

# INVESTIGATING DIALECTAL VARIATION IN THE ENGLISH OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES: METHODOLOGY AND PILOT STUDY

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## **Abstract**

This paper<sup>1</sup> describes the methodological procedures that will be used in the collection of data for a dialectal study of the English of Nigerian university graduates. It also reports on a pilot study carried out on this topic. The major elicitation instrument will be a Labovian sociolinguistic interview which will be supplemented by reading materials (Labov 1966). The study will also draw heavily on the current SuRE methodology by Upton and Llamas (1999). The theoretical framework that will be used in the analysis of data will be a diglossia model as this approach enables one to view Nigerian English (NE) as a continuum on which different varieties of English such as Standard English, non-Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin English exist.

## **1. Introduction**

There is enough evidence in the literature that Nigerian English (NE) is heterogeneous and that the variation that exists within it can be linked to two major factors, namely the region of origin and the level of education (cf. Awonusi 1986; Jibril 1986, 1991; Udofot 2004). By listening to the spoken English of a Nigerian, it is normally possible to predict the part of the country such a person came from (Bamgbose 1971) and this is because the accents of most speakers of NE differ depending on the region they belong to. There is also a correlation between the level of education and proficiency in English (Jowitt 1991). However, this correlation is not a clear-cut one as there may sometimes be a mismatch between the level of education and proficiency in English. The point to note here is that language variation is a complex phenomenon, especially in a multilingual, multicultural setting with diverse socio-religious and family backgrounds such as we have in Nigeria. Researchers intending to carry out a variationist study in a setting such as this must also be

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adequately grounded in methodological issues connected with the collection of natural data. This paper therefore presents and discusses the methodology to be used in an ongoing study of variation in Nigerian English and also reports on a pilot study already conducted.

## **2. The main study and the theoretical landscape**

The major research of which the present work is an aspect aims to examine the dialectal variation in the English of some Nigerian university graduates (NUGs), focusing mainly on selected phonological variables and grammar. The study will examine the influence of regional origin and extent of education on the English usage of the subjects with a view to assessing the phonological and grammatical variation that can be connected to regional background and the level of formal education (graduate and above) in their spoken English.

This study focuses specifically on NUGs for various reasons. In the first place, Nigerians look up to them as role models whose English should be considered as a target for other speakers. However, regarding NUGs as role models needs some clarification. In reality, not all NUGs have the same level of proficiency in English neither do all of them speak 'good' English. While the majority of graduates in English can be seen as role models, many NUGs who studied other disciplines like Engineering, Agriculture, and Technology and so on may not be so considered. Nevertheless, having been exposed to English as a medium of instruction right from the primary school (cf. National Policy on Education, 2004), it is believed that, given their level of exposure to English, their proficiency, especially in spoken English, is usually very high. More importantly, the majority of NUGs are habitual speakers of English in that, although English is not their ancestral language, they use English very frequently (cf. Herat 2005). The situation in Nigeria is such that, given the multilingual setting the country is characterised by, there are many NUGs who, in addition to English, speak more than one or two ancestral or regional languages with varied levels of proficiency.

This is a variationist study. Since the inception of the Labovian variationist model (cf. Labov 1963, 1966, 1972, 1978, 1994), variationist studies have been carried out in different parts of the globe using either the Labovian model or frameworks adopted from it (Herat 2005; Jibril 1991; Mesthrie 1991, 1997; Siegel 1991; Plat and Weber

1980; Trudgill 1974). However, there is a need to be more reflective on the applicability of the Labovian model in multilingual environments, especially in countries which belong to the outer circle setting (Kachru 1982). In the first place, Labov's studies, and most studies of English related to them (cf. Trudgill 1974), were restricted to native speakers of English in the inner circle settings where most speakers are monolinguals in a monolingual context, and where differing levels of proficiency in the language are not an issue. Secondly, the traditional Labovian model can only be fully applied in countries where stratification exists in terms of the social classes to which people belong. The basis for social classes upon which stratification is based is not clear-cut in Nigeria. Deumert and Mesthrie (2000:147) pointed out that the findings of a variationist model can "to a large extent be applied to western, 'late capitalist' industrialised countries, in which one language is dominant." Rather than using the Labovian model, I therefore will build on a diglossia theory used by Gupta (1991, 1992, 1999 and 2006) for the analysis of varieties of English in Singapore.

Diglossia was first suggested by Ferguson (1959:325) as a situation when 'two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play.' Ferguson described four languages with a High variety (H-variety) and a Low variety (L-variety), where the H-variety is 'the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation' (Ferguson 1959:336).

The big question here is: how does this fit into Nigeria's scenario? In Nigeria, apart from the ancestral languages and English, another contact variety of English is used by the majority of the population as a lingua franca irrespective of their ethnicity or the level of formal education: *Nigerian Pidgin English* (NPE). Like Singapore Colloquial English (Gupta 1992), NPE is spoken in informal situations with friends, family members, colleagues, market women and people who do not understand Standard English (StdE), whereas StdE is used mainly in formal settings such as in the classroom as the medium of instruction and in the conduct of official business or in writing the bulk of literary works. It is used to children in many parts of Nigeria as a native language. NPE and StdE can therefore be likened to Ferguson's L-variety and H-variety respectively since there is complementarity of functions between the two

codes. The majority of NUGs can use both StdE and NPE, and they normally switch between StdE and NPE (and sometimes their ancestral language) in mutually exclusive contexts as the situation demands.

### **3. Methodology**

Most sociolinguistic work involves the collection of data by fieldworkers from informants. One of the problems that researchers normally encounter in the collection of sociolinguistic data is the observer's paradox (i.e., the tendency of informants to distort their linguistic behaviour toward the norm of correctness as a result of the presence of a researcher). Labov (1972:209) argued that the major goal of sociolinguists is to 'find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation.' One task for sociolinguistic researchers, therefore, is to find ways of minimising, or eliminating if possible, the attendant restrictions of interview context. Most sociolinguists and applied linguists, in order to achieve this goal, try to make the rapport between them and their informants as casual and friendly as possible and also resort to creating techniques of distracting their informants' attention from the real interview setting, thereby ensuring the collection of more natural, spontaneous data. In this section, I therefore attempt to spell out the elicitation procedures that will be used by explaining, among other things, how the subjects were selected, the phonological variables, the elicitation instruments and the pilot study.

#### **3.1 The subjects of the study**

It is intended that, subject to their consent being obtained, the subjects for the main study will be 30 male NUGs. Ten interviewees will be selected from each of the three major ethnolinguistic groups in the country i.e., Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. From each city, 3 doctoral, 3 master's and 4 first degree holders will be chosen for the study by a judgement sample. The number of first degree holders is higher than either that of master's or doctoral degrees simply because the proportion of first degree holders in Nigeria is greater than the proportion of those with postgraduate or research degrees. In the selection of the subjects, I will make use of a judgement sampling technique (JST) using the following criteria:

- All the informants must be male.
- They must not be in any form of formal education at the time of the interview and their chances of being in formal education later, especially the first degree holders, should be slim.
- One of the native languages of the informants to be selected in each of the three cities must be the major language in that city.

My decision to make use of male graduates is based on the fact that it is difficult in some parts of Nigeria, for religious reasons, for a male researcher to have uninhibited access to female subjects and more importantly, the independent variables I will be examining in the study do not include gender. Although these samples seem to be small in number, they are sufficient for the kind of sociolinguistic enterprise embarked on here since ‘the structure of social and stylistic variation of language can be studied through samples considerably smaller than those required for the study of other forms of social behaviour’ (Labov 1966:638).

The three cities selected for the study are Kano in the North, Ile-Ife in the Southwest and Nssuka in the East. These cities were selected for important reasons. Firstly, each of these cities is right in the centre of the ethnolinguistic group it represents. In Nigeria, cities are usually the places where people from different ethnic groups across the country live and work. So, the chances of getting graduates who interact with their colleagues and friends in both NPE and StdE are very high in these cities. Lastly, the cities chosen have a concentration of graduates of different levels, being urban areas where, in each case, there is at least one university that has been in existence for more than 30 years. It is important for the subjects not to be in any form of ongoing formal education so that it will be possible for me to group them according to their existing, already achieved levels of education and see if this (i.e., the level of education) is a crucial factor that can cause variation.

### **3.2 Description of the elicitation instruments.**

The elicitation instrument that will be used in collecting the data for this study is a modified Labovian sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1966, 1972, Trudgill 1974), including the reading of a word list, some sentences and a passage. I will also use a guided discussion on grammatical variation. These instruments are described below.

### **3.2.1 The interview**

This interview will be modelled on the Labovian sociolinguistic interview in which some questions are normally used to ‘elicit as much free conversation as possible, with some reading tasks designed to elicit a range of styles’ (Feagin 2004: 29). The interview is expected to last for approximately an hour, and will be recorded (video and audio) on a portable digital video camera. About 55 minutes will be for an informal interview, while the reading of the word list, the sentences and the passage will take about 5 minutes. The major method I will use to make the interview as casual and friendly as possible is to ask questions that can provoke emotional reactions on the part of the respondents so that they become more concerned with what they have to say rather than with how to say it.

The interview is divided into two sections. During the first section, the informants will be informally interviewed to allow me to gain information about their previous language backgrounds and their age. This section is designed to enable me to obtain details on several issues, including how the informants think they use English now, their parental backgrounds, and whether or not they used English at home when they were young, and perhaps also the perceived effect of use or non-use of English when they were young on their English usage now. As is usual in sociolinguistic interviews, this section will generate both personal information and speech that can be analysed. The second section of the interview will focus on a linguistic domain (cf. The subjects’ views on Grammar below).

I will not write down anything, apart from the passage, sentences and words to be read aloud. The script will be in my head and no attempt will be made to follow any fixed ordering during the interview. I will use Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) alongside Standard English (StdE) during the interview. The aim of this is to reduce the sense of formality, and also to attempt to elicit the use of NPE. I will focus on the personal experience of the informants that revolve around linguistic domains, eliciting information about their attitude toward the use of NPE and how they could feel if NPE were adopted in the country as the only or one of the official languages. I will also encourage them to comment on the prompt sentences that will be given to them (cf. prompt sentences below).

### **3.2.2 Materials for reading aloud.**

The materials for reading aloud designed to reveal the target variables are divided into three parts, namely the word list, the sentences and the reading passage (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3). Reading materials are often useful in sociolinguistic studies that focus on phonology because these materials create uniformity by facing the respondents with the same set of variables. More importantly, readings and word lists tend to create in the informants the necessity to be more formal and to focus attention on the phonological variables (Labov 1966).

By contrast to the casual style during the interview section, here the style is formal and careful as the participants' attention is tacitly drawn to the formality that reading involves. It is assumed that the reading sections will be the source of the phonological data, as the analysis of careful pronunciation is just as valid as the analysis of less formal styles. It is important to state that formality, as manifested here through the reading materials, is a continuum along which there is variation ranging between formal, more formal and most formal styles (cf. Labov 1972). In order to follow these degrees of formality during the interview, the sentence reading comes after the reading passage because, while the sentence reading is not as formal as the word list, it is certainly more formal than the passage. Each word in the word list appears in isolation whereas in each of the sentences each word appears as a collocate among other words. This, I believe, may affect the pronunciation of the variables because, unlike in the word list, the tendency of the informants to concentrate on the idea expressed in each of the 10 sentences reading rather than on the pronunciation of any particular word will be very high. Similarly, in the reading passage, the informants will probably concentrate on the story rather than on the words. The informants will first of all read the passage, then the sentences and then finish with the reading of the word list; each of which appears on a different page.

Each of the three reading materials is very short and contains all the phonological variables this study is interested in. The reading passage is about 250 words, the sentence reading consists of ten short sentences while the word list comprises 30 words. These ten phonological variables of which six are consonantal and four vocalic are listed (i) to (x) below. Where possible, variables appear in a range of contexts to enable me to test if phonological environment can condition the realisations of a particular variable.

i (p) in words like <i>pat</i> and <i>tap</i>	ii (th) in words like <i>thin</i> and <i>bath</i>
iii (dh) in words like <i>then</i> and <i>clothe</i>	iv (v) in words like <i>view</i> and <i>rev</i>
v (h) in words like <i>honour</i> and <i>inhabit</i>	vi (z) in words like <i>zebra</i> and <i>pigs</i>
vii (er) in words like <i>learn</i> and <i>certain</i>	viii (a) in words like <i>father</i> and <i>park</i>
ix (u) in words like <i>sum</i> and <i>come</i>	x (e) in words like <i>red</i> and <i>dress</i> .

### 3.3. The subjects' views on grammar

The methodology to be used here is based on the methods undertaken in the *SuRE* (Survey of Regional English) project (Upton and Llamas 1999). The *SuRE* was predated by *SED* (the Survey of English Dialects). Upton and Llamas (1999) explained that, in *SED*, there was an undue emphasis on phonology and grammar at the expense of lexis and besides this, *SED* (see Orton and Wright (1974), Orton *et al* (1978)) as cited in Upton and Llamas (1999) was overwhelmingly rural and diachronic in its orientation (Upton and Llamas, 1999). *SuRE* methodology was designed to enable researchers to collect data from a varied population and also pay attention to linguistic variation at different levels especially at the levels of phonology, grammar and lexis.

In *SuRE* (see also Kerswill, Llamas and Upton 1999) methodology (also used to generate the archive of the BBC Voices project [see [www.bbc.co.uk/voices](http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices)]), the focus was on three levels of regional variation in spoken British English; phonological, lexical and grammatical. This project was faced mainly with the problem of devising an elicitation technique that would give a complete picture of regional variation at the three levels mentioned above.

Interaction is expected to be more casual and conversational in any sociolinguistic work that uses the *SuRE* method. Rather than engaging the interviewees in a lengthy interview, the fieldworker introduces a conversation that centres on linguistic domains. The interviewer may use some prompts. Some words were used as prompts in *SuRE* and, through these words, the informants were able to discuss lexical variation based on the region they came from. During the discussion, both phonological and grammatical data were gathered. It is worthwhile stressing that the *SuRE* approach will be adopted here with some modification. My study excludes lexical variation on which the *SuRE* project concentrated and, as such, the Sense



Relation Network (SRN) sheet arising from the use of certain words as prompts is not relevant here. Because of the inappropriateness of the SRN sheet, the prompts I will use in my research are sentences.

### **3.3.1 The prompt sentences**

I have prepared 36 prompt sentences which will be given to the informants at least a day before the interview is scheduled to take place. These 36 sentences have different statuses as they can be sorted into the following six categories: Standard English (StdE), non-Standard English (non-StdE), Disputed Standard English (DStdE), Unattested in English (UE), Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and Unattested in Nigerian Pidgin English (UNPE). StdE is similar to any StdE in any part of the world and this is the variety of English used by NUGs in formal situations. Non-StdE is a variety used mainly by people with a low level of education. It is the variety that is used by most primary and secondary school pupils in Nigeria although in few cases, it can be found in the English of post-secondary students and some graduates. DStdE is so called because in NE there are sentences whose uses are always controversial among educated speakers. For instance, while some graduates believe that the 'correct' preposition after the word 'corresponding' in *Check the seat corresponding – your number is to*, there are others who believe that this should be *with*. Similarly, while many Nigerians including NUGs will say *We love ourselves*, there are many who prefer to say *We love each other* (Banjo 1997). UE comprises those sentences that cannot be found in NE irrespective of the level of education. It is either that their structures do not conform to the structures of Standard or non-Standard English or they have no meaning in the language. NPE is used by the majority of Nigerians in informal situations and the sentences classified as NPE sentences here can be used by graduates, servants, market women, cobblers, road side mechanics, farmers as well as primary and secondary school pupils while UNPE, like UE, is not attested in NE. I believe that these sentences are likely to encourage the subjects to talk about language-related issues.

## **4. The Pilot Study**

### **4.1. The pilot subjects**

Those who participated in the pilot study conducted at the University of Leeds were 4 Nigerian informants: three males and one female. Since I could not use the

criteria which I will use for the selection of subjects in the major research, the only criterion I used here was to select Nigerians who had at least a first degree and who had spent less than a year in Leeds. Most of the subjects in this pilot study had more diverse backgrounds than I will allow for in my main study.

The female informant, whom I will refer to as ‘Lucy’, is a Yoruba woman who earned all her degrees except one (National Certificate in Education which she earned at Ila-Orangun in Nigeria) at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife in Nigeria. Lucy, who is about 40 years old, came to visit the University of Leeds. Lucy is married and has two children. Her husband is a principal of a secondary school at Ile-Ife. One of the other informants (Gruspel) is a master’s student in the School of Education at Leeds. Gruspel, who is from Calabar but also lived in different parts of Nigeria before he came to England in 2005, is in his early thirties. His parents were educated as they were both graduates. Gruspel grew up speaking English, NPE, Efik and Urhobo because while his father is an Efik, his mother is an Urhobo woman.

Hamzat, who preferred to be called Hams, is the third informant. He is a Yoruba man of about 30 years. He was born in Lagos and he attended primary, secondary and university education in Lagos. Hams’ father had 16 children and all were forbidden by their father to speak Yoruba at home. They were forced to communicate in English and whoever flouted this rule could expect to be punished. Ken, the last informant, is an Igbo man. He lived in the Eastern part of Nigeria until he was about 10 years old when his parents moved to Lagos. He then had to complete his primary education which he started in the East in Lagos, and he also went to secondary school in Lagos. However, for his university education, he went to the University of Port Harcourt where Igbo is the major ancestral language. Ken’s father is a graduate while his mother could not go beyond secondary school as a result of her father’s death. Ken is now an M.Sc student in Chemical Engineering at the University of Leeds.

#### **4.2. Analysis of data**

The analysis is divided into two major sections, namely the phonology of Nigerian English and the syntax of NE. For the purpose of this pilot study, my analysis of the phonology of NE will be based mainly on the reading materials while I will make use of the subjects’ responses to the prompt sentences as well as their use of NPE for the syntactic analysis. In the main study, however, this pattern may change slightly. I

should like to caution here that this pilot study does not fully reflect the national NE scenario as I was not able to get any Northern Nigerians to participate.

#### 4.2.1. The phonology of Nigerian English

The phonological aspect of NE that is being focused on in this research is the segmental, and not the supra-segmental. I present below three tables corresponding to the performances of the subjects in the reading passage, the sentences and the word list respectively.

**Table 1: Pronunciation in the reading passage**

Lexical Set	Word	Variable	Subjects			
			Gruspel	Hams	Ken	Lucy
PAT	peaceful	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
	responsible	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
THINK	thuggery	(th)	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[θ]
	aftermath	(th)	[θ]	[t]	[t]	[θ]
THEN	them	(dh)	[ð]	[d]	[d]	[d]
	clothes	(dh)	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[θ]
VAT	vandalism	(v)	[v]	[f]	[f]	[f]
	wives	(v)	[v]	[f]	[f]	[f]
HAT	honour	(h)	[h]	[∅]	[∅]	[∅]
	perhaps	(h)	[h]	[h]	[h]	[h]
ZEAL	crazy	(z)	[z]	[s]	[s]	[z]
	gives	(z)	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]
NURSE	concern	(er)	[a]	[a]	[a]	[a]
	word	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
BATH	father	(a)	[ɑ]	[a]	[a]	[a]
	part	(a)	[ɑ]	[a]	[a]	[a]
STRUT	discussions	(u)	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
	just	(u)	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
DRESS	fend	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]
	expected	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]

The first thing to note (Table 1) is that in spite of the differences in the backgrounds of the subjects, there is no variation whatsoever in their realisations of

certain variables. For instance, they all pronounced (p), (u) and (e) in words like *pat*, *luck* and *bed* the same way. This similarity is not much of a shock because the subjects are all southern Nigerians, and though there are ethnic differences between them, their ancestral languages belong to the same Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language sub-family (Jibril 1982). A close observation of the data in this table further shows that the accents of Hams, Ken and Lucy are similar in certain respects (cf. the realisations of (v), (z), (dh) and (er)). The reasons for this (i.e., why Gruspel's accent is different from the rest in many respects) might be connected with the facts that: (1) it is only Gruspel whose parents are both well-educated as they are both graduates and (2) it is only Gruspel who has lived in different parts of the country.

The differences in the way many of the variables are realised by the informants here are substantial. To start with, the (th) variable in *thuggery* and *aftermath* was pronounced as [θ] by Gruspel and Lucy, Hams pronounced it as [t] while Ken alternated between the two variants (i.e., [θ] and [t]). For Hams, Ken and Lucy, the (v) in the VAT words was produced as [f] while for Gruspel, it was [v]. Similarly, there are four variants for the (dh) variable and these are [ð], [d], [θ] and [t]. While Gruspel pronounced (dh) in *them* and *clothes* as [ð] and [θ] respectively, Hams, Ken and Lucy realised (dh) in *them* as [d]. However, both Ken and Lucy realised this variable in *clothes* as [θ] while Hams pronounced it as [t]. Whereas all these subjects pronounced (h) in *perhaps* as [h], only Gruspel realised this variable as [h] in *honour*; the other three realised it as zero (i.e., h-deletion). I will revisit some of these features later.

**Table 2: Pronunciation in the sentences**

Lexical Set	Sent. No	Word	Variable	Subjects			
				Gruspel	Hams	Ken	Lucy
PAT	1	pot	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
	2	pupils	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
THINK	4	think	(th)	[θ]	[t]	[t]	[θ]
	4	thermometer	(th)	[t]	[t]	[t]	[t]
THEN	8	bathe	(dh)	[θ]	[θ]	[θ]	[θ]
	10	healthy	(dh)	[ð]	[d]	[d]	[d]
VAT	10	gave	(v)	[v]	[v]	[f]	[f]
	5	vote	(v)	[v]	[v]	[v]	[v]
HAT	5	happy	(h)	[h]	[h]	[h]	[h]
	7	his	(h)	[h]	[h]	[∅]	[h]
ZEAL	6	regulations	(z)	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]
	2	gives	(z)	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]
NURSE	3	journey	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
	6	learn	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]
BATH	7	car	(a)	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]
	7	yard	(a)	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]
STRUT	1	cup	(u)	[ʌ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
	9	money	(u)	[ʌ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
DRESS	2	many	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]
	2	them	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]

Although the patterns of pronunciation in tables 1 and 2 are similar, there are slight differences which seem to match with the level of formality. This can best be illustrated by the VAT words as exemplified in *vandalism* (table 1) and *vote* (table 2). Whereas in table 1, (v) in *vandalism* was produced by three of the four subjects as [f], all the four subjects realised this variable as [v] in *vote*. Similarly, while Hams pronounced this variable as [f] in *wives*, he pronounced it as [v] in *gave* although it may be argued, if I have more evidence, that the realisation of (v) as [v], as demonstrated by the word *gave*, in Hams' speech was caused by the phonotactic position of the sound (i.e., the word-final position as opposed to its intervocalic

position in *wives*). Also related to this is Gruspel's realisation of STRUT vowel in tables 1 and 2. In Table 1 (the reading passage), he pronounced this vowel as [ɔ] while in sentence reading (Table 2) the STRUT vowel was pronounced as [ʌ].

A very important point I must not forget to highlight is the realisation of the (th) variable in *healthy* as [d] or [ð] by the informants. My observations about educated speakers of English in Nigeria have shown that the majority of English users usually pronounce this word as [heldi] or [helði], and those who say [heldi] outnumber those who say [helði]. As shown above, the **THEN** words has the variants [ð] or [d] in NE; the realisation of (th) as [ð] or [d] in *healthy*, therefore, suggests that for most Nigerian speakers of English, *healthy* belongs to the lexical set THEN and not THINK, and thus, goes with words like *although*, *them* and *altogether*. This word *healthy* was initially included in the word list and the sentence reading but after the pilot study, I realised that for the majority of Nigerians, *healthy* does not belong to the same lexical set as *through*, *thought* and *bath*. So, I have had to replace *healthy* with *pathetic* in the word list although I have still retained it in the sentence reading. It seems from the pilot study that the linguistic environment is a crucial factor which can cause phonological variation. Taking (th) as an example, I observed that the frequency with which this variable is realised as [t] in words like *cloth*, *mouth* and *aftermath* (i.e., when it appears in the word-final position) is greater than its rate of occurrence as [t] in words like *think* (i.e., word-initial position).

Table 3: Pronunciation in the word list

Lexical Set	Word	Variable	Subjects			
			Gruspel	Hams	Ken	Lucy
PAT	pat	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
	tipper	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
	top	(p)	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
THINK	thin	(th)	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[θ]
	healthy	(th)	[ð]	[d]	[d]	[ð]
	mouth	(th)	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[θ]
THEN	them	(dh)	[ð]	[d]	[d]	[d]
	although	(dh)	[ð]	[d]	[d]	[d]
	bathe	(dh)	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[θ]
VAT	van	(v)	[v]	[v]	[f]	[v]
	river	(v)	[v]	[v]	[v]	[v]
	rev	(v)	[v]	[v]	[f]	[v]
HAT	hat	(h)	[h]	[h]	[h]	[h]
	rehearse	(h)	[h]	[h]	[h]	[h]
	husbands	(h)	[h]	[h]	[∅]	[h]
ZEAL	zeal	(z)	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]
	resolve	(z)	[z]	[z]	[s]	[z]
	bags	(z)	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]
NURSE	term	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɛ]	[a]	[ɛ]
	firm	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɛ]	[a]	[ɛ]
	fur	(er)	[ɜ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
BATH	arm	(a)	[ɑ:]	[a]	[a]	[a]
	father	(a)	[ɑ:]	[a]	[a]	[a]
	bar	(a)	[ɑ:]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]
STRUT	strut	(u)	[ʌ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
	luck	(u)	[ʌ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
	love	(u)	[ʌ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ɔ]
DRESS	dress	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]
	leg	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]
	pet	(e)	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ]

Table 3 shows the pronunciation of the target variables in the word list; the most formal reading material of the three tested. There is nothing particular to say about this table in terms of how the variables were produced. However, if this table is compared with the ones above, one quickly notices that the difference in the degree of formality is evident in the pronunciation of words here. This, again, is manifested in the realisations of (v), (z) and (h). As noted in the table (Table 3), h-deletion became less prominent as it occurred only once (i.e., in the pronunciation of *husbands* by Ken). Similarly, out of the 12 instances of the production of (v) in VAT words in table 3, there were 10 [v] and 2 [f] while there were 11 [z] and 1 [s] in the realisations of (z) variable in ZEAL words. Also, in THINK words, the occurrence of [θ] in the pronunciation of *thin* and *mouth* in this table is greater than that of [t] in Tables 1 and 2.

#### 4.2.2 Phonotactic features of Nigerian English

Some of the features that are described here can also be found in other varieties of English such as Cameroon English (Simo Bobda 2003) and Singapore English (Lim 2004) with which NE shares some socio-historical affinities.

##### 4.2.2.1 Fricatives are always voiceless in word-final position

In NE, fricatives are always voiceless in word final position. From the data collected, the examples given below illustrate this phenomenon in NE.

1.	rev	[rɛf]
	resolve	[risɔlf]/[rizɔlf]
	love	[lɔf]
	clothe	[klɔt]/ [klɔθ]

The productions of the words above indicate that all but one Nigerian preferred voiceless fricatives at the word-final position. This phenomenon has been found to be common in NE, most especially in Yoruba English (Udofot 2004). In all the three reading tests, Gruspel, Ken and Lucy consistently produced the (dh) in *bathe*, *clothe*, *bequeath*, *breathe* and *blithe* as [θ] while Hams realised it as [t] and sometimes as [θ]. When I compared this with the way they pronounced (th) in *thin*, *thuggery* and *think*



(i.e., as either [t] or [θ], I noticed that for these informants, there is no difference between *cloth* and *clothe*, *bath* and *bathe* and *breath* and *breathe*. Each of these pairs of words therefore belongs to the same lexical sets in their English. This again supports the fact that fricatives are invariably voiceless in word-final position in NE.

#### 4.2.2.2 (th) and (dh) stopping

*Th*-stopping is a prominent feature of Nigerian English. *Th*-stopping refers to the production of the (th) variable in words like *think*, *ethics* and *mouth* as [t] while *dh*-stopping means the realisation of (dh) in words like *themselves*, *although* and *worthy* as [d]. There are numerous examples of this in the data collected as the examples below show:

2a	aftermath	[aftamat]
	think	[tink]
	birth	[bat]
2b	this	[dis]
	those	[dos]
	although	[ɔldo:]

For most Nigerian speakers of English, there is no distinction between *thin* and *tin*, *birth* and *bat* as well as between *then* and *den*. This can also be found in other varieties of English in Africa (Simo Bobda 2003).

#### 4.2.2.3 h-dropping and insertion

Most NE speakers, especially YE speakers and a few speakers of other NE varieties, do not normally pronounce the variable (h) in words like *honour* and *hat* such that these words are pronounced as [ɔnɔ] and [at] respectively. Only one (Gruspel) out of the four subjects pronounced [h] in *honour*; the other three deleted it (Table 1). The realisation of (h) as [h] in *honour* by Gruspel may be a case of hypercorrection especially when we consider the fact that this is consistent with his home background in some ways. However, that none of them deleted [h] in the word *perhaps* might be another indication that phonotactic environment is a crucial factor in the different realisations of phonological variables. It is also possible for NE

speakers to insert [h] in words like *apple*, *ear*, *eagle* and *eraser* such that these words are pronounced as [hapul], [hia] and [hiresa]/[hireza] respectively.

#### 4.2.2.4 Vowel length

It is evident in the pronunciation of BATH words (see tables 3 to 5) that the vowel in this lexical set is realised as a short vowel /a/ by most of the informants. Thus, there is no distinction between *park* and *pack* since the vowel in both is invariably produced as [a] in the variety of English represented above. This fact is supported by the pronunciation of *father*, *yard* and *part* as [fada], [jad] and [pat] by the subjects. As Jibril (1986) pointed out, this is one way through which the differences between the Southern Nigerian English and Northern Nigerian English are shown; for while there is length differentiation in Northern Nigerian English, there is none in the Southern variety (cf. Jowitt 1991).

#### 4.3 Subjects' views on grammar

One thing that I noticed fairly quickly was that even though two of my informants said they could not speak NPE very well, they were able to recognise the NPE sentences. Furthermore, during the interview they managed to use and comment on both StdE and NPE. The comments of at least three of them on the prompt sentences were quite interesting as they were able to give alternative ways of rephrasing some of the sentences they felt were not 'correct.' For instance, while Ken believed that the only thing wrong with *I cannot be able to do it yesterday* is the use of *cannot* instead of *could not* (i.e., the use of present tense instead of past tense), Hams and Lucy pointed out that, in addition to using the present tense in place of the past, it is not 'correct' to use *cannot* and *be able* together since they express the same meaning which relates to ability. So, Hams and Lucy who subscribed to this latter opinion said the sentence should simply read *I could not do it yesterday*. All the informants thought that the sentence *The informations about the equipments are many* is non-standard because *information* and *equipment* cannot be pluralized in English. Lucy suggested that this sentence should read *There are many information about the equipment*. Although Lucy said *information* cannot be pluralized, she used a plural quantifier *many*. Thus, *many information* is like the expression *many sheep* which is plural.

All of the respondents indicated that there was nothing wrong with *I congratulate you for your success* and *We love ourselves*. However, Hams (H), Ken (K) and Lucy (L) said that the sentences could be said in other ways as follows:

I congratulate you for your success

- H: (a) Congratulations on your success.
- K: (a) Congratulation.  
(b) Congratulation for your success.  
(c) I congratulate you on your success.
- L: (a) Please, accept my congratulation.

We love ourselves.

- H. We love one another.
- K. We love each other or We love one another
- L. We love each other

Lucy commented on most of the sentences. She said that although people normally say *Our country comprises 36 states*, the sentence can also be either *Our country comprises of 36 states* or *Our country is comprised of 36 states*. She also pointed out that there was no need for the inclusion of *about* in *The university discusses about his problem* and that *Has she replied your letter?* is 'correct' but may also read *Has she replied to your letter?*

The informants also responded to the sentences which, though having some semblance to NPE, were unattested in it in different ways, as shown by Gruspel's and Lucy's responses below (Note that Akinmade is the researcher).

Akinmade: Wetin you feel about dis kind sentence wey you call incorrect Pidgin?

Gruspel: I never come across this kind sentence before. Some of them dey OK grammatically but the ideas wey them bring no correct.

Lucy: This one be different from real Pidgin wey I dey hear from people when them they talk. Them no get meaning. Problem no be human being, he no fit marry. Bread no get leg we hin go take waka. Dem don scatter scatter this one. Di correct tin be say *Sweet mother, I no go forget you* and no be *I no go sweet mother forget you*.

The use of aspect particles in NPE is very crucial as they normally feature prominently within the verbal groups Agheyisi (1971) recognised three of these

particles namely *don*, *dey* and *wan* and she remarked that they normally occurred pre-verbally. According to Agheyisi (1971: 136), *don* ‘generally indicates that the action or state in the verbal it precedes occurred, or terminated, at the moment, or just before the time of speaking.’ The way in which *don* is used in *Dem don scatter scatter this one* in Lucy’s response above fully supports Agheyisi’s view in that it signifies that the action of *scattering* has been completed; thus, it is used as a perfective aspect marker. Similarly, *dey* is used in *The only language wey I dey hear from people when they talk* (i.e., The only language which I hear from people when they speak) to express habitual aspect. There may be cases where *dey* may acquire the status of a full verb in NPE as in *How you dey?* and *I dey Kampe* meaning *How are you?* and *I am fine/strong* respectively. However, *don*, as far as I know, cannot function as a full verb.

As evident in the first line of Gruspel’s utterance below, *wan* precedes *talk* which is a dynamic (i.e., action) verb. There are other particles such as *fit* and *sabi* which are also related to the verbal group. At a point during the interview, Hams said: *I no fit speak Pidgin English the way people wey dey speak am gangan dey speak am* while Lucy, in a similar situation, said: *Me I no sabi speak am well well but my daughter sabi am well well*. In Hams’s sentence, *fit* means *can* (ability to do something) which is preceded by a negativising morpheme *no*. The occurrence of *no* before *fit* changes the sentence from a positive declarative form to a negative one. Similarly, *sabi* expresses ability as evident in *...my daughter sabi Pidgin well well* (meaning ... my daughter knows Pidgin very well). However, the difference between *fit* and *sabi* is that while *fit* can express other meanings such as possibility (e.g., *The man fit come tomorrow*) and probability (e.g., *Lecturers fit strike next week*), *sabi* can mean only ability (Agheyisi 1971). *Wey* has the status of a relative pronoun *which* (or *that*) as evident in Lucy’s utterance above and Gruspel’s below:

Gruspel: The fost tin *wey* I wan talk be say if Nigeria get a national language, the national language *wey* hin get na Pidgin English. The only language *wey* you fit speak for Niger anywhere wherever you dey na Pidgin English. The language *wey* everybody sabi, young people, old people na him be Pidgin.

In each of the positions where *wey* occurs above, it is possible to replace it with the relative pronoun *which*.

Reduplication which is a prominent syntactic feature of NPE can also be found in other varieties of English such as Ghanaian Pidgin English (cf. Huber 1999) and Kamtok (cf. Todd 1990). This I believe is one of the strategies through which NPE achieves structural simplicity. Lexical items are usually repeated without any item coming in between in NPE. For instance, we have the repetition of *scatter* and *well* in *Dem don scatter scatter this one* and *Me I no sabi speak am well well.....* Related to this phenomenon of syntactic simplicity is the fact that NPE does not observe tense or plural morphology as all words appear in their basic form. Tense is marked through the use of particles and adverbials while plurality is shown in NPE through the use of quantifiers such as *plenty* and *boku* (Note that *boku* is related in meaning and use to *beaucoup* in French) as in *If you go Lagos, you see this una boy, dem boku for Lagos* (Lucy) and sentences like *I get plenty book to read*.

## 5. Evaluation and Conclusion

Arising from the results of the pilot study, there is a need to modify some of the instruments, especially specific words and sentences that will be used in the main research. I have added a sentence to the passage and I have increased the sentence reading from 10 to 15 so as to have more words in which the target variables appear in different positions. This will help me to examine in detail the correlation between the realisations of the phonological variables and their contexts of occurrence. I noticed that two of the subjects were inserting [h] in certain words which have no letter *h* in their spelling. I have, therefore, included some of these words (and three other words) to the word list and it now contains 45 words instead of 30 as used for the pilot study. Some of the words included are *apple, ear, eight, rice, rise* and *ice*.

I included *healthy* initially in the word list and the sentence reading to test the realisation of (th) but after the pilot study, I realised that for the majority of Nigerians, *healthy* does not belong to the same lexical set as *through, thought* and *bath* (cf. 4.2.1 above). So, I have replaced *healthy* with *pathetic* in the word list although I have still retained it in the sentence reading. I also observed that the frequency with which (th) is realised as [t] in words like *cloth, mouth* and *aftermath* (i.e., when it appears in the word-final position) is greater than its rate of occurrence as [t] in words like *think* (i.e., word-initial position).

I have also made some changes by replacing *firm* with *urban*, *strut* with *understand* and *leg* with *eggs* to ensure that I have the variable in each case. I also replaced *father* with *park* in the word list so as to call the attention of the informants to the letters –ar- which sometimes corresponds to the long vowel /a:/. The reading materials in the appendices are of two types. Appendices A<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> were used for the pilot study while appendices A<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>2</sub> were used for the main (i.e., post-pilot) study.

I have shown in this study the methodological procedures that I am going to use in the collection of data for my research. The use of prompt sentences to elicit data on grammatical variation is especially relevant in this study as the informants used both StdE and NPE freely. Although all the subjects studied were from the Southern part of Nigeria, the results of the pilot study have demonstrated that there is phonological variation in their English usage. It is hoped that the main study will reveal more of this variation and show where and why it occurs.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A<sub>1</sub>: The reading passage [Pilot].**

#### **The responsibilities of a man to his family**

The word *responsibility* can, perhaps, be viewed from different angles. When is a man considered responsible? It is not my major concern here to explain this term. My primary concern is to state one or two responsibilities of a man to members of his immediate family. A responsible man listens to his wife and children; allows them to express their opinions about the crazy world around them and gives them the chance to have inputs in various family discussions. He is not just a father to his children; he is also a friend to them. He is expected to be firm in making decisions. He buys necessary things for his wife and children, clothes them and allows them to have confidence in him. Many wives are not happy today because they are abandoned to fend for themselves and their children. The greatest honour a man can ever have is to have a peaceful home where all members have mutual respect for one another. Most husbands act with blithe disregard for the feelings of their wives. I think the aftermath of this is the recklessness, thuggery and vandalism on the part of our youth. What legacy are we, as men and as husbands, going to bequeath to the coming generations? I, therefore, strongly, appeal to you; let us wake up to our responsibilities and our society as a whole will breathe positive changes. Let us love our wives and children.

### **Appendix A<sub>2</sub>: The reading passage**

#### **The responsibilities of a man to his family**

The word *responsibility* can, perhaps, be viewed from different angles. When is a man considered responsible? It is not my major concern here to explain this term. My primary concern is to state one or two responsibilities of a man to members of his immediate family. A responsible man listens to his wife and children; allows them to express their opinions about the crazy world around them and gives them the chance to have inputs in various family discussions. He is not just a father to his children; he is also a friend to them. He is expected to be firm in making decisions. He buys

necessary things for his wife and children, clothes them and allows them to have confidence in him. Many wives are not happy today because they are abandoned to fend for themselves and their children. The greatest honour a man can ever have is to have a peaceful home where all members have mutual respect for one another. Most husbands act with blithe disregard for the feelings of their wives. I think the aftermath of this is the recklessness, thuggery and vandalism on the part of our youth. What legacy are we, as men and as husbands, going to bequeath to the coming generations? If we achieve all there is in the world without bringing up our children properly, we gain nothing: all comes to zero. I, therefore, strongly, appeal to you; let us wake up to our responsibilities and our society as a whole will breathe positive changes. Let us love our wives and children

#### **Appendix B<sub>1</sub>: The sentence reading [Pilot]**

1. I put the cup on the pot.
2. The teacher loves the pupils and gives them many gifts.
3. The journey will start at the beginning of the term.
4. I think the mouth of the thermometer is not wide enough.
5. We were happy to vote for you.
6. We learn that the workers always obey the regulations of the firm.
7. My father has a car park in his yard.
8. I will bathe and clothe the baby.
9. As soon as I received my pocket money, I purchased a laptop.
10. She gave birth to a fine healthy girl during the holiday

#### **Appendix B<sub>2</sub>: The sentence reading**

- i. I put the cup on the pot.
- ii. The teacher loves the pupils and gives them many gifts.
- iii. The journey will start at the beginning of the term.
- iv. I think the mouth of the thermometer is not wide enough.
- v. We were happy to vote for you.
- vi. We learn that the workers always obey the regulations of the firm.
- vii. My father has a car park in his yard.

- viii. I will bathe and clothe the baby.
- ix. As soon as I received my pocket money, I purchased a laptop.
- x. She gave birth to a fine healthy girl during the holiday.
- xi. The resumption day for this session is tomorrow.
- xii. His situation is quite pathetic.
- xiii. I will have a rethink about the matter.
- xiv. My monthly earn is very good.
- xv. I understand that the government will rehabilitate them by the end of this year if we do not give up our struggle.

**Appendix C<sub>1</sub>: The word list [Pilot].**

- |           |              |              |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. pat    | 2. tipper    | 3. top       |
| 4. thin   | 5. healthy   | 6. mouth     |
| 7. them   | 8. although  | 9. bathe     |
| 10. van   | 11. river    | 12. rev      |
| 13. hat   | 14. rehearse | 15. husbands |
| 16. zeal  | 17. resolve  | 18. bags     |
| 19. term  | 20. firm     | 21. fur      |
| 22. arm   | 23. father   | 24. bar      |
| 25. strut | 26. luck     | 27. love     |
| 28. dress | 29. leg      | 30. pet      |

**Appendix C<sub>2</sub>: The word list**

- |            |              |              |
|------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. pat     | 2. tipper    | 3. top       |
| 4. thin    | 5. pathetic  | 6. mouth     |
| 8. them    | 8. although  | 9. bathe     |
| 10. van    | 11. river    | 12. rev      |
| 13. hat    | 14. rehearse | 15. husbands |
| 16. honour | 17. vehicle  | 18. hour     |
| 19. apple  | 20. eight    | 21. eye      |
| 22. zeal   | 23. resolve  | 24. bags     |
| 25. wise   | 26. wiser    | 27. rise     |
| 28. ice    | 29. icing    | 30. rice     |
| 31. urban  | 32. term     | 33. fur      |
| 34. arm    | 35. park     | 36. bar      |
| 37. ask    | 38. half     | 39. father   |

40. ugly

41. luck

42. love

43. eggs

44. dress

45. pets

### **Appendix D: The prompt sentences [Same for both Pilot and post-pilot]**

1. I have spoken with my friend and he has agreed to help you.
2. The doctor has come here to look for you.
3. Is he a nice teacher?
4. Will you marry him?
5. Go and talk to him now.
6. Shut up and listen to me.
7. He have plenty book.
8. I cannot be able to do it yesterday.
9. Did you went and bought a bottle of oil?
10. Was my brothers and sisters there?
11. Leaves my office and writes what I ask you to write
12. Buys it and enjoyed life.
13. The informations about the equipments are many.
14. We love ourselves.
15. Our country comprises 36 states.
16. I congratulate you for your success.
17. The university discusses about his problem.
18. Has she replied your letter?
19. The table sings the food.
20. Our country states comprises 36.
21. The idea arrested the tenants, the room tried them on the playground and the table sent them to prison.
22. Mathematics difficult but interesting is.
23. Has the telephone eaten the mountain?
24. The furious bucket insulted the patient pen.
25. Make una come give me mai money if you no want make katakata go burst.
26. I done put am under table.
27. I waka go buy bread wey I dey chop.
28. Abi nah in be your oga?
29. me I no get money wey I fit waste on you.
30. Make you come now now.
31. Bread don waka eat finish.
32. His problem go marry una book.

33. Wai you come us disappoint.
34. The pikin don born hin papa.
35. I no go sweet mother forget you.
36. I look mai pocket, no dey money.

(note that Appendices A1, B1 and C1 were used for pilot study, appendices A2, B2 and C2 were the post-pilot study materials while there was no changes made to sentences under appendix D)