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The Intonation of Noun Phrase Subjects and Clause- Modifying Adverbials in Nigerian English (Pp. 167-178)

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Abstract

In view of the emerging peculiarity of Nigerian English as one of the non-native Englishes, especially at the level of phonology, this study investigates the English intonation tunes employed by Nigerian speakers of English for Noun Phrase Subjects and Clause-Modifying Adverbials. Forty television reporters in Nigeria were used as subjects. The intonation analysis of their reports recorded on air, using simple percentage calculation, reveals that, in both instances, there is a preponderance of rise tune as against fall-rise preferred in British English. They obtained 89.3%, and 87.9% rise tune respectively. The study concluded that the overwhelming preference for rise tune in Nigerian English in these syntactic structures is not unconnected with the fact that many Nigerian speakers of English have difficulty in producing complex intonation tunes due to unavailability of this tune type in their linguistic repertoire. It is hoped that this study shall widen the scope of research on the characterisation and description of Nigerian English.

Keywords: Intonation tunes, Nigerian English, Noun Phrase Subjects, Clause-Modifying Adverbials and Rise tune.

Introduction

Intonation is an important feature of the human language, tonal or non-tonal, used to express semantic and emotionally-stylistic differences of an utterance (Kundrotas, 2005). It is a non-grammatical, non-lexical but inseparable

component of vocal communication (Al-Sibai, 2004). Although there is currently no universally accepted definition of this important concept, it is commonly regarded as the variation in the pitch of voice to vary meaning in utterances. In this regard, scholars have, over the years, offered different definitions and descriptions. Intonation, to Bolinger (1989), is “a symptom of how we feel about what we say, and how you feel when you say it”. According to Vaissiere (2004:1), intonation is the use of Fo variation (Frequency Modulation) for conveying information at levels higher than the word; that is, the phrase, the utterance, the paragraph, and discourse as a whole. Ladd (1980:6) sees it as “the use of suprasegmental phonetic features (pitch) to convey postlexical or sentence-level pragmatic meanings in a linguistically structured way”.

Despite the descriptive controversies, intonation remains an important and prominent prosodic feature of the English language. Being a stress-timed language, English predominantly and elaborately uses intonation for communication. Gimson (1989) is of the opinion that the information an English utterance conveys to a listener is got not only from the contrastive sound patterns but also from the related pitch variation. This contrasts sharply with Nigerian languages which are predominantly tonal (whereby meaning of words are distinguished by means of tone), and only make use of ‘limited amount of superimposed intonation’ (Cruttenden, 1986: 10). This, in effect, constitutes a gap between Nigerian speakers of English and native speakers. Along this line, Banjo (1979:12) describes English suprasegmental features, of which intonation is one, as “the final hurdle, which a vast majority of speakers of English as a foreign language never manage to cross”.

Over the years, research on intonation has received considerable attention, particularly amongst the native speakers of English. Various attempts have been made to explore this prosodic feature of English from the perspectives of information structural notions (e.g. Uhmman, 1991; Féry, 1993), discourse organization (e.g. Selting, 1995), emotional or attitudinal meanings of intonation (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986) and grammatic functions of intonation (Cauldwell and Hewings, 1996). In Nigeria, however, intonation study is still at low ebb. Just a few scholars have ventured into this domain (e.g. Amayo, 1981; Atoye, 1989, 1999, 2005; Jowitt, 2000; Udofot, 2004; Gut and Milde, 2002; Fajobi, 2005; Adejuwon, 2003; Oladipupo, 2008). The reason for this neglect is not far-fetched: intonation is generally considered to be more elusive and much less researched and is therefore inherently more difficult to learn for foreign learners (Amayo, 1981; Cruz-Ferreira, 1989; Adetugbo,

2004). In view of this gap and in the light of Foulkes' (2006) remark that "a great deal remains to be learned about varieties of English elsewhere, and about varieties in other languages", this study, therefore, explores the English intonation tunes employed by Nigerian speakers of English for Noun Phrase Subjects (Noun Phrase in Subject position) and Clause-Modifying Adverbials (Adverbials modifying an entire clause).

Intonation Contours

There have been diverse scholarly positions as regards the number of tune types in English. Cruttenden (1986) considers this as an area where most analysts vary in their judgments of what constitutes a major difference of meaning and, thus, in the number of tones that are set up.

Leech and Svartvik (1975) and Ladefoged (1993) recognize four basic tunes: fall, rise-fall, rise and fall-rise while Brazil, et al. (1980) and Roach (2000) endorse five: fall, rise, rise-fall, fall-rise and level. Other scholars have tended to simplify this list by identifying low and high falls and rises, as well as other complex tones (Crystal, 1969:211). For instance, O'Connor and Arnold (1973) and Cruttenden (1986) include high-fall, low-fall, high-rise, and low-rise, while Halliday (1963) and Crystal (1969) add fall-rise-fall and rise-fall-rise.

Grammatical Intonation

This is the intonational function that, until recently, has been properly of interest for linguists (Pierrehumbert, 1980: 60). It is based on the notion that there are typical tones associated with syntactic structures. In this regard, Crystal (1995) is of the opinion that intonation helps to identify grammatical structure in speech (in which case, it performs a role similar to punctuation in writing), identify clause and sentence units and contrasts questions and statements. Halliday, cited in Kumaki (2003), also observes that grammatical intonation is concerned with grammatical mood (question/statement, etc.) as well as to modality (possibility, validity, etc.). According to Roach (2000), intonation aids the listener's recognition of the grammar and syntactic structure of what is being communicated. Thus, intonation functions grammatically, in English, to mark various syntactic structures such as sentence types declarative, yes/no interrogative, question word interrogative, imperatives and exclamation, and larger syntactic

Nevertheless, several scholars do not quite agree that a one-to-one relationship between sentence-types and intonation tunes actually exists.

Roach (2000:197), for example, agrees that the rise tone is commonly used with polar questions, while “wh-questions” normally take a fall e.g.

- (i) | Did you park the car |
(ii) | ¹Where did you park the car |

He, however, believes that it is not in all cases this is so. Sometimes, “Wh-questions”, as in (ii) for instance, may take a rise, while, at the same time, a fall can also be used for the question type in (i). In the same regard, he argues that the intonation of tag questions can either take the falling or rising tone depending on whether the speaker is seeking confirmation or requesting information respectively, e.g.

- (i) | They ¹are coming on Tuesday | arent they |
(Expecting confirmation)
(ii) | They ¹are ¹coming on Tuesday | arent they |
(Requesting information)

Cruttenden (1986:95-110) also argues that the grammatical approach to the analysis of intonational meaning is difficult to establish. This, according to him, is in view of the fact that any nuclear tone can be used with any syntactic type and their occurrence is context dependent. He states, for instance, that any of the established nuclear tones can be used to produce ‘yes/no question’ such as: “Are you going OUT tonight?”. He, thus, considers the grammatical approach to intonation as a necessity for simplifying the teaching of English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, he agrees that falling tones (i.e. low-fall, high-fall and rise-fall) are commonly used on sentence final intonation groups because they express finality, completeness, definiteness and separateness in declaratives, whereas the rising tones (i.e. low-rise, high-rise and fall-rise) are common on sentence non-final intonation groups where they show dependency of the intonation group.

Intonation of Noun-Phase subjects

Cruttenden (1986) provides us with information on the choice of intonation tunes for the Noun Phrase Subject. He posits that in British English, when Noun-phrase subjects (NP-Subjects) take a separate intonation group, they often have a fall-rise tone especially when contrast is being expressed, e.g.

- (i) Private ^Venterprise / is always ef^Vicient / whereas public _ownership / means ^Vinefficiency
- (ii) A friend of mine / actually suffers from a ^Vcute absent-mindedness

The NP- Subject, ‘Private enterprises’ in example (i) above, takes a fall-rise tune, showing continuity, dependency, non-finality and contrast with ‘public ownership’ in the second clause. This is also the case in example (ii) where the NP-Subject, ‘A friend of mine’ takes a fall-rise tune indicating non-finality and dependency. (Cruttenden, 1986:106), in this regard, posits that the use of “fall-rise seems to be on the increase in these positions in British English”.

Intonation in Clause-Modifying Adverbials

Cruttenden (1986) goes further to prove that the same tune (fall-rise) is also common on clause –modifying adverbials (Adverbials modifying an entire clause) where it does not only express contrast but also, in some cases, emphasis, e.g.

- a) Un^Vfortunately / their best player didn’t turn ^Vup
- b) Pre^Vsumably / he thinks he ^Vcan.
- c) ^VUsually / he comes on ^VSundays

Celik (2001:5) also buttresses this view when he says that “fall-rise, appears to be generally used in what may be called ‘dependent’ intonation units such as those involving sentential adverbs, subordinate clauses, compound sentences, and so on”.

In this regard, Cruttenden (1986:104-105) contends that in sequences of subordinate clause plus main clause or vice versa, the fall-rise is likely to be used in non-final position, while the low-rise is preferred in final position, e.g.

- (i) Because I hadn’t had any ^Vaspirins / I felt a bit ^Vbetter
(Fall-rise in non-final position)

(ii) It's not altogether \easy / when you think how much is in \olved

(Low-rise in final position)

In coordinate clauses, however, the first clause is most likely to have one of the rising tones (or mid-level) followed by a fall in the second. This, though, is possible only if the clauses involve two successive aspects of a single action, e.g.

(i) He took the \car / and drove to \London

(ii) She's twenty-eight years \old / and thinking of starting a \family

(two successive aspects of a single action)

If, on the other hand, each clause involves two distinct (and often parallel) actions, a fall is used in each clause, e.g.

She's twenty-eight years \old / and lives in East \Grinstead

(Two distinct actions)

Methodology

Live reports of forty (40) Nigerian television reporters from eight television stations in Lagos, comprising three government and five private stations, were used for this research. Intonation groups corresponding with Noun Phrase Subjects (e.g. //The co mmission/, //The striking lecturers/, etc.) and Clause Modifying Adverbials (e.g. //moreover, earlier, etc.) were extracted from the reports. Tokens of the occurrence of the four basic nuclear tones (fall, rise, fall-rise, and rise-fall) in each intonation group of individual subjects were counted and converted to a maximum point of 10 each to ensure uniformity of scores.

The calculation was done using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Sum of a Tune in an IG of a Subject}}{\text{Sum of all Tunes in an IG of a Subject}} \times \frac{10}{1}$$

where *IG* = *Intonation Group*.

For example,

$$\frac{\text{Sum of Falls in NPS of Subject 1}}{\text{Sum of (F + R + FR + RF) in NPS}} \times \frac{10}{1} = 4 \times \frac{10}{4} = 10$$

of Subject 1

where NPS =Noun Phrase Subject, F =Fall; R =Rise, FR = Fall-Rise; and RS = Rise-Fall .

To calculate the percentage score of each nuclear tune used by all the subjects in an intonation group, the subjects' scores in a tune in that particular intonation group were added together and divided by the sum of all the subjects' scores in all the nuclear tunes used in the intonation group. The result was then multiplied by 100, e.g.

$$\% \text{ score of Fall in NPS for all Subjects} = \frac{\text{Sum of Falls in NPS for all Subjects}}{\text{Sum of (F + R + FR + RF) in NPS}} \times 100$$

for all subjects

The percentage scores calculated were then tabulated and also represented graphically with a view to showing clearly the observed intonation patterns of the subjects in each constituent.

Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of Subjects' Production of Intonation Tunes in NPS and CMA

Table 1 shows the overall intonation patterns of all the subjects in both syntactic structures- Noun-Phrase Subjects and Clause-Modifying Adverbials- according to their performance in the use of English intonation tunes in their reporting based on the formula described above.

Arising from Table 1 and Fig. 1, NPS (Noun Phrase Subjects) records 7.1% fall, 89.3% rise, 3.6% fall-rise and 0% rise-fall. This implies that a majority of the subjects (89.3%) produced Noun Phrase Subjects with the rising tune, while a negligible number (3.6%) used the fall-rise tune which is, however, more suitable and appropriate for this syntactic structure in RP (Cruttenden, 1986:102-103). The result, therefore, reveals the deficiency of Nigerian speakers of English in the use of complex tunes, which had earlier been attested to by Nigerian phonologists. Udofot (1997; 2004), for instance, discovers that bi-directional tones (fall-rise) were produced significantly less in Nigerian English. Jowitt (1991) also observes that Popular Nigerian English (PNE) rarely uses the one syllable and multi-syllable falling-rising tune but tends to replace the tune with a rising tune. This, perhaps, is traceable to the fact that this tune is not found in their indigenous languages

(Cruttenden, 1986:159). On this basis therefore, we conclude that the rise tune is predominantly used for Noun Phrase subjects in Nigerian English, unlike in RP where fall-rise is rampant in the same position.

Again, Table 1 and Figure 1 reveal the distribution of subjects' intonation patterns in Clause-Modifying Adverbials. A token of 3.5% fall was recorded against 87.9% of rise and 8.6% instances of fall-rise. As usual, no record of rise-fall was observed. This performance means that the subjects used the rising tune predominantly in Clause-Modifying Adverbials. Again, there is a limited use of the fall-rise tune which is also a possibility in these positions in RP. This strengthens our initial discovery of the subjects' predominant use of the rising tune in incomplete utterances and non-final intonation groups, and deficiency in the use of complex tunes.

This, perhaps, arose from their over-generalisation of the use of the rising tune in sentence non-final intonation groups to indicate incomplete utterances, continuative, non-assertive and open statements (Cruttenden, 1986:169). This, again, corroborates Jowitt's (1991) observation that PNE speakers mark the end of a dependent clause or phrase frequently with a rising tone than an SBE speaker does, as long as it does not appear at the end of the sentence.

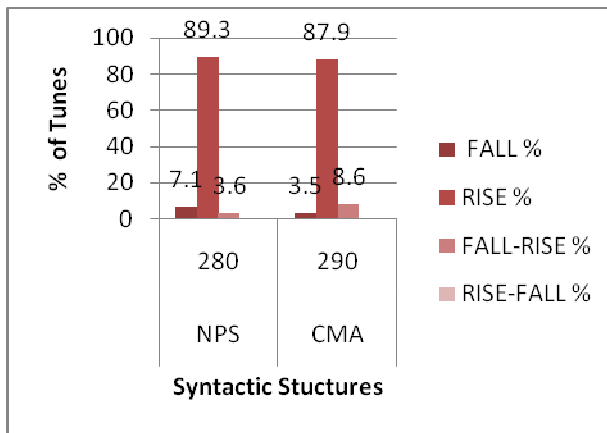
Conclusion

The study attempted to investigate the intonation tunes Nigerian speakers of English employ in producing Noun Phrase Subjects and Clause Modifying Adverbials. It was discovered that in both syntactic structures, the rising tune predominated. This discovery is in tandem with earlier views of scholars that complex tunes (e.g. fall-rise and rise-fall) are rarely used in Nigerian English. Instead, the rising tune is mostly employed. This is traceable to the fact that complex tunes are alien to their indigenous languages.

Table 1: Percentage Scores of Subjects' Intonation Tunes (pp. 9)

SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE	TOTAL NO OF TUNES	FALL %	RISE %	FALL-RISE %	RISE-FALL %
NPS	280	7.1	89.3	3.6	0
CMA	290	3.5	87.9	8.6	0

Fig. 1: Distribution of Subjects' Intonation Tunes (pp. 9)



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