



A Critical Review of Segmental, Suprasegmental and Sociolinguistic Variation in Nigerian English Phonology

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.68050/JAMS.2026.547>

Received: 20 Sept 2026; Accepted: 21 Sept 2026; Published: 23 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Nigerian English has developed as a result of prolonged contact between English and the many indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. This contact has produced a range of segmental and suprasegmental patterns that distinguish Nigerian English from other varieties of English. This article critically reviews research on Nigerian English phonology, with particular attention to Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio and Edo English. It examines vowel and consonant systems, monophthongisation, consonant cluster reduction, stress, rhythm and intonation, while also considering the influence of first language, region, ethnicity, education and social context. The review shows that Nigerian English cannot adequately be described as a single uniform pronunciation system. Although some features occur across linguistic groups, others are associated with particular regional or ethnic backgrounds. Research on Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba English has provided much of the foundation for the description of Nigerian English phonology, but studies of Ibibio, Edo, Ijaw and other less studied varieties show that the national picture is more complex. Recent acoustic research has further demonstrated that vowels traditionally classified as monophthongs may exhibit substantial internal movement when examined through formant trajectories. The review therefore argues for a multidimensional understanding of Nigerian English phonology in which common national patterns, ethnic and regional variation, individual differences and social factors are considered together. The findings also have implications for pronunciation teaching. An intelligibility-oriented approach can recognise Nigerian English as a legitimate variety while providing learners with the knowledge and flexibility required for communication across different English-speaking contexts.

Keywords: Nigerian English, Phonology, Sociolinguistic Variation, Prosody, Pronunciation, Intelligibility

INTRODUCTION

English has occupied an important position in Nigerian public life since the colonial period. It is widely used in education, government, administration, law, the media, business and interethnic communication. Its long history in Nigeria has produced a local variety of English with identifiable characteristics. Nigerian English is therefore part of the wider development of postcolonial Englishes in which English has undergone structural adaptation through contact with local languages and social environments (Kachru, 1985; Schneider, 2007).

Pronunciation provides some of the clearest evidence of this development. Nigerian English differs from many inner-circle varieties in vowel organisation, consonant realisation, syllable structure, stress, rhythm and intonation. Earlier descriptions often interpreted these differences mainly by comparing Nigerian English with British English, particularly Received Pronunciation. Such comparison remains useful because it identifies areas of phonetic and phonological difference. However, it is not sufficient for understanding the internal organisation of Nigerian English. A feature that differs from British English is not necessarily an error. It may represent a regular pattern within a Nigerian English variety.



An important development in the literature has been the recognition that Nigerian English is internally diverse. Early work concentrated heavily on Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba speakers. Jibril's major study, for example, was based on recordings from 45 Nigerians, including 15 Hausa, 15 Igbo and 15 Yoruba speakers. He examined differences in vowels, consonants, syllable structure, melody and intonation and demonstrated that the phonological systems of these groups could not be reduced to one undifferentiated pattern (Jibril, 1982). Recent reviews continue to identify Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the most extensively studied ethnic varieties, while also drawing attention to research on Ibibio and other Nigerian languages (Jowitt, 2026).

The emphasis on the three major linguistic groups, however, has also created a limitation in the literature. Nigeria contains hundreds of indigenous languages, and English is spoken by people from communities with very different phonological systems. Research on Ibibio, Edo, Ijaw and other groups shows that the description of Nigerian English becomes more complete when these varieties are examined directly rather than treated as marginal examples.

The present article therefore reviews Nigerian English phonology from a broader perspective. It examines the evidence associated with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio and Edo while also considering evidence from other Nigerian English varieties where relevant. The purpose is not to produce a simple catalogue of pronunciation differences. Rather, the article asks three related questions. First, which segmental and suprasegmental features are shared across Nigerian English varieties? Second, which features appear to be associated with particular linguistic or regional backgrounds? Third, to what extent can these differences be explained by first language influence, and to what extent do social and linguistic factors provide alternative explanations?

The review also considers recent acoustic research, particularly work using formant trajectories. This research is important because it challenges descriptions based solely on static vowel measurements and provides evidence that Nigerian English vowels may have greater internal movement than earlier accounts suggested.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a critical narrative review approach. The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, established scholarly books and chapters, doctoral research, and reputable institutional repositories where primary research is available. The literature was examined with particular attention to studies dealing directly with Nigerian English pronunciation or with the phonological systems of indigenous Nigerian languages that provide relevant linguistic background for interpreting Nigerian English variation.

Searches focused on combinations of the following terms: *Nigerian English phonology*, *Nigerian English pronunciation*, *Nigerian English vowels*, *Nigerian English consonants*, *Nigerian English stress*, *Nigerian English rhythm*, *Nigerian English intonation*, *Hausa English phonology*, *Yoruba English phonology*, *Igbo English phonology*, *Ibibio English phonology*, *Edo English phonology*, *Ijaw English phonology*, *Ijo English*, *Izon English*, *Izon phonology*, and *Kalabari-Ijo phonology*.

Studies were included when they met at least one of the following conditions: they provided empirical evidence on Nigerian English pronunciation; they examined a clearly identified ethnic or regional variety of Nigerian English; they investigated an indigenous Nigerian language in a way that was relevant to possible cross-linguistic influence; or they provided a major theoretical or descriptive account of Nigerian English phonology and prosody.

Studies were excluded when they made general claims about Nigerian English without providing sufficient linguistic or empirical evidence, when their participant background was unclear, or when they treated a small regional sample as representative of all Nigerian English speakers without adequate justification. Particular care was taken with claims about first language transfer. A difference between Nigerian English and British English was not automatically classified as an L1 effect unless the relevant study provided evidence linking the feature to the speaker's linguistic background.



The synthesis was organised into four broad areas: segmental phonology, suprasegmental phonology, sociolinguistic variation and acoustic research. Particular attention was given to participant characteristics, geographical location, first language, sample size and research method. This approach is important because Nigerian English research has often used samples associated with particular linguistic groups. Findings from an Igbo-speaking sample, for example, should not automatically be extended to Yoruba, Hausa, Ijaw, Ibibio or Edo English.

SCOPE OF THE LITERATURE

Research on Nigerian English phonology has developed unevenly. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have received considerably more attention than many other indigenous language groups. Jowitt (2026) notes that research on ethnic varieties has included Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and Ibibio, while more recent work continues to expand the range of Nigerian English varieties examined.

Table 1: Selected Studies Relevant to Nigerian English Phonology

Author/Year	Language or Variety	Participants/Corpus	Method	Feature Examined	Major Contribution
Jibril (1982)	Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba English	45 Nigerian speakers	Acoustic and phonological analysis	Vowels, consonants, syllables, intonation	Demonstrated major ethnic and regional variation
Gut and Milde (2002)	Nigerian English	Nigerian speakers	Acoustic analysis	Rhythm, syllable structure, tone	Showed distinctive Nigerian English prosody
Simo Bobda (2007)	Nigerian English	Previous empirical descriptions and linguistic data	Phonological analysis	Segmental processes	Identified systematic segmental rules
Gussenhoven and Udofot (2010)	Nigerian and British English	Nigerian and British listeners	Perception experiment	Pitch and intonation	Demonstrated differences in pitch organisation
Jamakovic and Fuchs (2019)	Formal Nigerian English, mainly Igbo L1	9 educated speakers, 811 vowel tokens	Acoustic analysis	Vowels	Found a reduced vowel system
Essien (2020)	Educated Ibibio English	Ibibio speakers	Acoustic and perceptual analysis	Monophthongisation, vowel length	Demonstrated specific Ibibio English vowel patterns
Akindele (2021)	Educated Edo English	200 Edo-speaking undergraduates	Acoustic analysis	Vowel reduction	Examined vowel reduction in Edo English
Rolle (2021)	Izon	Gbarain and Kolokuma speakers	Phonological analysis	Lexical tone	Described the complex tone system of Izon
Udofot (2022)	Nigerian English	Selected Nigerian speakers	Descriptive phonological analysis	Segments and prosody	Identified recurring national phonological patterns
Ahamefula and Babarinde (2018)	Ijo and Igbo	Ijo and Igbo speakers	Contrastive analysis	Consonants and phonotactics	Provided evidence relevant to Ijo and Igbo transfer
Amoniyan and Melefa	Southeastern Nigerian	Speakers from five southeastern states	Dynamic acoustic	Diphthongs and formant trajectories	Demonstrated substantial



(2026)	English		analysis		temporal movement in vowels
Jowitt (2026)	Nigerian English	Review of previous research	Critical review	Phonology and ethnic variation	Identified developments and gaps in Nigerian English research

The table shows that the evidence base is not evenly distributed. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have a longer history of empirical research. Ibibio and Edo have more specialised studies, while Ijaw English remains less directly documented. This difference in research coverage should be recognised when making national claims.

NIGERIAN ENGLISH AND THE QUESTION OF PRONUNCIATION NORMS

Nigerian English has developed between local and external pronunciation norms. British English historically provided an important model in formal education, while Nigerian speakers have developed pronunciation patterns associated with local linguistic experience.

Jamakovic and Fuchs (2019) provide useful acoustic evidence from formal Nigerian English. Their study analysed 811 vowel tokens produced by nine educated speakers with Igbo as their first language. The results reduced the thirteen vowel categories examined to nine distinct phonemes, a system that closely resembled the Igbo vowel inventory. The finding demonstrates that L1 influence may remain visible even in formal educated Nigerian English.

The significance of this finding should not be exaggerated. The sample was small and linguistically specific. It provides strong evidence about the speakers studied, but it does not demonstrate that all Nigerian English speakers possess the same vowel system. Rather, it shows why participant background is essential in Nigerian English phonological research.

The same principle applies to other groups. A Yoruba English speaker, a Hausa English speaker, an Ijaw English speaker and an Edo English speaker may share some national Nigerian English characteristics while differing in particular segmental or prosodic patterns. Nigerian English should therefore be treated as a complex system containing both shared features and internally variable patterns.

SEGMENTAL FEATURES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH

Vowels

Vowel organisation is one of the most extensively investigated areas of Nigerian English phonology. General descriptions have identified a reduced vowel system in comparison with British English. Jowitt (2026) notes that research consistently identifies differences in vowel inventories between Nigerian English and inner-circle varieties.

Simo Bobda (2007) similarly identifies monophthongisation and other segmental processes as important characteristics of Nigerian English. Diphthongs may be realised with less internal movement, while some triphthongs may undergo simplification.

However, the term *monophthongisation* should not be interpreted too rigidly. Amoniyan and Melefa (2026) examined southeastern Nigerian English using formant trajectories rather than relying only on measurements at a single point in a vowel. Their analysis of data from five southeastern states showed substantial variation across lexical sets. Even vowels described as monophthongised displayed measurable movement through their duration. This finding suggests that vowel categories are better understood as dynamic phonetic distributions than as fixed points on a vowel chart.



The importance of this result extends beyond southeastern Nigeria. It shows that traditional classifications may hide important phonetic detail. A vowel can be phonologically classified as a monophthong while still displaying measurable spectral movement. Conversely, movement alone does not mean that the vowel has acquired the phonological status of a diphthong.

The evidence also demonstrates the importance of regional and linguistic background. The southeastern study involved a population with a strong shared Igbo linguistic background. Its findings therefore provide valuable evidence about southeastern Nigerian English, but they should not automatically be extended to Hausa, Yoruba, Ijaw, Ibibio or Edo English.

Hausa English

Hausa English represents an important component of Nigerian English phonological research because it provides evidence from northern Nigeria. Jibril's study examined Hausa English alongside Igbo and Yoruba English and showed that the three groups could not simply be treated as one homogeneous pronunciation system.

Later research has provided more detailed evidence concerning Hausa English. Muhammad's comparative research on Hausa and Kanuri English, for example, identifies specific patterns involving vowels and consonants. Some Hausa English vowel realisations appear to reflect similarities between Hausa syllable structures and English forms, while consonant realisation also shows variation according to speech style and linguistic environment.

Hausa is a tone language, and this provides an important background for understanding the prosodic organisation of Hausa English. However, the presence of lexical tone in Hausa should not be taken as proof that Hausa English simply transfers Hausa tone directly into English. English stress, rhythm and intonation operate within a different linguistic system. The appropriate interpretation is therefore one of interaction between L1 prosodic knowledge and the phonological structure of English.

Recent comparative work involving Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba speakers also demonstrates that some pronunciation patterns are shared across groups while others are language-specific. For example, dental fricatives may present difficulties across the three groups, but individual varieties may differ in their treatment of other fricatives.

Yoruba English

Yoruba English has received substantial attention in Nigerian English research. Yoruba is a tonal language, and its phonological structure provides an important background for examining English pronunciation.

Research has identified consonant and vowel patterns associated with Yoruba English. Initial /h/, for example, has been discussed as an area of variation, while particular English consonants that are absent or differently distributed in Yoruba may be realised through alternative articulations.

The relationship between Yoruba phonology and Yoruba English should nevertheless be treated cautiously. Not every feature found in the speech of a Yoruba speaker necessarily represents direct transfer from Yoruba. Speakers have different levels of education, exposure to English, social experience and familiarity with other Nigerian languages. Yoruba English should therefore be studied as a developing variety rather than as a simple phonological projection of Yoruba.

The importance of this distinction becomes clearer when Yoruba English is compared with Hausa and Igbo English. Some features recur across all three groups, suggesting broader Nigerian English patterning, while other features occur more strongly in particular groups. Recent comparative research on Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba speakers confirms that shared patterns and language-specific patterns coexist.

Igbo English



Igbo English is one of the best documented ethnic varieties of Nigerian English. The significance of Igbo English is especially clear in acoustic research.

Jamakovic and Fuchs (2019) demonstrated substantial correspondence between the vowel system of formal Nigerian English speakers with Igbo L1 and the Igbo vowel inventory. This study is particularly important because the participants were educated speakers and the data came from formal contexts. It therefore challenges the assumption that education automatically eliminates L1 influence.

Recent research on southeastern Nigerian English has also examined vowel trajectories. Amoniyani and Melefa (2026) found that vowels in the southeastern sample displayed considerable temporal movement. Their results indicate that descriptions of Igbo-influenced Nigerian English should move beyond static vowel charts and consider dynamic acoustic behaviour.

Igbo also provides a useful case for examining consonant patterns and phonotactics. The contrastive study by Ahamefula and Babarinde (2018) compares Igbo and Ijo and shows why detailed knowledge of indigenous phonological systems is important for understanding possible L1 effects in English.

Ijaw and Ijo English

Ijaw requires particular care because the term refers to a broad linguistic grouping rather than one uniform phonological system. The Ijo linguistic area includes several varieties, including Kalabari-Ijo and Izon. Harry (2003), for example, provides a phonetic description of Kalabari-Ijo and places it within the East Ijo group. The study also distinguishes East Ijo from other Ijo groups, including Nembe-Akaha, Inland Ijo and Izon.

This diversity has important implications for research on Ijaw English. It is not methodologically appropriate to treat all Ijaw speakers as having one identical L1 phonological system.

The evidence from Izon is especially relevant to prosody. Rolle (2021) provides an extensive analysis of lexical tone in Izon, including data from Gbarain and Kolokuma Izon. The study demonstrates that tone is an important component of the phonological organisation of Izon. Such evidence provides a strong linguistic basis for examining how speakers of Izon may negotiate English stress, rhythm and intonation. It does not, however, establish that Izon English has a particular intonational pattern unless that pattern is demonstrated in empirical studies of Izon English itself.

Ahamefula and Babarinde (2018) provide another useful source by comparing the consonantal phonemes and phonotactics of Igbo and Ijo. Their work shows that Ijo has a phonological structure that differs from Igbo and therefore provides an additional reason for avoiding broad assumptions about southern Nigerian English.

The Ijaw evidence thus supports two important conclusions. First, Ijaw should be included in broader accounts of Nigerian English phonological variation. Second, future research should distinguish among Ijo varieties rather than treating Ijaw as a single linguistic category.

At present, the direct empirical literature on Ijaw English is much smaller than that on Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo English. This is not evidence that Ijaw English lacks distinctive features. It indicates a gap in the research. Detailed acoustic and sociophonetic studies of Izon, Nembe, Kalabari and other Ijo-speaking communities would therefore contribute significantly to the description of Nigerian English.

Ibibio English

Ibibio English provides important evidence from southeastern Nigeria outside the better studied Igbo context.

Essien (2020) examined monophthongisation and vowel lengthening in educated Ibibio English. The study focused on the realisation of English diphthongs and showed that monophthongisation could be accompanied by vowel lengthening, particularly in final open stressed syllables. Acoustic measurements were used alongside perceptual analysis.



This finding is important because it demonstrates that monophthongisation should not be treated as a uniform process across Nigerian English. The phonetic consequences of reducing a diphthong may differ according to the linguistic background of speakers.

Ibibio also has particular importance in research on Nigerian English rhythm. Gut and Milde (2002) compared Nigerian English with West African tone languages including Ibibio and found measurable differences in rhythmic organisation. Their work illustrates the value of examining Nigerian English together with the indigenous languages spoken by its users.

Ibibio English therefore contributes to the broader argument that Nigerian English contains both national tendencies and language-specific patterns. Its vowel and prosodic characteristics should be analysed on their own empirical evidence rather than inferred from Igbo or Yoruba English.

Edo English

Edo English is another important but less extensively studied variety.

Akindele (2021) examined vowel reduction in educated Edo English using 200 Edo-speaking university undergraduates. The study compared the participants' production with a native English baseline and focused on English words containing selected suffixes. The research contributes to the understanding of how vowel reduction operates in an Edo-speaking Nigerian English population.

The significance of Edo English lies partly in its relationship with a tonal indigenous language. As with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Izon, the presence of tone in the first language provides an important background for investigating English prosody. However, tone in Edo should not be assumed to transfer directly into English. The relationship must be established through empirical analysis.

Research on Edo English also shows why the concept of a single Nigerian English accent can be limiting. The phonological behaviour of Edo speakers may overlap with patterns found elsewhere in Nigeria while retaining features associated with their linguistic background.

Consonants

Consonant variation is another major component of Nigerian English phonology. English consonants that are absent or differently distributed in Nigerian languages may be produced through alternative articulations. Dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ have received considerable attention. Comparative research involving Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba speakers has reported substitutions involving these sounds, although the precise pattern may differ between linguistic groups.

Simo Bobda (2007) provides a broader analysis of Nigerian English segmental rules and shows that Nigerian English does not simply reproduce the phonological rules of British English. Some processes are more general, some are restricted, and some are distinctive to Nigerian English.

The voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ is another frequently discussed consonant. Its realisation may vary among Nigerian speakers, including substitution by sounds that are more familiar in their indigenous phonological systems. Again, such variation should not be treated as a uniform rule applying to all Nigerian English speakers.

Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters have often been presented as a major area of difficulty in Nigerian English. Earlier descriptions associated cluster simplification with the syllable structures of indigenous Nigerian languages.

More recent evidence requires a more careful interpretation. Gut (2007) found that first language phonology alone did not adequately explain final consonant cluster production in Nigerian English. More recent research likewise indicates that cluster reduction is generally lower than simple descriptions of Nigerian English would



suggest. Gut's 2026 work on consonant clusters reports low overall reduction, particularly in onset clusters, and finds that stress, consonant position and following phonetic environment are more important explanatory factors than L1 alone.

This development is important because it illustrates a broader methodological principle of Nigerian English research. A recurring pronunciation feature should not automatically be explained through L1 transfer. Linguistic context, speech style, lexical form, stress and phonetic environment may also influence production.

SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES

Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the most discussed suprasegmental features of Nigerian English.

Gut and Milde (2002) used acoustic measures to compare Nigerian English with British English and three West African tone languages, including Ibibio. Their findings showed that Nigerian English has a distinctive rhythmic organisation. Nigerian English occupied an intermediate position rather than fitting neatly into a simple stress-timed versus syllable-timed classification.

One important factor is vowel reduction. British English makes extensive use of reduced vowels in unstressed syllables. Nigerian English frequently preserves fuller vowel qualities. This increases the acoustic prominence of syllables that may be weak in British English and contributes to the distinctive rhythm of Nigerian speech.

Udofot (2022) similarly argues that Nigerian English cannot be adequately classified as purely stress-timed or syllable-timed. The variety contains prominence patterns associated with English but also shows stronger realisation of syllables that would be reduced in some native English varieties.

Stress

Word stress is another area of variation. Nigerian English speakers may differ from British English speakers in the placement of stress in particular lexical items.

Simo Bobda (2010) examined word stress in Nigerian and Cameroonian Englishes and identified systematic constraints that help account for stress placement. This finding is important because it shows that stress variation is not necessarily random.

The literature also suggests that stress varies according to linguistic background and educational experience. Studies of Edo English, for example, have specifically examined how educated Edo speakers handle contrastive word stress. Such work demonstrates the value of studying stress at the level of particular ethnic varieties rather than assuming that one national pattern applies equally to all speakers.

Intonation and Tone

Intonation is closely connected with Nigeria's multilingual environment. Many Nigerian languages use tone as an important lexical or grammatical resource. Nigerian English speakers therefore acquire English in linguistic environments in which pitch already performs functions that differ from those of British English.

Gussenhoven and Udofot (2010) found that Nigerian English listeners were sensitive to pitch patterns on syllables that British English listeners did not necessarily treat as accented. Their findings support the view that Nigerian English has a distinctive organisation of pitch.

The relationship between tone languages and Nigerian English prosody should nevertheless be expressed cautiously. It is reasonable to propose interaction between the prosodic structures of indigenous languages and English. It is not sufficient to conclude that Nigerian English has simply replaced English intonation with the tone system of a speaker's L1.



This issue is particularly important for Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Ibibio and Izon because all have linguistic traditions in which pitch plays an important role, although their tonal systems are not identical. Ijaw research, especially work on Izon, demonstrates that even within the Ijo group, tone requires detailed analysis.

Therefore, research on Ijaw English should not assume that one general Ijaw prosodic system exists.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

First Language Influence

First language influence remains an important factor in Nigerian English pronunciation. When an English sound or syllable structure differs from that of a speaker's first language, the speaker may produce a form that is compatible with the L1 system.

Evidence from Igbo, Ibibio, Edo, Hausa, Yoruba and Ijo provides examples of why L1 phonology must be considered. However, L1 influence should be treated as one explanatory factor rather than a universal explanation.

Jamakovic and Fuchs (2019), for example, found substantial correspondence between the vowel system of their formal Nigerian English participants and Igbo. By contrast, research on consonant clusters has shown that L1 syllable structure does not always predict the actual pattern of cluster reduction.

The evidence therefore supports a multicausal interpretation. L1 background interacts with education, social experience, exposure, speech style and phonological context.

Ethnic and Regional Variation

Ethnic and regional variation is one of the defining characteristics of Nigerian English phonology.

The Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba varieties provide the strongest evidence because they have received extensive research. However, the inclusion of Ibibio, Edo and Ijaw demonstrates that the national picture is broader.

A study involving southeastern Nigerian English, for example, cannot automatically be used to describe Hausa English in northern Nigeria. Similarly, a study of Edo English should not be used as evidence for Yoruba English simply because both varieties occur in southern Nigeria.

The correct analytical approach is therefore to identify both geographical and linguistic variables. Region may correlate with language background, but the two variables are not identical.

Education

Education affects access to different pronunciation models. Educated speakers may have greater exposure to British, American and other international varieties of English through formal instruction, media, professional interaction and travel.

However, education does not necessarily remove local pronunciation patterns. Jamakovic and Fuchs (2019) demonstrate this clearly through their analysis of educated Igbo-speaking Nigerians.

Recent sociophonetic work also shows that educational background interacts with other social variables. Nigerian English should therefore not be divided simply into educated and uneducated speech. Educational experience affects the range of pronunciation models available to speakers, but speakers may select different forms according to context.

Social Identity and Norm Orientation



Pronunciation can carry social meaning. Speakers may use forms associated with local Nigerian English to express familiarity, identity and solidarity. In other settings, they may adopt forms closer to British or American English because those forms are associated with formal education, professional communication or international interaction.

This supports the distinction between endonormative and exonormative orientations. Nigerian English continues to operate within a complex relationship between locally established norms and external English models.

The result is not necessarily a simple movement from Nigerian English towards British English. Speakers may command several pronunciation patterns and adjust their speech according to audience and communicative purpose.

RECENT ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AND NIGERIAN ENGLISH

One of the most important developments in Nigerian English phonology is the increased use of acoustic methods.

Earlier research often relied heavily on auditory description or measurements taken at one point in a vowel. Such methods remain useful, but they may fail to capture the temporal development of vowel quality.

Amoniyani and Melefa (2026) provide an important example. Their study of southeastern Nigerian English examined F1 and F2 at several normalised time points and used generalised additive mixed models to analyse vowel trajectories. They found significant variation across lexical sets and showed that even vowels traditionally treated as monophthongised could display spectral movement.

This finding has two implications. First, phonological categories should not be confused with phonetic realisations. A vowel may belong to a monophthongal category while displaying measurable internal movement. Second, static measurements may hide important differences among speakers and varieties.

Future Nigerian English research should therefore combine traditional phonological analysis with dynamic acoustic methods. Such work should examine:

1. F1 and F2 trajectories.
2. Vowel duration.
3. Consonant transitions.
4. Voice quality.
5. Spectral change.
6. Connected speech.
7. Prosodic variation.
8. Gender and age.
9. Region and first language.
10. Speech style and communicative setting.

Dynamic acoustic research should also be extended beyond southeastern Nigeria. Comparable studies involving Hausa, Yoruba, Ijaw, Ibibio and Edo English would make it possible to determine which patterns are broadly Nigerian and which are associated with particular linguistic backgrounds.



COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ACROSS HAUSA, YORUBA, IGBO, IJAW, IBIBIO AND EDO

The literature reviewed suggests that Nigerian English phonology can be understood at three related levels.

Shared Nigerian English Features

Some features occur across several Nigerian English varieties. These include:

- reduced vowel contrasts in comparison with some British English models;
- monophthongisation of some diphthongs;
- reduced vowel weakening in unstressed syllables;
- consonant modification;
- variable consonant cluster reduction;
- distinctive rhythm;
- distinctive pitch and intonation patterns.

These features support the description of Nigerian English as a recognisable variety.

Ethnic and Regional Features

Other features are more strongly associated with particular linguistic populations.

Hausa English reflects the phonological background of Hausa-speaking communities. Yoruba English contains patterns associated with Yoruba phonology. Igbo English has received particularly strong acoustic support for vowel restructuring. Ibibio English provides evidence of specific monophthongisation and vowel-lengthening patterns. Edo English provides evidence concerning vowel reduction and word stress. Ijaw English remains less extensively documented, but the phonological diversity of Ijo languages and the tonal structure of Izon provide important grounds for further investigation.

Individual and Social Variation

The third level is individual and social variation. Speakers with the same L1 may not pronounce English in exactly the same way. Differences may arise from education, age, gender, occupation, urbanisation, exposure to international varieties, communicative setting and personal orientation towards pronunciation norms.

This three-level model is preferable to a simple opposition between Nigerian English and British English. It recognises a national variety while also recognising internal diversity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRONUNCIATION TEACHING

The literature has important implications for English language teaching in Nigeria.

First, pronunciation teaching should recognise that Nigerian English is systematic. Teachers should not automatically treat every difference from British English as an error.

Second, teachers should understand the diversity of Nigerian English. A pronunciation feature associated with Hausa speakers should not automatically be presented as a feature of Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio or Edo English.



Third, pronunciation teaching should distinguish between a systematic Nigerian English feature and a pronunciation feature that may interfere with intelligibility in a particular communicative setting.

An intelligibility-oriented approach is therefore useful. Learners should be taught the pronunciation patterns common in Nigerian English while also being introduced to alternative forms that may facilitate communication with speakers from other English-speaking communities.

For example, students can be taught to recognise differences in vowel quality, dental fricatives, consonant clusters, stress placement and intonation. The objective should not be to eliminate Nigerian identity from English pronunciation. Rather, learners should develop sufficient phonological awareness to understand variation and modify their speech when communication requires it.

Teacher education is equally important. Teachers need knowledge of Nigerian English varieties so that pronunciation instruction is based on linguistic evidence rather than on the assumption that British English is the only legitimate pronunciation model.

Technology can support this approach through speech recording, acoustic analysis, listening activities and computer-assisted pronunciation practice. Acoustic tools are particularly useful because learners can observe vowel movement, duration and pitch rather than relying exclusively on auditory judgement.

RESEARCH GAPS

The review reveals several important gaps.

First, Nigerian English research remains unevenly distributed across linguistic groups. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo English have received considerable attention, while Ijaw, Edo, Ibibio and other varieties require further systematic investigation.

Second, many studies involve relatively small samples. Such studies can provide valuable detailed evidence, but their findings should not be generalised beyond the populations examined.

Third, more comparative research is needed. Studies should compare Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio and Edo English using similar research instruments and acoustic methods.

Fourth, Ijaw English requires particular attention. Research should distinguish among Izon, Nembe, Kalabari and other Ijo varieties. The term Ijaw should not be used as if it referred to a single phonological system.

Fifth, there is a need for more dynamic acoustic research. Formant trajectories should be examined across different Nigerian English populations rather than concentrating mainly on one regional group.

Sixth, prosody requires further attention. Comparative studies of stress, rhythm and intonation among Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio and Edo speakers could clarify the relationship between Nigerian English and indigenous tonal systems.

Seventh, more research should examine connected speech. Much existing work relies on word lists, reading passages or controlled speech. Natural conversation may reveal patterns that are not visible in formal elicitation.

Finally, intelligibility research remains necessary. It is not enough to identify differences from British English. Researchers should determine which Nigerian English features actually affect understanding among Nigerian and international listeners.

CONCLUSION



Nigerian English phonology is a complex system shaped by linguistic contact, regional diversity, ethnic affiliation, education, social experience and communicative context. The evidence does not support a description of Nigerian English pronunciation as a collection of random deviations from British English. At the same time, Nigerian English should not be treated as a completely uniform national accent.

The strongest evidence for internal diversity comes from research on Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo English, which has provided much of the foundation for the study of Nigerian English phonology. Research on Ibibio and Edo English has expanded this evidence by demonstrating that smaller linguistic communities may display distinctive vowel, stress and prosodic patterns. Ijaw presents an important further area of investigation. Research on Kalabari-Ijo and Izon demonstrates substantial phonological diversity within the Ijo group itself. The implication is that future research should not treat Ijaw as one homogeneous linguistic category.

The evidence also shows that first language influence is important but insufficient as a complete explanation of Nigerian English pronunciation. Some patterns are associated with particular linguistic backgrounds, while others occur across several groups. Social factors, speech style, education, lexical frequency and phonological environment may also influence pronunciation.

Recent acoustic research has added an important methodological dimension. The study of formant trajectories shows that vowels traditionally classified as monophthongs may contain substantial internal movement. This finding supports a more dynamic approach to Nigerian English phonology and cautions against conclusions based solely on static measurements.

A fuller description of Nigerian English therefore requires comparative research across Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Edo and other Nigerian linguistic groups. Such research should combine acoustic phonetics, phonological analysis and sociolinguistic methods. It should also pay greater attention to connected speech, prosody and intelligibility.

For pronunciation teaching, the evidence supports an intelligibility-oriented approach. Nigerian English should be recognised as a systematic variety, while learners should also be equipped with the knowledge and flexibility required for communication across different English-speaking environments. Such an approach can maintain the legitimacy of Nigerian English while ensuring that pronunciation instruction remains practical, evidence-based and responsive to the multilingual character of Nigeria.

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