

Journal of HUMANITIES

VOLUME 4 JANUARY, 1996

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Journal of Humanities, Vol. 4, January, 1996

PAUSING IN SPOKEN NIGERIAN ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of pausing in Spoken Nigerian English. Both relevant pauses and the class of irrelevant pauses referred to as hesitation phenomena are investigated using the spoken prose and spontaneous productions of sixty Nigerians of varied educational backgrounds selected by a stratified random sampling technique from twenty ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria and that of a native (British) speaker who serves as the control. The productions of the sixty informants and the control's are perceptually and acoustically analysed. It is shown that Spoken Nigerian English exhibits a high incidence of irrelevant pausing which affects fluency resulting in a jerky rhythm in the Nonstandard Variety but that the incidence of irrelevant pausing decreases with a consequent improvement in fluency as one ascends the ladder of quality from Nonstandard to Standard to Sophisticated Varieties. Relevant pausing is also shown to alter the overall tempo of Spoken Nigerian English.

1. Introduction

Pauses are an important aspect of the total communicative process. Pausing at grammatical points in an utterance enhances the fluency of the utterance as well as its intelligibility. Ungrammatical or irrelevant pausing on the other hand results in a distorted rhythm which in turn affects intelligibility. Eka (1993:1 - 11) has identified irrelevant pausing as a performance feature of Educated Spoken Nigerian English and notes that extensive pausing seriously disturbs both meaning and the continuity of an utterance resulting in a jerky rhythm.

Crystal (1969:166-172) examines the role of pauses noting how they function in English and sees them as an essential 'ingredient' in communication since they affect the fluency as well as the meaning of utterances. Cruttenden (1986:36) also gives a useful discussion on the role of pauses in communication in English. It classifies pauses into two categories: the unfilled pause (silence) and the filled pause, the latter involving in many dialects of English the use of the central vowel /ə/ and the bilabial nasal [m] singly or in combination¹.

According to Cruttenden (1986:37) pauses occur typically:

- (i) at intonation group boundaries, that is at major constituent boundaries mainly between clauses and between subject and predicate;
- (ii) before words of high lexical contents (mainly within a noun phrase, adverbial phrase or verb phrase) for instance between a determiner and a noun head;
- (iii) after the first word in an intonation group.

Pause type (i) is generally unfilled and mandatory while types (ii) and (iii) are examples of hesitation phenomena (irrelevant pauses and softeners) which indicate hesitation

for the purpose of finding of a proper word or to correct a false start or repetition. These types may be filled or unfilled. While the relevant pauses are often signalled by the presence of punctuation marks the occurrence of irrelevant pauses are largely idiosyncratic.

This paper is concerned with pausing and its effect on the fluency and therefore the rhythm of Spoken Nigerian English. Since irrelevant pausing has been identified as a performance feature of Educated Spoken Nigerian English (cf Eka 1993), the incidence of irrelevant pausing and softeners (hesitation phenomena) is investigated in the whole continuum - Nigerian English. The paper goes on to examine the extent to which mandatory pauses occur in the Spoken English of Nigerians and brings out the effect of failure to observe mandatory pauses on the overall tempo of Spoken Nigerian English.

2. Methodology:

The informants for this study were sixty Nigerians selected by a stratified random sampling technique from twenty linguistic groups in Nigeria and a native (British) English speaker. The experimental group was selected using *education in English* as the main yardstick of stratification. They were then divided into three groups. Group one consisted of those who have been exposed to formal English learning for a period of nine to twelve years covering primary and post primary education or training. Group Two was made up of those who have had or were in the process of having tertiary education and have been exposed to English learning and use for twelve to fifteen years. Group Three was made up of those who have been exposed to English Language learning and use for at least fifteen years and in addition to having had tertiary education have had some specialised training in the pronunciation of English and also use English for their daily official purposes.

The brand of Spoken English produced by the experimental group was classified into: Variety I or Nonstandard corresponding to the performance of Group One; Variety II or Standard associated with Group Two and Variety III or Sophisticated corresponding to the performance of Group Three members. We argue here that proficiency in the use of a second language increases with length of exposure to the language (cf Bansal 1990:218).

The informants were each required to read the following passage adapted from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

He stretched himself and scratched his thigh where a mosquito had bitten him while he slept. Another one was wailing near his ear. He slapped the ear and hoped he had killed it. Why do they always go for one's ear? When he was a child, his mother had told him a story about it. Mosquito, she had said, had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. 'How much longer do you think you will live', she asked. 'You are already a skeleton'. Mosquito went away humiliated; and anytime he passed her way, he told Ear that he was still alive. (p.53).

They were also to speak freely on the topic, 'The High Cost of Living in Nigeria' for three minutes using the headings and the pictures in a cartoon from Vanguard Newspaper of November 4th, 1994 which reflects the high cost of living in Nigeria for guidance. Each participant had five minutes to organise himself and get used to the passage before taking a turn. The performance of each informant was tape-recorded. The native British English Speaker who served as the control was also required to speak for three minutes on the same

topic and read the same passage given to the members of the experimental group.

The tape-recorded productions were played back. Instances of hesitation phenomena were indicated both in the spoken prose (the reading passage) and the spontaneous productions of the experimental group and the control. To observe the effect of relevant pausing on the overall tempo, a compound complex sentence from the passage: 'Mosquito went away humiliated; and anytime he passed her way, he told Ear that he was still alive' as produced by six members of the experimental group (two from each variety) was fed into a Macintosh (Performa 450) computer. The control's production of the sentence was also fed into the computer. For convenience, the sentence was labelled UTT4. (The wave forms of the whole utterance (UTT4) in the Min max plot format for two of the informants and the control are shown in Appendix 1). The overall durations (tempo) of the utterance as produced by the six Nigerians as well as the overall tempo of UTT 1, 2 and 3 in respect of three members of the experimental group each representing a variety were obtained and compared to the Control's Performance. A summary of the results obtained are shown in Tables 1-3 below:

3. Presentation and Analysis of Data

We observed that of the two sets of pausing the one that affects and tends to characterise Spoken Nigerian English more is the set called irrelevant pauses (hesitation phenomena). Details regarding the incidence of hesitation phenomena in respect of the Spoken Prose and spontaneous speech are shown in Tables 1 & 2.

Table I: Hesitation Phenomena - Spoken Prose

Variety III		Variety II		Variety I	
Informants	Irr. Pauses	Informants	Irr. Pauses	Informants	Irr. Pauses
MS62	0	MS62	0	MS62	0
MS1	3	MS9	0	MS5	0
MS3	2	MS17	1	MS7	0
MS4	0	MS18	0	MS8	0
MS16	2	MS19	1	MS11	0
MS20	0	MS24	0	MS12	0
MS21	0	MS26	0	MS13	2
MS22	0	MS28	0	MS14	5
MS23	0	MS29	0	MS15	6
MS35	0	MS30	0	MS25	5
MS38	0	MS34	0	MS27	3
MS39	0	MS37	5	MS31	4
MS43	0	MS41	0	MS32	2
MS45	0	MS42	0	MS33	0
MS49	0	MS46	1	MS36	2
MS50	0	MS47	0	MS48	4
MS54	3	MS51	0	MS53	5
MS60	0	MS52	0	MS57	1
MS61	0	MS55	0	MS58	0
MS65	2	MS59	0	MS68	7
MS67	0	MS66	5	MS70	7
	12		13		53

Table 2: Hesitation Phenomena: Spontaneous Productions

Variety III				Variety II				Variety I			
Informants	Irr.P	SFN	Total	Informants	IR.P	SFN	Total	Informants	IR.P	SFN	Total
*MS62	13	6	19	MS62	13	16	19	MS62	13	16	19
MS1	17	1	18	MS9	4	0	4	MS5	15	12	17
MS3	0	0	0	MS17	2	1	3	MS7	5	6	11
MS4	19	1	20	MS18	15	4	19	MS8	7	0	7
MS16	6	0	6	MS19	3	0	3	MS11	14	2	17
MS20	3	1	4	MS24	5	2	7	MS12	4	1	5
MS21	3	3	6	MS26	4	1	5	MS13	10	0	10
MS22	10	3	13	MS28	10	0	10	MS14	3	0	3
MS23	5	2	7	MS29	1	0	1	MS15	10	1	11
MS35	1	15	16	MS30	5	0	5	MS25	10	4	14
MS38	1	0	1	MS34	2	0	2	MS27	4	0	4
MS39	3	2	5	MS37	2	0	2	MS31	8	1	9
MS43	4	5	19	MS41	4	0	4	MS32	7	2	9
MS45	4	3	7	MS42	4	3	7	MS33	4	1	5
MS49	3	2	5	MS46	3	2	5	MS36	2	2	4
MS50	1	3	4	MS47	5	0	6	MS48	7	3	10
MS54	11	10	21	MS51	1	2	3	MS53	6	0	6
MS60	6	2	8	MS52	5	1	6	MS57	10	0	10
MS61	2	0	2	MS55	6	6	12	MS58	22	0	22
MS65	6	4	10	MS59	9	0	9	MS68	9	0	9
MS67	7	3	10	MS66	3	3	6	MS70	13	0	13
	112	60	172		94	25	119		160	35	195

Key Irr. P. = Irrelevant Pauses * = Control
 SFN = Softeners MS = Main study Informant

Of the relevant pauses, we observed that while the control observed all mandatory pauses (as shown for instance by the punctuation of the spoken prose passage) some members of the experimental group did not observe such mandatory pauses. Details regarding the effect of relevant pauses are shown in Tables 3a & b.

Table 3a: Overall Tempo of Spoken Nigerian English

Informants	UTT1	UTT2	UTT3	UTT4
MS62 (Control)	1558.23ms	2288.91ms	1946.62ms	7720.61ms
MS61	2034.59ms	1934.74ms	1816.58ms	6231.03ms
MS52	2652.22ms	2525.07ms	2670.38ms	8047.53ms
MS53	2325.31ms	2125.44ms	2634.07ms	7157.53ms
Mean	2337.37ms	2195.08ms	2373.67ms	7145.36ms
Duration of Exp. Group				

Table 3b: Effect of Pausing on Overall Tempo of Spoken Nigerian English

Informants	Duration of Pause B/W UTT 1 & 2	Duration of UTT4
MS62 (Control)	1143ms	7720.61ms
MS61	329.01ms	6231.03ms
MS52	744.79ms	8047.53ms
MS53	145.01ms	7157.53ms
MS60	544.94ms	7375.44ms
MS21	363.32ms	6794.12ms
MS33	108.75ms	5885.87ms
Mean duration of Exp. Group	372.35ms	6915.25ms

4. Discussion

4.1 Hesitation Phenomena

4.1.1 Spoken Prose

As can be seen from Table 1 the incidence of irrelevant pauses was negligible in the spoken prose. Many of our informants in Varieties III and II had no incidence of irrelevant pauses. The same was true of a few informants in Variety I. Altogether, there was no significant difference between the performance of Varieties III and II but Variety I recorded four times the number of irrelevant pauses than Variety III. Irrelevant pauses disturb the continuity of an utterance resulting in a jerky rhythm (cf Eka 1993:8). This means that the bulk of the informants (13 out of 20) in Variety I could not read with a fluent rhythm whereas the majority of informants in Varieties II and III read fluently.

4.1.2 Spontaneous Productions

As regards the spontaneous productions, we observed a high incidence of hesitation phenomena even in the production of the control. From Table 2, we noted that the highest incidence occurred in Variety I (195) followed by Variety III (172) while Variety II reorded the least number (119). Of the 172 instances of hesitation phenomena in Variety III, 112 were instances of irrelevant pauses and 60 were softeners with MS 35 recording the highest number of softeners (15) followed by MS54 who had 10 and the control who had 6. The incidence of softeners therefore decreased from Variety III to Variety I with Variety III having 60 instances and Variety II having 25 instances while Variety I had 35. The use of hesitation phenomena was therefore largely idiosyncratic. This finding is corroborated by Cruttenden (1986:37) which says:

... the use of pause in general and the relationship between filled and unfilled pauses in particular is subject to a large amount of idiosyncratic variation.

We also noted a tendency for Standard Nigerian English to be more fluent than Sophisticated Nigerian English. This is quite interesting for even the native (British) Speaker, our control, had one of the highest incidence of hesitation phenomena (19) in the three groups with only two informants in Variety III and one in Variety I recording higher numbers while one informant in Variety II had an equal number. The use of softeners therefore appears to be a feature of the Sophisticated Variety of Spoken Nigerian English which had the closest

performance to **that of the control**. As can be seen from the examples from the Spontaneous productions of **some informants** of the Sophisticated variety shown below; softeners do not appear to **adversely affect the continuity** in a majority of cases except that in **some cases**, they occur **within information points**.

MS21

1. The landlords, because of high cost of em building materials charge exorbitant rents.
2. Transportation too is em very troublesome.

MS35

1. It is not very easy for somebody to transport goods from one point to the other without you know paying heavily for it in terms of em the cost of transportation.
2. It also affects education, em people are no longer able to em train their children.

MS45

1. ... Take the University for example, the em ordinary lecturer now cannot live on his salary.
2. He has to cut down on em what to eat, em the money he can give to his children and in the end barely manages to exist.

MS54

1. Em in the past decade or so em the situation in this country has been very unfortunate.
2. Em a drop within the metropolis here in Uyo, for instance, attracts about em five naira and ten naira..

MS60

1. Em the other day, my landlord increased the rent to eighteen thousand naira a year.
2. It is amazing em the way prices of things have gone up in Nigeria.

The softeners in the above speeches notwithstanding, the speeches are reasonably fluent and show no incidence of irrelevant pausing. The silence fillers (softeners) in the utterances of MS21 serve the purpose of allowing the speaker time to think of the right word or expression to use. MS35 uses softeners as an idiosyncrasy besides allowing himself time to think. He uses the highest number of softeners (16) of the sixty informants studied. The incidence of irrelevant pauses in his production was however negligible. MS45 like MS21 uses softeners largely to allow himself time to think while MS54 like MS35 exhibits an idiosyncratic preference for silence-fillers. He uses the next highest number of softeners in his spontaneous production. We had earlier observed that the control's spontaneous speech featured six softeners but was quite fluent. Also, although three of the informants in Variety III used no softeners at all, and only a negligible number used unfilled pauses which we have identified as irrelevant, the tendency to use softeners can be said to characterise the rhythm of Sophisticated Spoken Nigerian English. This tendency (as we have observed) tends to enhance continuity rather than disrupt it since unlike unfilled pauses, they make for reasonably fluent speech.

The Nonstandard Variety, on the other hand, which had the highest number of irrelevant pauses in the Spoken Prose had prolonged periods of unfilled silence and very frequent irrelevant pauses in the spontaneous productions as the following examples from the

productions of some informants in variety I show:

MS5

1. He slapped/the ear/and hoped/he had/killed it.
2. He has not been able to meet up with/the/payment of the/house rent....

MS53

1. How much/longer do you think/you will live?
2. ...the poor man cannot send his child/to the school because of high/school fees now.

MS58

1. In those days a poor man/can send/his child/to school/but nowadays/he cannot/send his child/to school/because of/the high cost of living in Nigeria.
2. In terms of feeding, a common man cannot/feed himself/again/three times a day/because of/the high cost of living in Nigeria

MS70

1. How much longer do/you think/you will live?
2. ... a common man/who cannot/work/very hard to get money cannot pay a house rent.

As can be seen from the above examples, the incidence of irrelevant pauses in the above utterances occur mostly at points other than intonation phrase boundaries.

The performance of MS5 and MS58 are typical examples in this regard. The result is that the speeches of the informants shown above which are typical representative performances of the Nonstandard Variety result in a kind of halting and jerky rhythm². The lack of fluency resulting from the very high incidence of irrelevant pauses in the outputs of informants of Variety I appears to be owing to insufficient mastery of the language and consequent inability to break up the utterances into normal intonation (information) phrases.

4.2 Relevant Pausing:

As shown in Table 3 a, the three members of the experimental group took longer to produce the utterance (UTT.1) than the control. Whereas the control took 1558.23 milliseconds (approximately 1.6 seconds), the experimental group used a mean duration of 2337.37 (2.3 seconds) to produce the same utterance. The overall tempo of the control in UTT.1 was therefore faster than that of the experimental group. We also noted that UTT.1 is a stretch of utterance which can be said with one breath by a normal speaker whereas UTT 2, and UTT 3 allow room for relevant pauses (optional and mandatory) as for example between 'and' and 'anytime' in UTT 2 and between 'that' and 'he' in UTT 3. Thus, the overall duration of the control's performance in UTT 2, 3 and the whole compound complex sentence - UTT 4 are not shorter than those of the members of the experimental group. On the other hand, the overall tempo of the control was faster than the mean tempo of the experimental group in UTT 3. It can be argued that the experimental group did not observe the optional pauses in UTT 2 and UTT 4 but the control did.

With regard to UTT 4, Table 3b shows that the control observed a longer pause between UTT.1 and UTT 2 than all the six members of the experimental group with the result that the overall speed of the utterance is slowed down. The control used a longer time than the average time used by the experimental group. As can also be seen from the visual display

of the waveforms of UTT 4 (See appendix 1) the control not only observed a longer pause (represented in the figure by a straight line)³ between UTT 1 and UTT 2 but also shorter pauses between UTT 2 and UTT 3 than all the members of the experimental group. The experimental group on the other hand observed on the average, shorter pauses between UTT 1 and UTT 2 and slightly longer pauses between UTT 2 and UTT 3 which added together still failed to equal the total length of pause in the control's output. This implies that the experimental group failed to observe the required pauses between intonation boundaries and the optional pauses within the utterances as the control did.

5. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has investigated the phenomenon of pausing in Spoken Nigerian English. It has been shown that both relevant and irrelevant pauses as well as the filled pauses (softeners) occur in Spoken Nigerian English and that whereas the occurrence of irrelevant and relevant pauses disturb the fluency of Spoken Nigerian English, they do not significantly slow down its overall tempo. The result is that the melody of Spoken Nigerian English lacks the ebb and flow that characterises the Spoken English of the native (British) speaker here represented by the control. The incidence of pauses, it has been observed, differs from one variety to the other and the fluency improves as one ascends the ladder of quality from Nonstandard to the Sophisticated.

END NOTES

1. In our study, the type of softeners mostly observed among our informants involved the use of the front vowel [e] and the bilabial nasal [m] singly and in combination as well as the phrase 'you know'.
2. (cf Bansal 1990:227) on the rhythm of Indian English which is said to show some of these tendencies.
3. The intervals of silence between the utterances in the waveform of the control's output are not straight lines because of the atmospheric and other vibrations which intrude into recording since she did not speak directly into the computer. What is shown there is a typical noise wavelshape. (See Clark and Yallop 1990:194) Fig. 7, 4, 3.

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Appendix 1

