

## STRESS AND INTONATION AMONG THE ANNANG STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF ARTS, AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

*This study portrays the pronunciation of English Language by the Annang Students of the Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University on the aspect of Stress and Intonation. There have always been some existing challenges by the non-natives on the segmental of the pronunciation of English words, that is, the sounds and sound change. Unarguably, the greatest percentage of the problem is faced on the aspect of non-segmental phonology which for this study, Stress and Intonation are considered. Annang Students of Akwa Ibom State University do not use English language often, thereby making them exposed to some problems of pronunciation as there is no fluency and accuracy in their speeches. This study uses the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to carry out a Contrastive study of English Stress and Intonation patterns among students of Akwa Ibom State University, Faculty of Arts. Poor intonation can cause misunderstanding and even produce an unfavorable impression of a person. The most common mistakes of intonation are norising pitch and the use of the wrong pitch. Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonation and they often don't use the right pitch to convey feelings. (Irma Rusadze 2018). Stress patterns, at both the word level and the sentence level, are important for intelligibility, and offer a useful starting point for teaching pronunciation, particularly with a class of students from different L1 backgrounds (Benrabah 1997; Chela-Flores 2001). This study tested Twenty (20) Annang students of the Faculty of Arts across all Departments and the result of Student's performance thereof was generally poor which was attributed to certain linguistic factors listed above.*

**Keywords: Non-natives, Annang Students, Stress, Intonation, Contrastive Analysis.**

### 1. Introduction

The etymology of English language can be traced to North-Western Germany; it belongs to the low West Germanic family which is a subgroup of the Indo-European family. Owing to the spread of English language into different parts of the world, English language possesses what can be referred to as 'local colouration' as a result of languages in contact. (See Edem, 2018, Edem 2015b and Edem 2020).

Annang is one of the tribes whose accent has much interference to the pronunciation of English language. Research carries it that Annang has twenty (20) consonant sounds and eleven (11) vowel sounds and these are //kp, p, b, t, d, k, g, f, m, n, ŋ, l, r, w, h, dz, tʃ, ʃ, s/ and /i, i:, u, u:, o, e, ə, v, ʌ, æ, a:/ They do not have enough sounds in their sound system as that of English sounds (Joseph Udodata 2006, p27, Edem, 2015). This study examines the non-

segmental phonological elements: Stress and Intonation among the Annang speakers of English.

Over the years, there has always existed the problem of pronunciation among English language learners. Some of these problems exist due to languages in contact, oneself some are caused by the environment one finds oneself, and some are caused by peer groups. (Edem 2005, Edem 2015a, Edem 2016). However, it is not out of place as it is known generally that language learned is often problematic unlike language acquired.

It should be noted that lack of qualified teachers to coach these learners at their primary and secondary levels can also bring about a problem in how well they can speak. This can be checked by ensuring that qualified teachers are given to coach the young learners of English language (Enang and Edem 2022).

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

In linguistics intonation is the variation of pitch when speaking, intonation and stress are two main elements of linguistic prosody. Intonation is the "music" of a language, and it is perhaps the most important element of a good accent. Intonation – the rise and fall of pitch in our voice – plays a crucial role in how we express meaning (Udofot and Edem, 2018 and Edem 2024). Intonation is the main element of linguistic prosody. Poor intonation can cause misunderstanding and even produce an unfavorable impression of a person. The most common mistakes of intonation are no rising pitch and the use of the wrong pitch. Students often have more trouble imitating the rising than the falling intonation and they often don't use the right pitch to convey feelings. (Irma Rusadze 2018, p.3-7)

Munro and Derwing (1999) suggests that intonation is more important for how easy relatively advanced speakers are to understand, than for how far they are actually understood.

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

Many researchers have done a lot on the area of native language interference on the target language. Harrison (1973, p.20 and Edem 2015) observe that the effect of L1 interference on

L2 learners points to the fact that the system of LI in sound and structure are acquired so well in childhood. Constant and frequent use afterwards makes it problematic to the language learner and teacher. L2 speakers of English should guard against the influence of mother tongue in language learning because grammatical notions such as tense, voice and gender are subject to very strong interference. Interference has its ability to affect both expressive and impressive speech sounds and is inherent in the use of a foreign language, (Verboj 1971). The problem of mother tongue interference or effect is not attributed to learners or pupils alone but it also affects teachers. This is affirmed by Bamgbose (1975 and Edem 2015) grammatical and linguistic problems are caused by mother tongue interference which is encountered by both the teachers and the learners. Both of them have some phonological problems peculiar to their ethnic group and these affect their effective acquisition of the language (Bamgbose 1975, p.14).

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

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

It is therefore not surprising that orthographic forms can affect the way learners pronounce a second language. Spelling does not always have an effect (Simon, Cambless & Alves 2010), and can sometimes even lead to non-native-like productions (Bassetti, Hayes-Harb & Escudero 2015). Previous research in this field has documented the effects of orthography on the L2 speech production of learners of a number of languages. (Paolo Mairano, Bene Bassetti, 2018).

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

This study seeks to address some of the possible problems responsible for the poor performance of Annang speakers of English in stress and intonation; and will also suggest some possible solutions.

The aims and objectives of this study are to examine the pronunciation of Annang speakers of English; determine causes of poor performance of Annang speakers of English in the pronunciation of English words and to suggest ways to which Annang speakers of English can improve upon their performance.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework on which is study is based is the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis founded by Robert Lado in (1957). The theory is hinged on second language learning/teaching. The claim of the theory is that the errors and difficulties that are encountered in our Language learning and use of foreign language are from the interference of our mother tongue.

The theory further states that in the event of the structure of the target language (L2) being at variance with that of L1, it implies that some difficulties in learning and errors in performance should be expected. The theory also has it that if there is much similarities between the language learned and the language acquired, then there will exist less problem.

What the theory states is that the difficulties, problems and challenges faced by language learners are simply posted by the nature of the mother tongue. And that the problematic and the less-problematic nature of second language (language learned) is determined by the differences and similarities respectively.

## 3. Research Procedure

The data collection instrument used for this study was a reading test. Ten expressions were generated to test the aspect of stress and phrasing and another ten sentences to test record for intonation. A sound recorder was used to record the subjects. The researcher paid much attention to the stress and intonation and scores were given by the researcher.

This work studied the performance of Twenty Annang students of Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University; where subjects were tested across all Departments in the faculty. Two boys and two girls were picked in each of the five Departments in the Faculty of Arts; that makes it four Subjects in each Department and a total of Twenty. This research used simple random sampling technique in analysing the data. Each correct item carries 1 mark. The subjects were coded A to J. The scoring was carried out on the basis of accuracy of articulation of the segment tested. The score of each subject was calculated out of the total number of score expected. For instance, in the test for stress and phrasing, each correct item has 1 mark. Therefore, if a subject had all correct, that will equal to 10marks. Where the subject had less, the number was divided by 10 and multiplied by 100 to have the percentage. For example, the scores for subject A equal to 5. The computation in percentage is  $5 \div 10 \times 100 = 50\%$ .

## 4. Presentation of Data

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

**SN. ITEM INFORMANT/SCORE**

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	remember 'that 'period	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
2	to 'take their 'children to school	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
3	'shepherded by their 'parents	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1		
14	the 'book of some 'school	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
5	a 'miserable 'floating 'population	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
6	'happened to 'live 'near the 'school	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0

7	which had 'nothing in 'common	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
8	with the un'known	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
9	we 'were 'those 'children	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
10	'not 'easy to for'get	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
	<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>PERCENTAGES</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>30</b>

**Table 2 showing the performance of subjects in intonation:**

They were tested using the sentences below:

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

**Table 2 Performance of Intonation**

SN	ITEM	INFORMANT/SCORE									
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Sentence 1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
2	Sentence 2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
3	Sentence 3	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
4	Sentence 4	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
5	Sentence 5	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
6	Sentence 6	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
7	Sentence 7	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
8	Sentence 8	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
9	Sentence 9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Sentence 10	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>PERCENTAGES</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>

### Data Analysis

The performance of Annang speakers of English in the non-segmental aspect of phonology is very poor. The first table above shows the performance of subjects in stress and phrasing. What is being tested is the accuracy in articulation in respect to stress and phrasing: giving the stress where necessary and observing pauses where necessary. As it can be seen, their performance in this aspect was poor as the highest percentage scored was 70% which subjects G had. In other words, what could be seen as the highest percentage is not a good or an excellent percentage as should be expected from university students, it would have been considered a fair attempt if the subjects were in the secondary schools. However, subjects C,

E and 1 scored 60%, while subjects A, D, F and H scored 50%; subject B scored 40% and J, 30%. This simply points to the fact that "stress" as it concerns everyday communication among Annang students is highly problematic. In other words, in both conscious and unconscious reading and communication from students of Akwa Ibom State University, word and sentence stress are not properly observed, thus, making it problematic and needs to be addressed.

In the aspect of intonation as regard the act of communication among Annang students, this study affirms it problematic. This aspect tested for the tone of the voice used in reading some sentences. It takes consideration of what tested can be referred to as the pitch (the rising and the falling) of sound as in adds meaning to stretch of utterances. By this, it is meant that the tone used in articulating, which are put together to form a word, adds more explanation to what intended meaning of the word. Considering Table 2, the table showing the performance of subjects in intonation, the highest percentage scored was 60% which were scored by Subjects A, D and H.. Subjects C, E and J scored 50% while subjects B, F and G scored 40% and subject I, 30%.

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

## **5. Summary/Conclusion**

This paper looked at the speech production of Annang speakers of English in the aspect of stress and intonation among students of the faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University. It shows the similarities and dissimilarities of English sounds and that of Annang.

The study however, has it that the general performance of Annang speakers of English is very poor, especially in the aspect of stress and intonation. The way they speak shows high level of incompetence and incapability to use the language properly. It is found out that most of the Annang students in Akwa Ibom State University are conscious users of vernacular and Nigerian pidgin in their everyday communication. Little or no attempt is made to use proper English in communicating with peers. This problem begins from home as parents do not teach them to use simple and correct English to communicate. Moreover, the teachers handling this course in Secondary Schools are not well trained in this field. In most cases, one would see a teacher of Physics teaching English Language. This work agrees that teachers do not come to classes often; the little time they come to teach English, they will only dwell on grammar not oral. This has instilled in them, the inability to articulate English sounds properly.

These problems can be solved if qualified teachers of English are employed to teach all aspects of English Language Usage. Parents should also try their best to have their children

communicate in English; Schools should endeavour to make communication with friends be done only with the official language - English. New texts books should be given to students, especially those whose mother tongue has influenced them to a large extent. By these, there shall be a remarkable improvement upon the pronunciation of English in stress and intonation.

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