Test items in sections 4.5 to 4.8 belong to Group B of Category 1 and portray *compulsion*. We now present an utterance-by-utterance analysis of the test items.

The accented word and nucleus of the utterance in Section 4.5 above is *must* and the tone unit structure for the utterance is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
You	must	be ready for the task

Ti5 has an onset, a nucleus and a coda. However, only 11 (34%) respondents out of 32 tested, placed the accent on the proper word and realized an onset-nucleus-coda structure. 21 (66%) others accented wrong words. 1 respondent accented *you* and realized a ϕ -nucleus-coda pattern. 5 respondents accented *task* and arrived at an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. 1 respondent accented *for* and 1 other respondent accented *be* respectively. 13 others accented *ready*, all realizing the onset-nucleus-coda pattern but missing out on the correct stress placement. The pitch trace for Inf10 starts at 120.9Hz on the word *must*, rises to 198.8Hz and falls at 134.4Hz, as depicted in Figure 5:

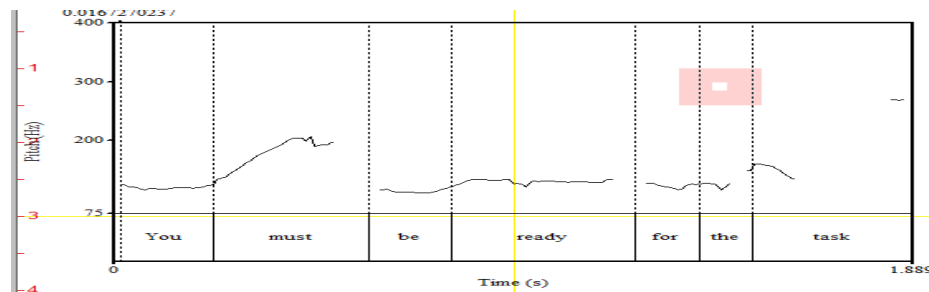


Figure 5. Inf10 Accented the Correct Word, *Must*

4.6 Respondents' Performance in Ti6: *I Compel You to Sit.*

The nucleus and accented word expressing compulsion in the utterance is *compel*. The tone unit of the utterance is structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
I	compel	you to sit

The onset, nucleus and coda are present in the utterance. Out of 32 respondents, 23 (72%) got it right, by accenting the proper word and deriving an onset-nucleus-coda structure. 9 (28%) other respondents missed out on the stress placement. 9 of them accented *sit*, which produced an onset-nucleus- ϕ structure, while 1 respondent accented *I*, and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda pattern. For Inf11, the pitch trace starts from 182.9Hz, rises to 239.8Hz, on the correct word *compel* and ends on 167.6Hz, as depicted in Figure 6:

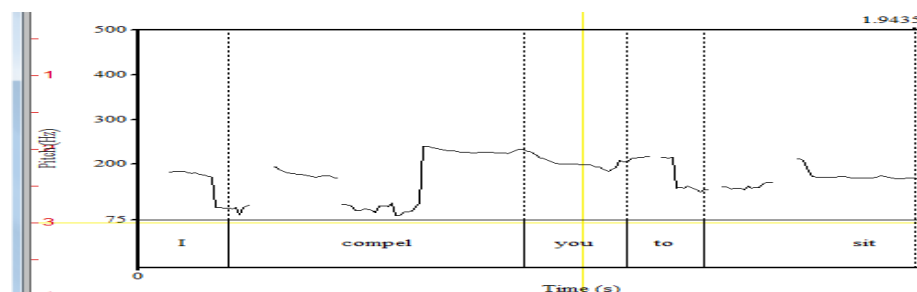


Figure 6. Inf11 Accented the Correct Word, *Compel* in the Sentence

4.7 Respondents' Performance in Ti7: *We Demand That You Quit*

The word that is accented to express compulsion and serve as the nucleus in this utterance is *demand*. The tone unit is structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
We	demand	that you quit

The tone unit consists of the onset, nucleus and coda. 18 (56%) respondents out of 32 realized the proper stress pattern and structure of the sentence; onset nucleus coda. 14 (44%) others missed it. 10 respondents accented *quit* and realized an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. 1 respondent accented *we* and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure; 2 respondents accented *that*, while 1 other respondent accented *you*.

For Inf13, as shown in Figure 7 below, the pitch trace on the wrongly accented *quit* starts from 140.6Hz, rises to 227.3Hz and ends on 93.99Hz.

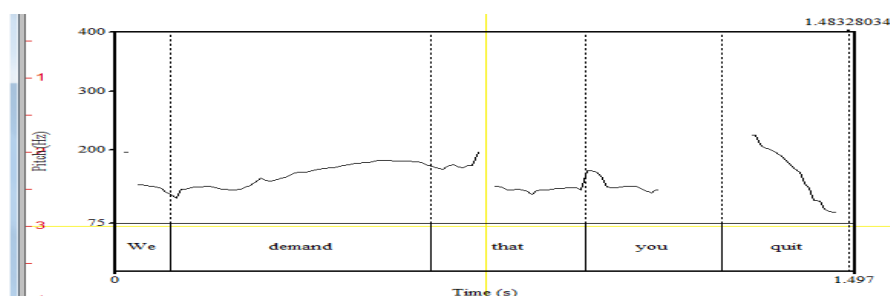


Figure 7. Inf13 Accented the Wrong Word *Quit*

4.8 Respondents' Performance in Ti8: *We have to Dance Well*

The phrase “*have to*” is accented and serves as the nucleus of the utterance. The structure of this tone unit is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
We	have to	dance well

The utterance therefore consists of an onset, a nucleus and a coda. Out of 32 respondents, 22 (69%) accented the proper element and also correctly realized an onset-nucleus-coda structure. The remaining 10 (31%) respondents accented the wrong elements in the sentence. 5 of them accented *well* and realized an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. 2 respondents accented *we* and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. 2 other respondents accented *to*, while 1 accented *dance*. The pitch trace for Inf14, as represented in Figure 8 below, starts on 200.0Hz, rises to 273.9Hz and ends at 152.6Hz.

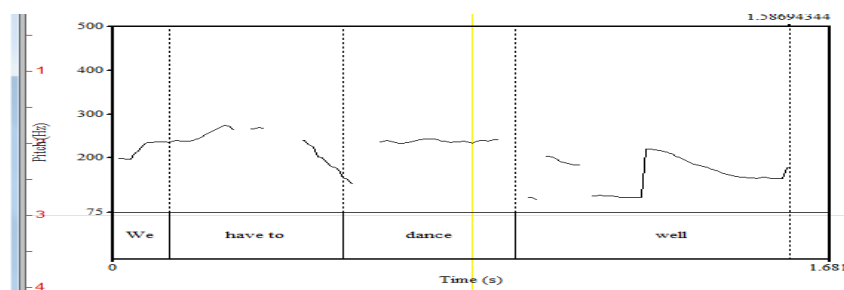


Figure 8. Inf14 Accented the Correct Element, *have to*

4.9 Respondents' Performance in Ti9: *Mary and John were there*

The test items in section 4.9 through 4.12 belong to Group C of Category 1. The speaker's intension here is to portray *inclusion/addition*. An utterance-by-utterance description of the test items is provided below, starting with the test item in Section 4.9.

The conjunction *and* is the nucleus of Ti9; it is accented to express inclusion/addition. It can be structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Mary	and	John were there

The utterance consists of the onset, nucleus and coda. However, only 3 (9%) out of the 32 respondents tested got it correctly. 29 (91%) others missed it. As many as 26 respondents accented *Mary* and realized a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure, while 3 other respondents accented *John*. Figure 9 below shows Inf15's pitch trace, which starts from 202.5Hz, rises to 333.5Hz on the wrong word *Mary*, and falls on 153.6Hz.

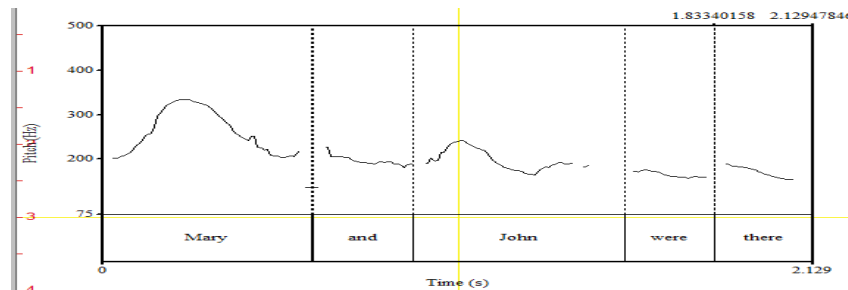


Figure 9. Inf15 Wrongly Accented the Word *Mary*

4.10 Respondents' Performance in Ti10: *He Walks with His Dog*.

The word accented in this utterance is *with*. It can be represented structurally as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
He walks	with	his dog

Thus, Ti10 maintains an onset-nucleus-coda structure. Out of 32 respondents tested, only 6 (19%) got it correctly, while 26 (81%) produced the sentence with the wrong stress placement. 18 respondents accented *walks*, while 2 others accented *his*. 3 respondents accented *he* and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda pattern. 3 other respondents accented *dog* and realized an onset-nucleus- ϕ structure. The pitch trace for Inf16 in Figure 10 starts from 206.6Hz, rises to 231.3Hz on the word *walks* and ends at 155Hz, as represented below:

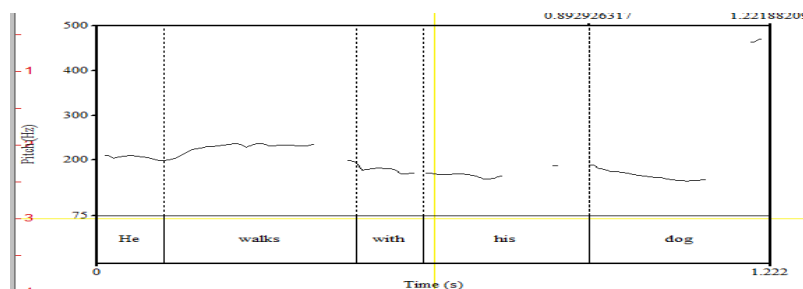


Figure 10. Inf16 Accented the Wrong Word *Walks*

4.11 Respondents' Performance in Ti11: *We Sent a Card, also*.

The word *also* is accented to portray inclusion/addition. The structure of the tone unit is therefore

represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
We sent a card	also	_____

The utterance consists of the onset and nucleus only. However, only 5 (16%) respondents got the proper accentuation and structure. 27 (84%) others accented something else and realized a completely different structure. 23 of them accented *sent*, 3 accented *card*, while 1 accented *a*, all deriving an onset-nucleus-coda structure. Figure 11 shows the rendition by an informant, who accented the wrong word. The pitch trace for Inf20 starts at 198.6Hz, rises to 208.5Hz on the word *sent* and falls on 159.9Hz, as represented below:

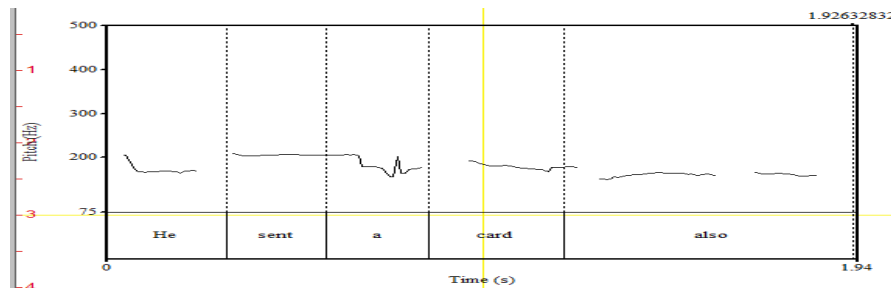


Fig 11. Inf20 Accented the Wrong Word *Sent*

4.12 Respondents' Performance in Ti12: *We are in Your Group*

The word *in* is accented and considered the nucleus of the utterance. The structure of the tone unit is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
We are	in	your group

The onset, nucleus and coda are adequately represented in the utterance. 8 (25%) out of 32 respondents got the stress placement and the onset-nucleus-coda structure right. 24 (75%) others missed it. 12 of them accented *group* and realized an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. 7 of the respondents accented *we* and altered the original pattern to derive a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. The remaining 5 accented *your*. Figure 12 shows the pitch trace for Inf21, which starts from 222.6Hz, reaches its peak at 252.1Hz on the word *we* and drops on 203.9Hz.

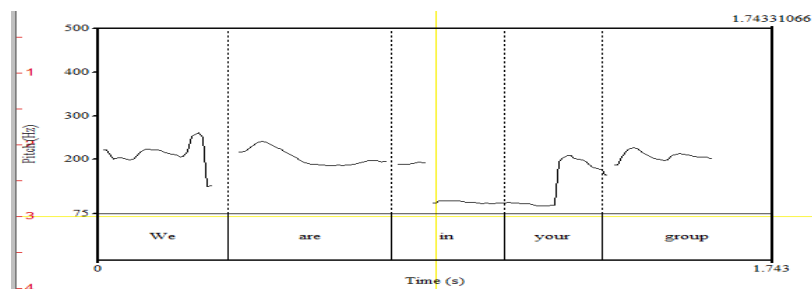


Figure 12. Inf21 Accented the Word *We*

4.13 Respondents' Performance in Ti13

Test items in section 4.13 to 4.15 belong to Sub-category 2.i under Category 2. The dialogue is a question-and-answer session between a teacher and a student. A word in each of the student's responses negates the impression of the teacher. The word is accented and given a structural tone unit representation.

Test item 13 (Ti13):

Teacher: Was it a very unpleasant day for Pat, the bride-to-be?

Student: It was a very pleasant day for Pat, the bride-to-be.

The word *pleasant* in the student's response negates the teacher's impression and is thus accented. It can be structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
It was a very	pleasant	day for Pat, the bride-to-be.

The onset, nucleus and coda are represented in the utterance. Out of the 32 respondents, 7 (22%) got the stress placement correctly and realized an onset-nucleus-coda structure. 25 (78%) others placed the stress wrongly and altered the structure in few cases. 2 of the respondents accented *it* and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda pattern. 1 respondent accented *for*, 1 accented *Pat*, 1 accented *to*, 1 accented *a*, 1 other accented *day*. 5 accented *was*, while the remaining 13 accented *very*, all retaining the original sentence structure. Figure 13 below portrays the pitch trace for Inf22, which starts from 119.4Hz, rises to 206.3Hz on the word *pleasant* and falls on 103Hz.

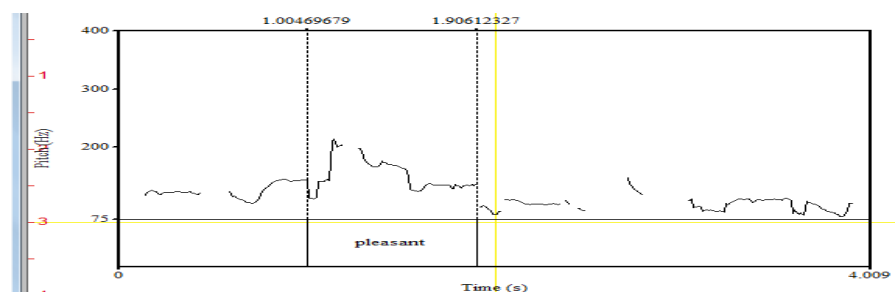


Figure 13. Inf22 Accented the Correct Word, *Pleasant*

4.14 Respondents' Performance in Ti14

Teacher: Was Pat indifferent about her facial blemish from chickenpox?

Student: Pat was bothered about her facial blemish from chickenpox.

The word *bothered* negates *indifferent*, which is the teacher's impression. Thus, *bothered* is accented and serves as the nucleus of the utterance. The structural representation is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Pat was	bothered	about her facial blemish from chickenpox

The utterance consists of the onset, nucleus and coda. Out of 32 respondents tested, only 5 (16%) got it right, by accenting the appropriate word and realizing the onset-nucleus-coda structure. 27 (84%) other

respondents accented the wrong words and some of them altered the structure of the item. 17 of them accented *Pat*, realising a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. 2 accented *chickenpox* and derived an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. 4 accented *facial*, 2 accented *her* and 1 accented *from*. For Inf23, as shown in Figure 14 below, the pitch trace starts at 182.2Hz, reaches its peak at 216.9Hz on *bothered* and falls at 102.2Hz.

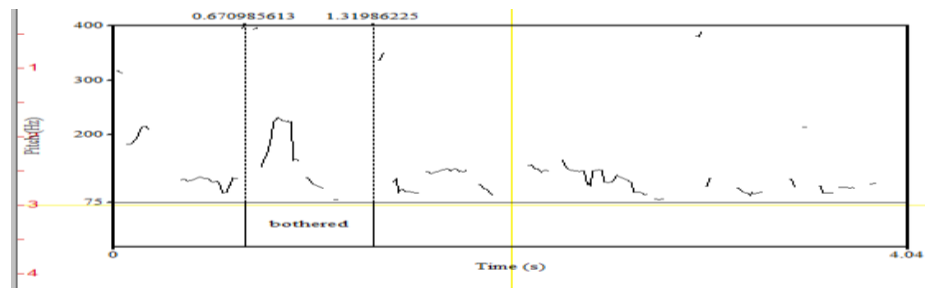


Fig 14: Inf23 accented the correct word, *bothered*

4.15 Respondents' Performance in Ti15

Teacher: Did Ben consider her to be ugly?

Student: Ben considered her to be charming.

The word *charming* is accented to negate the speaker's impression. Therefore, it serves as the nucleus of the utterance. It can be given the following structural representation:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Ben considered her to be	charming	_____

Ti15 has an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. Out of the 32 respondents tested, 7 (22%) got the correct stress pattern and structure, while 25 (78%) missed it. 13 of them accented *Ben* and derived a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. 7 accented *considered*, 2 accented *to*, 1 accented *be*, 1 accented *Pat*, while 1 other person accented *her*. For Inf1, as represented in Figure 15, the pitch trace starts at 117.3Hz, rises to 176.4Hz on the word *Ben* and falls at 89.32Hz.

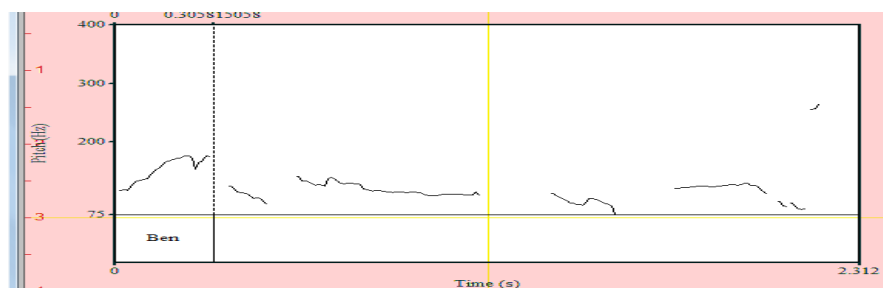


Figure 15. Inf1 Accented the Wrong Word *Ben*

4.16 Respondents' Performance in Ti16

Test items in section 4.16 through 4.21 belong to Sub-category 2.ii of Category 2. Here, a word in each of the student's questions negates the teacher's impression. Thus, the definite question-word is accented, while each utterance is structurally represented.

Test Item 16 (Ti16):

Teacher: Ben called this morning to say that he would be at the wedding in his most unusual form.

Student: Did Ben call this morning to say that he would be at the wedding in his most usual form?

The nucleus and accented word in the student's question is *usual*. It is structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Did Ben call...	usual	form

Ti16 consists of the onset, nucleus and a coda. Out of the 32 respondents tested, none (0%) was able to get it right. All 32 (100%) respondents placed stress on the wrong words and some altered the structure of the sentence. 17 respondents accented *Ben*, 2 accented *call*, 1 respondent accented *at*, 1 accented *say*, 1 accented *that*, 1 other accented *wedding*, 1 accented *to*, 1 accented *he*. 7 other respondents accented *form* and gave the sentence an onset-nucleus- ϕ coda pattern. The pitch trace for Inf3 in the production of Ti16, as shown in Figure 16, starts on *Ben* from 176.4Hz rises to 359.2Hz and falls at 172.2Hz.

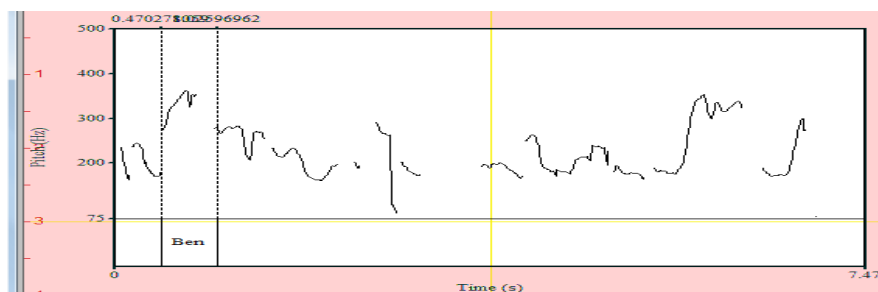


Figure 16. Inf3 Accented the Wrong Word *Ben*.

4.17 Respondents' Performance in Ti17

Teacher: Pat thought Ben was full of surprises.

Student: Did Pat think Ben was predictable?

Predictable is the nucleus and the accented word in the student's question. It is thus structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Did Pat think Ben was	predictable	_____?

The coda is absent in the utterance, while the onset and nucleus are represented. 15 (47%) respondents out of 32 accented the correct word and realized the proper onset-nucleus- ϕ structure. 17 (53%) other respondents missed it. 14 of them accented *Pat*, 2 accented *was*, while 1 accented *think*; all realizing an onset-nucleus-coda pattern. Figure 17 below is the pitch trace for Inf29's performance, which starts from 142.1Hz and reaches its peak at 294.9Hz on *predictable*. The accented word/nucleus happens to

be the last element in the sentence, which is a question; hence, the rise in the pitch trace of the respondent's production of the word.

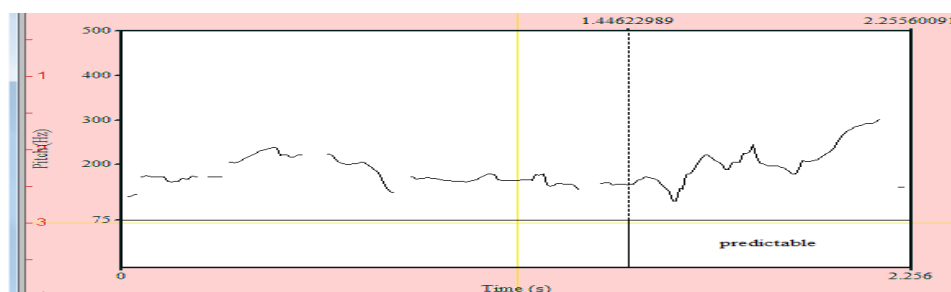


Figure 17. Inf29 Accented the Correct Word *Predictable*

4.18 Respondents' Performance in Ti18

Teacher: Pat was very eager to see her Mr. Charm.

Student: Was Pat very reluctant to see her Mr. Charm?

The word *reluctant* in the student's question negates the teacher's impression and is thus the nucleus of the utterance. The tone unit structure for the utterance is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Was Pat very	reluctant	to see her Mr. Charm

Ti18 thus has an onset-nucleus-coda structure. Out of the 32 respondents tested, only 3 (9%) got it correctly. 29 (91%) other respondents had a wrong stress placement, while some altered the original structure of the sentence. 11 of them accented *Pat*, 9 accented *charm*, 5 accented *see*, 1 accented *her*, 1 accented *Mr*. The 2 others accented *was* and thus gave the sentence a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. For Inf30, the pitch trace, as represented in Figure 18, starts from 191.2Hz, rises to 261.3Hz on *Pat* and falls at 257.8Hz.

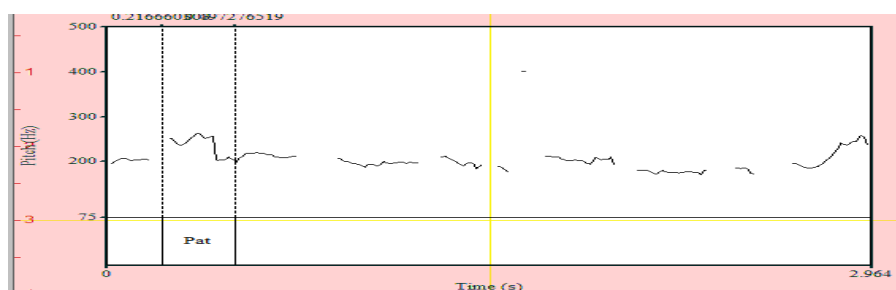


Figure 18. Inf30 Accented the Wrong Word *Pat*

4.19 Respondents' Performance in Ti19

Teacher: Pat became surprised to find her seventy-year-old next-door neighbour waiting as the groom.

Student: Did Pat become unsurprised to find her seventy-year-old next-door neighbour waiting as the groom?

The word accented in the above question is *unsurprised* and it is also the nucleus. The structural representation of the utterance is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Did Pat become	unsurprised	to find her...

The onset, nucleus and coda are present in the utterance. Out of the 32 respondents tested, 6 (19%) got the proper stress placement and the onset-nucleus-coda structure of the sentence. 26 (81%) others did not get the correct stress, while one of them altered the structure. 10 of the respondents accented *Pat*, 4 accented *seventy*, 4 others accented *groom*, 2 accented *become*, 2 accented *old*, 1 respondent accented *to*, 1 accented *waiting*, while 1 also accented *the*. 1 respondent accented *did* and realized a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. For Inf25, the pitch trace starts at 236.7Hz, reaches its peak at 323.8Hz on the word *Pat* and falls at 297.4Hz, as shown in Figure 19 below:

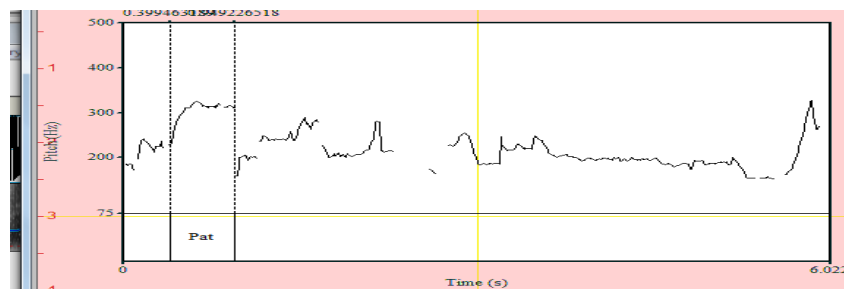


Figure 19. Inf25 Accented the Word *Pat*

4.20 Respondents' Performance in Ti20

Teacher: She had never talked to him all their days as neighbours.

Student: Had she ever talked to him all their days as neighbours?

The word *ever* serves as the nucleus, as well as the word accented to negate the teacher's impression. Its structural representation is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Had she	ever	talked to him all their days as neighbours

The onset, nucleus and coda are present in Ti20. However, only 1 (3%) of the 32 respondents got the correct stress pattern and structure of the sentence. 31 (97%) other respondents missed it and altered the structure in some instances. 19 of them accented *she*, 2 accented *days*, 2 accented *as*, 1 accented *him*, 1 accented *had* and 1 respondent accented *to*. 5 others accented *neighbours* and made the sentence to assume the structure onset-nucleus- ϕ . Figure 20 shows the pitch trace for Inf12, which starts from 110.2Hz, rises to 206.9Hz on the word *she* and falls at 128.7Hz.

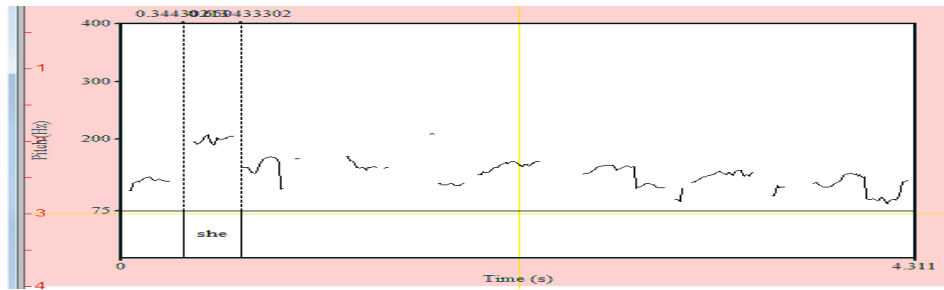


Figure 20. Inf12 Accented the Word *She*

4.21 Respondents' Performance in Ti21

Teacher: Pat was more amazed to hear him talk exactly like Ben.

Student: Was Pat more amazed to hear him laugh exactly like Ben?

Laugh is both the nucleus and the accented word that negates the teacher's impression in Ti21. The tone unit structure of the utterance is thus:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Was Pat more amazed to hear him	laugh	exactly like Ben

Although, Ti21 has an onset, a nucleus and a coda, only 1 (3%) of the 32 respondents got the correct stress pattern and structure of the sentence. 31 (97%) other respondents missed it and altered the structure in some instances. 19 of the respondents accented *Pat*, 3 accented *amazed*, 1 accented *more*, 1 accented *exactly*, 1 accented *she*, and 1 of them accented *to*. The remaining 5 accented *Ben*, thus realized an onset-nucleus- ϕ structure. The pitch trace for Inf17 starts at 106.3Hz, rises to 219.3Hz on the word *Ben* and falls at 188Hz, as represented in Figure 21 below:

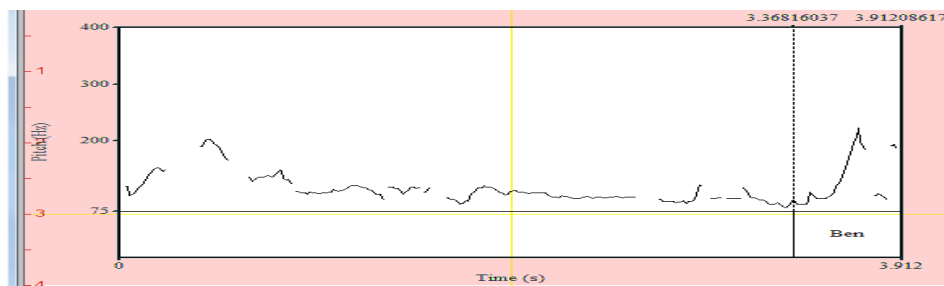


Figure 21. Inf17 Accented the Wrong Word *Ben*.

4.22 Respondents' Performance in Ti22

Test items in section 4.22 through 4.24 belong to Sub-category 2.iii of Category 2. In this part, a certain word in each of the student's questions projects the teacher's impression. The definite question-words concerned are accented and structurally represented below.

Test Item 22 (Ti22):

Teacher: Pat collapsed and could faintly hear her chief bride's maid's voice calling her to wake up.

Student: Pat collapsed and could faintly hear whose voice calling her to wake up?

The word *whose* in the student's question is both the accented word that portrays the teacher's impression and the nucleus. The structural representation of the utterance is:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
Pat collapsed...	whose	voice calling her to wake up?

Ti22 is made up of the onset, nucleus and coda. 8 (25%) respondents out of the 32 tested produced the sentence with the correct stress placement and structure. 24 (75%) other respondents did otherwise. 12 of them accented *Pat* and realized a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure. 3 accented *up*, 3 accented *faintly*, 2 accented *collapsed*, 2 accented *calling*, 1 accented *and*, while 1 also accented *she*. For Inf5, as portrayed in Figure 22, the pitch trace starts from 254.4Hz, rises to 263.3Hz on *faintly* and falls at 147.7Hz.

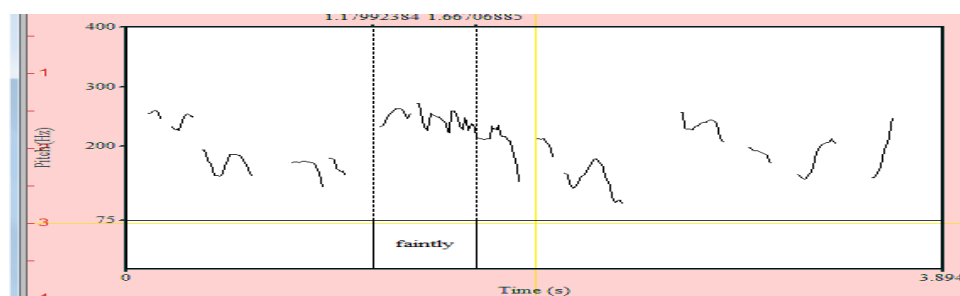


Figure 22. Inf5 Accented the Wrong Word Faintly

4.23 Respondents' Performance in Ti23

Teacher: With the repeated knock at the door and the alarm blaring to announce it was 6 a.m., Pat dashed out of bed panting.

Student: With the repeated knock at the door and the alarm blaring to announce it was 6am, who dashed out of bed panting?

The word *who* in the student's question is the nucleus and the accented word that reflects the teacher's impression. It is structurally represented as:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
With the repeated knock...	who	dashed out of bed panting

The onset, nucleus and coda are present in Ti23. Out of the 32 respondents tested, 12 (37.5%) produced the sentence with the appropriate stress placement and structure, while the remaining 20 (62.5%) respondents did not do that exactly. 10 of them accented *repeated*, 3 accented *6a.m.*, 1 accented *and*, 1 accented *door*, 1 accented *at*, 1 accented *up*, and 1 accented *dashed*. The remaining 2 respondents accented *panting* and derived an onset-nucleus- ϕ structure for the sentence. For Inf18, as shown in Figure 23, the pitch trace starts from 173.3Hz, rises to 343.1Hz on the word *who* and falls at 113.9Hz.

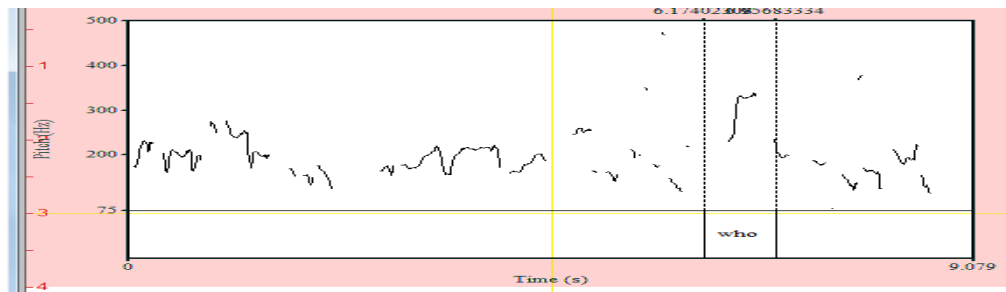


Figure 23. Inf18 Accented the Right Word, *Who*?

4.24 Respondents' Performance in Ti24

Teacher: She ran to the mirror to examine if her face truly had blemishes from chickenpox.

Student: She ran to the mirror to examine if what truly had blemishes from chickenpox?

In the student's question above, the word *what* is the nucleus, as well as the accented word, portraying the teacher's impression. The structural representation of this tone unit is thus:

Onset	Nucleus	Coda
She ran to the mirror...	what	truly had blemishes from chickenpox?

Ti24 consists of the onset, the nucleus and the coda. Out of 32 respondents tested, only 6 (19%) were able to produce the correct structure and place the stress on the right word. 26 (81%) other respondents did not get it right. 13 of the respondents accented *ran*, 3 of them accented *if*, 2 of them accented *from*, 2 accented *truly*, 1 accented *had*, 1 accented *Ben*, 1 accented *to* and 1 accented *examined*. 1 of the respondents accented *she* and realized a ϕ -nucleus-coda structure, while 1 other accented *chickenpox* and derived an onset-nucleus- ϕ pattern. For Inf19, the pitch trace starts from 147.4Hz, reaches its peak at 228.4Hz on the word *if* and falls at 109.6Hz, as shown in Figure 24 below:

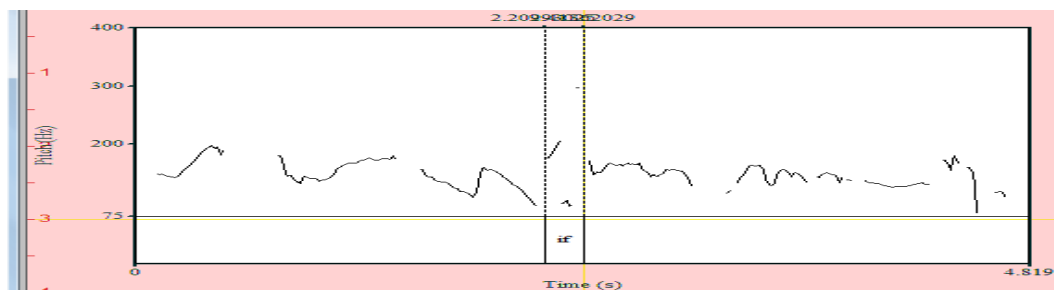


Figure 24. Inf19 Accented the Wrong Word

4.25 Respondents' Overall Performance

Table 1 presents a summary of the respondents' general performance. The table reveals that only 27% of the informants were able to accent the appropriate items in the sentences given, while 73% were unable to. Hence, it can be deduced from the analysis and the table that the respondents have not had a mastery of sentence stress articulation. Their knowledge in sentence stress is inadequate. Their responses to the questionnaire similarly attest to this. They could hardly match the intended messages

in sentences with the words articulated in the same, in spite of the explicit instruction and explanations provided by the researchers as guide. Their performance in short sentences was not any better than what was obtained in the long sentences. Thus, they simply accented any part of a sentence as deemed fit, not as appropriate to the message encoded in the sentence.

Table 1. Overall Performance of the Informants in the Test Items

Test Items	Nucleus/ Accentable Components	Total Number of Participants	Participants		Participants	
			with Correct Accentuation	%	with Incorrect Accentuation	%
Sentence 1	Childish	32	12	37.5	20	62.5
Sentence 2	Young	32	2	6	30	94
Sentence 3	Juvenile	32	5	16	27	84
Sentence 4	Youths	32	20	62.5	12	37.5
Sentence 5	Must	32	11	34	21	66
Sentence 6	Compel	32	23	72	9	28
Sentence 7	Demand	32	18	56	14	44
Sentence 8	Have to	32	22	69	10	31
Sentence 9	And	32	3	9	29	91
Sentence 10	With	32	6	19	26	81
Sentence 11	Also	32	5	16	27	84
Sentence 12	In	32	8	25	24	75
Sentence 13	Pleasant	32	7	22	25	78
Sentence 14	Bothered	32	5	16	27	84
Sentence 15	Charming	32	7	22	25	78
Sentence 16	Usual	32	0	0	32	100
Sentence 17	Predictable	32	15	47	17	53
Sentence 18	Reluctant	32	3	9	29	91
Sentence 19	Unsurprised	32	6	19	26	81
Sentence 20	Ever	32	1	3	31	97
Sentence 21	Laugh	32	1	3	31	97
Sentence 22	Whose	32	8	25	24	75
Sentence 23	Who	32	12	37.5	20	62.5
Sentence 24	What	32	6	19	26	81
Total		768	206		562	
Overall Performance in Percentage			27% (correct)		73% (incorrect)	

Other interesting findings from the teachers' performance in sentence-stress articulation experiment carried out in this study include the following, among others:

- (i) Respondents' inability to communicate meaning when sentence stress is to be used as the tool of communication. Although, a good number of the respondents claim to stress words when they interact with their students, findings from the analysis prove that sentence stress is quite alien to them. Hence their averred attempt must be a misuse of sentence-stress.
- (ii) Miscommunication of intention (e.g., teaching objective) to the listener/learner.
- (iii) Wrong feedback: A listener who by chance considers the accented word(s) in a sentence to be significant for meaning gets a different message and gives a wrong/different feedback from what is expected.
- (iv) Listeners, especially learners, are often indifferent or react negatively to any attempt to stress words, as gathered in the questionnaire. Some listeners who take it well mostly consider it as a demonstration of expertise not as a tool of communication.
- (v) Justice is not done to the teaching of stress because the teachers themselves are yet to understand the workings of this skill in communication.
- (vi) Prolonged conversation: Cases of prolonged conversation due to the employment of more words to make up for inadequacies in the use of stress to communicate, were also evident in the respondents' performance.

Implication of the above include the fact that, sentence-stress articulation as part of the teaching contents of the English language in Nigerian secondary schools is yet to receive adequate attention in practice. Curriculum planners and executors need to pay more attention to not only the teaching, learning and practice of this aspect of spoken language, but also the prosody generally.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the analyses carried out reveal that sentence-stress is a significant tool for communication in English. The word accented in a sentence is significant for meaning. Hence, if the sentence stress is properly articulated, the speaker's meaning equals the listener's. However, a misuse of sentence stress brings about conflicting meanings from both ends of production and reception, as the message communicated will not be understood.

Sadly, acclaimed experts who are expected to be adept in the use of sentence stress have been discovered to have shallow knowledge in the workings of the same. Hardly was there any teacher, among those tested, whose performance was above average. English teachers who impart knowledge to learners are expected to know and be proficient in the articulation of sentence stress, being an aspect of the subject that they teach and a key tool of communication in the language of instruction.

Since the teachers are not conversant with the use of sentence stress in communication, the chance of instructing learners, some of who will in turn become instructors, is slim. Hence the significance of sentence stress stands the risk of being swept under the carpet, while communication continues to be an

arduous task to perform.

However, organization of national and international intensive trainings for teachers as well as introducing them, at the secondary school level, to speech analyzers that can help them to personally assess their performances in accentuation exercise will go a long way to improve the teachers' quality. Keeping abreast with developments in English prosody, getting acquainted with e-learning and listening to BBC and other RP sources can also enhance the teachers' performance in sentence stress articulation.

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