

Emerging Patterns of Stress in Zambian English: Deviation or Nationalisation? An Exploratory Study

by

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The pronunciation of English in Africa is of particular importance because (non-standard) pronunciation features seem to be most persistent in African varieties, i.e., they are retained even in the speech of the most educated speakers. *English in Africa*, Josef Schmied, 1991: 57.

Introductory Caveats

Attempts at defining 'Zambian English' have been made in the past but so far without apparent conclusive success (confer e.g., Africa, 1983; Banda, 1999). Consequently, in the context of the present exploratory study, the term 'Zambian English' will be used in the same sense as that in which it is used ordinarily in everyday speech in Zambia.

A careful examination of previous writings on 'Zambian English' reveals that there has never been any treatment of the phonology of this regional variety of English. Both Felix Banda and Hugh Africa who can be credited with having made a gallant effort at giving 'Zambian English' some definite sociolinguistic identity were preoccupied almost exclusively with matters of definition. Consequently, the present exploratory study has little or nothing to build on by way of a helpful foundation.

As a third caveat, it needs to be stressed throughout the present presentation that the data to be offered are not derived from any scientifically rigorous inquiry. Rather, they are merely the outcome of several decades of sustained personal observations of the Zambian sociolinguistic scene. Research consisted for the most part in keeping a keen ear to the manner Zambians pronounced English words in their everyday life with particular reference to stress. What was heard was then noted down. To map out as comprehensively as possible the emerging patterns of stress in 'Zambian English', all social situations, both formal and informal, came under observation. In this way, the occurrence of stress in 'Zambian English' was recorded in a varied array of social settings: academic addresses, seminars/conferences/workshops, speeches, political rallies, radio and television broadcasts, everyday social interaction, etc.

This approach had the advantage of enabling the researcher to capture samples of occurrences of stress in 'Zambian English' from actual everyday speech. It had also the advantage of not limiting observation to pre-selected arenas of human communicative interaction, which would have been the case had a more formal scientific approach been adopted.

Another important point to make at this introductory stage is that concerning the use of technical language. Because of the nature of the presentation in its present form, it has not been considered necessary to adopt a highly technical descriptive style. Thus, for instance, the use of phonetic and phonemic notation has deliberately been avoided.

A Note on Stress

In his *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages*, David Crystal defines linguistic stress as 'the relative perceived prominence of a unit of spoken language' (Crystal, 1992: 369). In contrast to the Bantu languages of Zambia, where it is hardly to be found, stress has a very high functional load in English.

There are three levels of stress in Standard English: primary, secondary and weak. In addition, two types of stress may be identified: lexical and syntactical. Lexical stress is exemplified by **green** house versus green**house** (where green and house in bold represent primary stress). A similar example is the distinction between boy **friend** and boy**friend**. Syntactical (or sentence) stress is exemplified by 'the person you want is **NOT** here' (where stress is put on 'not' here).

For the present purposes, the (functional) significance of stress in Standard English is illustrated by the observations Kashoki and Michael Mann (1978: 70) make in Chapter two, 'A General Sketch of the Bantu Languages of Zambia' of *Language in Zambia*, thus:

In contrast to Zambian languages, English uses stress (the relative amount of prominence with which a syllable is pronounced) to distinguish one word or phrase from another in meaning. For example, it is possible, using stress, to change a verb into a noun or a noun into a verb in English. Some notable examples are *convert*, *insult* and *progress*, which can either be a noun or a verb depending on the stress with which they are said. Similarly, stress in English helps to distinguish between a *black bird* (i.e., any bird that is black in colour) and a *blackbird* (a specific type of bird).

Presentation of Data

In order to show instances where stress occurring in 'Zambian English' is markedly different from that normally associated with Standard English, the available data will be presented in two columns, thus:

Zambian English

Standard English

For each item cited, the syllable bearing the stress in question will appear in bold. It is hoped that this will enable readers to see at a glance where Zambian English stress is at variance with Standard English stress.

Stress Pattern 1

Typically falling under this category are words ending in **-ism** where 'Zambian English' stress tends to be placed on the final syllable, e.g.

Zambian English

capita-**lism**

huma-**nism**

triba-**lism**

journa-**lism**

racia-**lism**

tou-**rism**

professiona-**lism**

Standard English

ca-**pitalism**

hu-**manism**

tri-**balism**

jour-**nalism**

ra-**cialism**

tou-**rism**

pro-**fessionalism**

Stress Pattern 2

Falling under this category are words ending in **-ise** where, as in the preceding case, there is a tendency for 'Zambian English' stress to be placed on the final syllables, thus:

Zambian English

apolo-**gise**

recog-**nise**

rea-**lise**

exer-**cise**

catego-**rise**

summa-**rise**

Standard English

a-**po-logise**

re-**cognise**

re-**alise**

exer-**cise**

ca-**tegorise** or

ca-**te-gorise**

sum-**marise**

Stress Pattern 3

This stress pattern is similar to the preceding one except that it normally contains verbs ending in **-ate** as the following examples seek to illustrate.

Zambian English

discrimi-**nate**investi-**gate**intimi-**date**evalu-**ate**navi-**gate**

Standard English

dis-crimi-**nate**in-vesti-**gate**in-timi-**date**e-va-lu-**ate**na-vi-**gate**

What is evident from these examples is that there is a tendency in this stress pattern, as in Stress Pattern 2, to place stress on the last syllable of a word.

Stress Pattern 4

This pattern differs from those so far described in one very significant respect. Stress in this case, instead of being placed on the final syllable, tends to occur on the first syllable of a word, thus:

Zambian English

e-**ffect**res-**ponse**res-**pect**ex-**change** (noun)ex-**tent**com-**plaint**con-**sent** (noun)con-**straint**ad-**vice**ad-**vance** (noun)com-**ponent**op-**ponent**sur-**prise** (noun)

Standard English

e-**ffect**res-**ponse**res-**pect**ex-**change**ex-**tent**com-**plaint**con-**sent**con-**strai-nt**ad-**vice**ad-**vance**com-**ponent**op-**ponent**sur-**prise**

Stress Pattern 5

This stress pattern is notable for two things: (a) it contains only a few words and (b) stress in 'Zambian English' tends to occur on the second (or middle) of a three-syllable word, as in the following examples:

Zambian English

e-**li**-gible
 ca-**te**-gory
 ma-**na**-gement
 sig-**na**-ture
 man-**che**-ster
 pub-**li**-sh
 re-**gi**-ster (verb)
 cha-**lle**-nge

Standard English

e-ligible
 ca-tegory
 ma-nagement
 sig-nature
 ma-nchester
 pu-blish
 re-gister
 cha-llenge

Stress Pattern 6

Stress Pattern 6 concerns the occurrence of stress in Zambian English with regard to compound words. Here, for purposes of illustration, four examples will suffice:

Zambian English

bene-**fit**
 photo-**copy**
 fund-**raise**
 safe-**guard**

Standard English

be-**nefit**
 pho-**to**copy
 fund-**raise**
 safe-**guard**

Here, whereas primary stress in compound words in Zambian English tends, typically to occur on the final syllable(s), e.g., bene-**fit**, fund-**raise**, in Standard English in contrast, primary stress falls on the first syllable of a compound word.

Stress Pattern 7

Typically, this stress pattern contains verbs that characteristically end in **-fy**, as in 'qualify', 'quantify', 'satisfy', 'ratify', etc. In 'Zambian English' what is readily observable is that primary stress in these kinds of verb is predictably placed on the last syllable (which of course happens to be **-fy**) compared to Standard English. We thus end up with the following stress pattern.

Zambian English

quali-**fy**
 quanti-**fy**
 satis-**fy**
 rati-**fy**

Standard English

qua-lify
 qua-ntify
 sa-tisfy
 ra-tify

clari-**fy**
magni-**fy**

cla-r**ify**
mag-n**ify**

The pronunciation picture that is revealed by the above is that, in 'Zambian English,' primary stress in verbs ending in **-fy** will predictably be expected to occur on the last syllable irrespective of the number of syllables constituting the verb stem. This is in sharp contrast to Standard English where primary stress typically occurs on the first or initial syllable of such verb stems.

Miscellaneous Category

Under this category, one could attempt to account for those English words (or lexical items) that are not easily amenable to categorisation in 'Zambian English' with respect to stress. Such words include **circumstances**, **sovereignty**, **crocodile** and **customer**.

These words assume varied stress patterns. For instance, whereas primary stress occurs on the initial syllable (i.e. on **cir-**) in Standard English in the word **circumstances**, in 'Zambian English' primary stress tends to be placed on the second syllable, viz, **-cum-** with the result that we end up with the following stress pattern:

Zambian English
cir-**cum**-stances

Standard English
cir-cumstances

The lexical item **sovereignty** is even more unusual from the point of view of stress in 'Zambian English'. It is unusual in the sense that, at least in the speech of some speakers of 'Zambian English', the word is first adapted to Bantu (language) phonology with respect to syllable structure before being assigned a stress. The resultant final product becomes:

Zambian English
sove-**re**-nity

Standard English
so-vereignty

A similar phonological process seems to take place with regard to the word **technical** in the speech of some speakers of Zambian English. First, the word is 'Bantu-ised' phonologically as **te-ke-nical** and, thereafter, a stress pattern is assigned so that in the end we get:

Zambian English
te-**ke**-nical

Standard English
tech-nical

Regarding two other English words, primary stress in the speech of a fairly good number of speakers of 'Zambian English' tends to occur on the second (or middle) syllable or the final syllable respectively in the words **customer** and **crocodile** with the result that we end up with:

Zambian English
cus-**to**-mer
croco-**dile**

Standard English
cus-tomer
cro-codile

Conclusion

In bringing this presentation to a close, a few concluding points deserve mention. First of all, from all available evidence, the seven stress patterns identified and described in this preliminary exploratory study would seem to be the predominant ones. In this regard, stress patterns 1, 2 and 3 are worthy of special note, particularly from the perspective of their potential to absorb new members. More plainly, this is to say that any new noun ending in **-ism**, for example, will most probably be accommodated in this stress pattern. Similarly, new verbs ending in **-ise** or **-ate** are certain to be accommodated in stress patterns 2 and 3 respectively.

The second point to be made here concerns the shortcomings of the investigation. As was observed in the introductory section, the investigation was conducted without the benefit of a theoretical framework. Because of this, the necessary attention was not paid to such critical issues as the aims of the study, the scientific line of inquiry to be adopted and the validation of the findings. In this latter regard, such crucial factors as level of formal education attained, degree of familiarity with Standard English, the extent to which 'Zambian English' stress is widespread in the country, permanence or otherwise of 'Zambian English' stress, etc., have remained unconsidered.

As a final point, because of the largely informal character of the study, it is difficult to say at this stage whether the stress patterns that have been identified in 'Zambian English' represent deviation from Standard English or a form of nationalisation of the English language in Zambia. All that can be said at the moment is that, in any case, it all depends on one's perspective. One perspective is that which accepts and tolerates the existence of an increasing array of varieties of English throughout the world, the fact of what is now being referred to in the sociolinguistic literature as world *Englishes*. The opposite perspective is that which does not accept or is intolerant of any deviation from what is perceived to be the standard norm. In the case of the point in question, the emergence of the identified patterns

of stress in 'Zambian English' represents deviation or nationalisation depending on one's point of view.

It is hoped that all these shortcomings will be rectified by a more scientifically rigorous investigation.

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