SOME UNIQUE PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF SPOKEN URHOBO ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Researchers of Nigerian English (NE) phonology have claimed that NE segmental features are widespread and occur according to largely predictable patterns. However, existing data in Urhobo English (UE) show that such claim of definability of NE as a system at the segmental level is overgeneralisation, given some attested unique phonological features of UE such as: (1) [ʒ]-pronunciation (2) type-[o] /l/-vocalisation. (3) NC-cluster simplification. (4) [ɛ]-/pronunciation in *nurse* vowel suggested by <er>/<ear> spelling, (5) Word final [ɛ:]-pronunciation of *square* vowel suggested by <are>/<air> spelling, and (6) [iɛ]-pronunciation of *near* vowel. A descriptive analysis of the attested unique patterns shows that the above-mentioned features are properties of UE accent lacking in NE accent which is an amalgam of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba English accents. In view of these existing prominent, peculiar regional/ethnic phonological markers, this paper, whose principal objective is to reveal the apparent overgeneralisation of NE segmental features, concludes by recommending that rigorous research studies should be carried out on the different ethnic/regional dialects of NE, especially the ones with sizeable population of native speakers such as Fula, Edo, Izon, Efik/Ibibio, Tiv, Nupe, Ika, Ukwuani, Isoko, Ikwerre, among others in order to: (1) fully identify/establish the degree of convergence and divergence of features. (2) Stem overgeneralisation of phonological features, and (3) arrive at definitive, systematic features that truly reflect standard/popular NE accent.

Keywords: Urhobo English, Nigerian English, segmental features, phonology, overgeneralisation

1. Introduction

A collection of articles, edited by Dunstan (1969) contrasts native phonologies of twelve Nigerian languages with the phonology of English, identifying areas of difficulties that should be paid attention to by English language teachers in English as a second language context,

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Nigeria. The collection includes a survey of phonological features associated with the three major ethnic groups, namely Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English, which at present are an amalgam of the socio-linguistic nomenclature construed as 'Nigerian English' or 'Popular Nigerian English'.

With the influential work of Dunstan's edited piece, these three major varieties of Nigerian English (NE, henceforth) have been rigorously and persistently documented, the most routinely studied being Yoruba English. The remaining nine Nigerian Englishes namely Fula English and Tiv English, Efik English, Etsako English, Itsekiri English, Nupe English, Ijo English, Urhobo English and Isoko English have been given thin or no attention since then.

Jibril (1982) carried out a research on NE phonology and sampled a number of Nigerian subjects, 107 to be precise based on mother-tongue criterion. Of this number, 23 were Hausa, 26 Igbo and 33 Yoruba. With the exception of Fulani, a major tribe in Nigeria, the remaining 25 respondents were selected from speakers of small (minority) language groups at the time. The statistics show thus: Fulani (2 respondents) Bolewa (1), Efik (1), Idoma (1), Ijaw (2), Ishan (2), Kanuri (2), Nupe (1), Tiv (1), Unidentified subjects (12). Thereafter, Jibril (1986) came up with a two-way classification of NE, which he labels 'Southern English' and the other 'Northern English'. Evidently, as the statistics of the respondents show, NE is largely composed of Hausa, Igbo- and Yoruba-based NE accent, as just a few respondents from other ethnic/regional varieties of NE were sampled.

Similarly, Jowitt (1991) studied the linguistic features of NE and proposed a variety of English which he refers to as Popular Nigerian English (PNE). His informants (no statistics given) comprised English speakers from the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba extractions. In one of his comments in the work, he admitted that there was little available information on the spoken English forms of Nigeria's smaller ethnic groups which make it difficult to ascertain the degree of differences between the regional varieties of NE.

In principle, taken the claims above cumulatively, the term 'Nigerian English' appears completely representative. In reality, however, the conception of the term 'Nigerian English' is unrepresentative. This is against the backdrop of the fact that a number of phonological features identified in the data of the evolving sub-variety of NE tagged 'Urhobo English' (UE) under current study (see sections 3.2 through 5.6 for discussions) are exclusive to this regional variety but have been conspicuously missing in the phonological literature on NE accent.

Despite the seemingly lopsidedness, researchers of NE phonology have claimed that its segmental features are widespread and occur according to largely predictable patterns, a claim accredited to Simo Bobda (2007), Jibril (1982), Jowitt (1991) and Udofot (1997), among others. While Simo Bobda's claim of definability of NE as a system at the segmental level is not entirely incorrect, it is an oversimplification, given the phonological facts that would be made obvious in section 5. On revealing the oversimplification of NE features as a widespread, predictable system is the main goal of this study anchored on the following objectives:

1) to reveal some peculiar segmental features of an evolving ethnic variety of NE accent referred to as 'Urhobo English' which must be rigorously accounted for (together with other evolving tribal varieties) in the standardisation process of NE accent.
2) to add to the database of NE phonology which is predominantly an amalgam of data extracted from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba English speech performance.

3) to complement research efforts of English linguistics scholars on the study of English accents of speakers from sizeable ethnic groups of Nigeria (Onose, 2003; Ojarikre, 2007; Ilolo, 2013; Utulu, 2014; Utulu and Akinjobi, 2015, among others) which Urhobo English accent is one.

These objectives put in their proper perspectives, it is hoped that the broad spectra of convergence and divergence of phonological features of NE would be brought to the fore. Consequently, definitive, systematic phonological features that truly reflect 'Standard' or 'Popular' NE will be established.

2. Phonological Features of Nigerian English: A Segmental Perspective

In consideration of the segmental/phonemic system of NE, researchers such as Jibril (1982), Awonusi (1986), Eka (1985), Jowitt, (1991), Gorlach (1997), Udofot (2004), Akinjobi (2013), Gut (2004), Simo Bobda (1995, 2007), Ugorji (2007) have documented quite comprehensive phonological data that define NE accent. In one of the critical remarks of one of the researchers, Simo Bobda (2007), he opines that NE segmental features are definable as a system because the features are widespread and often occur according to largely predictable patterns to be termed 'idiosyncratic'. In the following section, the segmental features that appear to implicate the definability of NE segmental phonology as a system are discussed.

2.1 The Consonants of Nigerian English

Following extensive works on the segmental features of "Nigerian English" (mostly on varieties of the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba extraction) (e.g. Adejare, 1995; Peter, 2008; Ufomata, 2010, and the ones outlined in the foregoing), the consonant inventory of Nigerian English, according to Jibril (1982) consists of twenty-two (22) consonant sounds as opposed to twenty-four in English. However, most of the aforementioned researchers suggest that NE has essentially the same phonemic consonant inventory as RP (= Received Pronunciation).

Specifically, following Jibril's account, the number of consonant inventory that typifies NE excludes /ʒ/ and /ŋ/. Jibril's inventory of the Nigerian English consonant system is represented in a schema as shown in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Inventory of Nigerian English 22-Consonant System Adapted from Jibril (1982)

Manner of Articulation	Labial		Coronal				Dorsal		
	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b		θ ð	t d			k g		
Fricative		f v		s z	ʃ				h
Affricate	m				tʃ dʒ				
Nasal				n					
Trill				r					
Approximant				l		j		w	

However, a different inventory of NE consonants is given by Jowitt (1991). According to Jowitt, NE has twenty-four (24) consonant phonemes which implicates the inclusion of /ʒ/ in the system. Furthermore, he claims that there exists significant variation in Nigerian English phonetic consonant inventory owing to the difference in Nigerian Mother Tongues phonological systems. Particularly, classical examples of such variations include the Hausa English [f]-pronunciation in place of the RP /p/; the Yoruba English [f]- and [s]-pronunciation used in place of the RP /v/ and /z/ respectively; and the pronunciation of [t] and [d] in place of the RP dental consonants, /θ/ and /ð/ by overwhelming majority of English speakers in Nigeria.

Similar to Jibril (1982) account, Ugorji (2007) suggests twenty-two (22) consonants which are functional in Nigerian mother tongues. Ugorji opines that the values of the consonants approximate closely those of international convergence with English. The inventory of the consonant sounds is [p, b, t, d, k, g, f, v, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h, ʧ, ʤ, m, n, ŋ, r, l, j, w]. Aside these phonemes, Ugorji posits additional seven consonants found in Igbo and Yoruba. They are [d] which may replace /ð/ and /θ/ by [t]. Others consonants are [gb, kp, ɲ, kw, gw].

Basically, Igbo has [ɲ], [kw] and [gw] (Uguru, 2001; Igboanusi, 2002) while Yoruba has [kp] and [gb] (Ojo, 1977). The sounds that bear a resemblance to the Yoruba labio-velars [kp] and [gb] in standard Igbo are the bilabial implosives [ɓ] and [ɓ] respectively. In his proposal, Ugorji suggests that the inventory of the 22 consonants outlined above reflects sounds found in educated usage and are based on Banjo's (1995) twin criteria, international intelligibility and social acceptance.

However, in the opinion of the current researcher, Ugorji's inclusion of [gb, kp, ɲ, kw, gw] is unrealistic, in that these phonemes are not attested in English phonology. The consonants are simply structurally 'African' as they are phonemes characteristically found in many Niger/Benue Congo languages. Moreover, the 'African' phonemes are not at all attested in Germanic languages to which English belongs. The indigenous phonemes are rarely employed in the speech of socially sophisticated educated Nigerian speakers of English. Moreover, the Igbo phonemes listed above exclusively occur in non-educated pronunciation which sounds unnatural and can become quite unintelligible to native English listeners.

According to Ufomata (2010), there are no significant differences between the consonant system of RP and Educated Spoken Nigerian English. Nonetheless, researchers of Nigerian English phonology accept the fact that consonants such as [θ, ð, ʒ and ŋ] pose problem of usage to many non-native users of English (including Nigerians), particularly the use of the first-three phonemes, the dental and affricate sounds.

It is interesting to note however that the functional voiced post alveolar fricative /ʒ/, as will be shown in the next subsequent sections, is attested in UE accent, contrary to claims that it is absent in spoken Nigerian English.

2.2 The Vowels of Nigerian English

The general observations of NE researchers, to mention but a few (e.g. Tiffen, 1974; Ekong, 1978; Akere, 1980; Jibril, 1982; Awonusi, 1986; Adetugbo, 1987; Odumuh, 1993; Akinjobi, 2013) is that NE has few inventory of vowels, particularly when viewed from the number of vowels that occur in standard native British variety. Accordingly, Ekong suggests twelve vowel inventory while Jibril lists fifteen vowels, which are /i, ɪ, e, ɛ, a, ə, ʌ, æ, ɔ, ɔ: ʊ, u: ɑ:, ɔɪ, aɪ /. In

addition to this inventory, Jibril includes three diphthongs [ɪə, ɛə, ʊə] which he considers marginal.

Table 2: Patterns of Realisation of Vowels in Nigerian English (Simo Bobda, 2007: p. 284)

Vowels	Realisations
kit, fleece	/i/; /much shorter than RP /iː/
happY	/i/; /e/ in words in –*day*
horsEs	/i/ in plural, possessive and 3rd person singular forms; /ɛ/ with other cases involving orthographic <eC>
trap, bath, palm, start	/a/; much shorter than RP /ɑː/
dress	generally /ɛ/, but /e/ before one and only one medial consonant
lot, cloth	/ɔ/
thought, north, force, force	/ɔ/; much shorter than RP /ɔː/
strut	/ɔ/ in the south and /a/ in the north
cure	Generally /ɔ/; but fluctuates with /ɔa/ in the north
foot, goose	Generally /u/; much shorter than RP /uː/; occasionally/i/ in the north
nurse	/a, ɛ, ɔ/ orthographically, geographically, ethnically and lexically determined
face	/e/; closer than dress
price	/ai/, but monophthongisation to /a/ very common in the south
mouth	/au/, but monophthongisation to /a/ very common in the south
choice	/ɔi/
goat	/o/; but also /ɔ/ before one and only one medial consonant
near	/ia/
square	/iɛ, ia, eɛ, ea/ lectally and lexically conditioned
lettER	/a/ for orthographic <er, re, ear, ir>; /ɔ/ for <or, our, ure> in the south; /a/ but also /ɔ/ in the north
commA	A wide range of realisations generally, but not always, suggested by the spelling

He maintains that the correct pronunciation of these vowels, particularly the ones that do not occur in Nigerian mother tongues phonology are largely dependent upon the educational and social background of the speaker(s) under consideration.

However, Jibril's conclusion on the possible number of vowel in NE is that, though NE vowels are different in their distribution when compared with those of RP, they are similar. Odumuh (1993) isolates six vowels [iː, e, a, uː, ei, ai] in NE and claims that they all have the same quality that approximates those of the RP, an observation widely criticised for lack of data source. Based on the documented patterns of realisation of RP vowels in NE, Simo Bobda (2007) presents a model of the NE patterns (see details in Table 2).

Regardless of the divergent opinions of the number of vowels in NE, the fact remains that NE accent has a paucity of vowels which generally approximate to those of the Nigerian indigenous languages.

3. Phonological Features of Urhobo English: A Segmental Perspective

Urhobo English (UE) is a sub-variety of NE spoken by homegrown Urhobo ethnic extraction domiciled in Delta State, south-south, Nigeria (Utulu, 2014). According to 2006 population figures, the Urhobo people are about two million. Some authors put it at over two million. The

Urhobo ethnic group constitutes the fifth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Otite, 1982; Aziza, 1997).

The variety/accent of UE understudied in this current work is based on (1) data of Utulu (2008), collected from a section of Urhobo semi-literate indigenes that hold the primary/secondary school certificate. (2) Selected speech samples of literate UE speakers who hold Bachelor's Degree certificate, based on the data of a Ph.D. fieldwork carried out between 2008 and 2012, and (3) basilectal forms of UE drawn from existing literature (Aziza and Utulu, 2006).

To begin with, only a few studies exist on UE phonology. The earliest attempt at studying Urhobo English was by Kelly (1969) in Dustan (1969). However, a number of works on the segmental phonology of UE has emerged in the wake of the millennium 2000 up till date, (e.g. Onose, 2003; Utulu and Aziza, 2006; Ojarikre, 2007; Utulu, 2014; 2017). Onose contrasts the phonologies of English and Urhobo, in what he tags 'linguistic problems of Urhobo learners of English'. Aziza and Utulu, (2006) investigate the strategies of adaptation of English loanword by non-educated Urhobo English speakers. Ojarikre (2007) examines aspects of the segmental phonology of Urhobo English while Utulu (2014, 2017) examines the phonetic features of educated Urhobo English from theoretical and quantitative points of view. The findings of these works show that Urhobo English accent is markedly different from native English accent, particularly at the vocalic level, based in part on mother-tongue influence together with contextual and spelling-cued factors.

Besides, Utulu (2014) remarks that one important aspect that is yet to be described in educated variety of UE segmental phonology is the difficulty encountered by some Urhobo speakers in handling nasal-consonant (NC) sequence (underlined) in English words such as 'da_n_ger', 'cha_n_ge' 'important', 'co_n_tribute', etc., even though each of the sounds that make up the sequence is attested in native Urhobo language phonology. Of relevance is this phonological feature to the current investigation.

3.1 The Consonants of Urhobo English

Like NE, EU consonant sounds are almost similar to the ones in SBE. Existing studies on UE consonant system show that dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ and post alveolar affricates, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ pose pronunciation difficulty for EU speakers, as they substitute the respective English phonemes for /t/ and /d/, and /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ (Kelly, 1969; Onose, 2003; Aziza and Utulu, (2006); Ojarikre; 2007); Utulu, 2014, 2017). In addition to the four consonant phonemes, Kelly remarks that velar nasal /ŋ/ and alveolar approximant /l/ pose pronunciation difficulty for Urhobo speakers of English.

However, Utulu (2014) argues that the RP velar and alveolar phonemes do not pose pronunciation difficulty for the Urhobo speakers of English as his data show. According to him, /l/ is attested in native Urhobo phonology while /ŋ/ which is not attested in the language as a unit phoneme is pronounced in English words (depending on the social/educational class of the speaker) if followed by /k/ and /g/ e.g. 'bank', 'link' etc; and even in contexts where it is silent in native accent, e.g. 'sing', 'long', etc. Table 3 show the typical consonant system of UE, following (Utulu, 2014):

Table 3: Inventory of Educated Urhobo English Consonants (Utulu, 2014)

p	b		t	d				k	g
	f	v	*θ	*ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ	h
						*tʃ	*dʒ		
	m		n					ŋ	
		l			r		j	w	

*(Arrows indicate: *θ → t, *ð → d, *tʃ → ʃ, *dʒ → ʒ)*

* These phonemes have a tendency to be replaced by sounds closest to their phonetic value, specifically by those to which the arrow symbol is directed.

As Table 3 indicates, UE consonant inventory, in principle has 24 consonants, though the ones in asterisks in Table 3 tend to be substituted for sounds closest to their phonetic value. It is important to note that voiced post alveolar fricative /ʒ/ which is conspicuously missing in the consonant inventory of NE is attested in UE, a phonological feature which forms one of the bases of discussions in the current study.

3.2 The Vowel of Urhobo English

The quality of vowels of UE is somewhat different from that of native Standard English accent (see Tables 3&4). Existing studies (e.g. Onose, 2003; Utulu 2015) show that UE has fewer vowels when compared with that of native English accent. In the set of monophthongs, only the low mid vowel /ɛ/ is similar to that of English. Moreover, instrumental studies show that the inherent long-short dichotomy in tense and lax vowels is characteristically under-differentiated in such that the two distinct vowels qualities are not saliently differentiated (Utulu, 2014; Utulu and Akinjobi, 2015).

In addition, some diphthongs, particularly closing diphthongs /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ are monophthongised as /e/ and /o/ respectively. In some sophisticated UE accent /ɛə/ appears to be evolving as /ɛː/, as in 'care, 'fair', etc, though a number of UE speakers employ /iɛ/, differing from classical NE /ia/-pronunciation. Besides, English triphthongs assumed to be one syllable element with three timing slots (Roach, 2008) are typically realised as two syllables, where the intervening native high vowels /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are characteristically converted to glides /j/ and /w/ respectively, as in /leɪə/ 'layer' and /ləʊə/ 'lower' realised as /leya/ and /lowa/ respectively. The inventory of monophthongs suggested for educated variety of UE is presented in Tables 3, following (Utulu, 2014):

Table 3: Inventory of Pure Vowels in Educated Urhobo English (EUE) and SBE (Utulu, 2014)

SBE	iː	ɪ	**i		e	æ	uː	**u	ʊ		ɔː	ɒ	ɑː	ʌ	ɜː	ə
EUE	i			*e	ɛ	a	u			*o	ɔ					

* These vowels are the simplified forms of SBE /eɪ/ and /əʊ/, restricted before a consonant.
** SBE /i/ occurs only in final open/unstressed syllable, e.g cit*y*, lovel*y* etc., while /u/ occurs before a vowel, followed by a consonant, e.g sens*u*al, act*u*ate etc.
Vowel /ɜː/ may be realised as /ɛ/ or when spelling is <er>, <ir>.
The schwa vowel may be realised as /a/ or /i/ subject to spelling.

The inventory of diphthongs suggested for educated variety of UE is presented in Table 4, following (Utulu, 2014):

Table 4: Inventory of Diphthongs in Educated Urhobo English

RP	eɪ	əʊ	aɪ	aʊ	ɔɪ	ɪə	ɛə	ʊə	
EUE	**ei	**ou	ai	au	ɔi	***iɛ		*uɔ	*iɔ

* These variants are lexically-determined. /uɔ/ is most frequently used in place of ʊə.
** These diphthongs are significantly rendered as monophthongs /e/ and /o/ respectively. Thus /ei/ and /ou/ pronunciation are generally not the norm in EUE (Utulu, 2014).
*** This nativised diphthong may be simplified as long /ɛː/ in NURSE vowel in educated UE, subject to the social background of the speaker. Less sophisticated speakers typically use /iɛ/.

As the vowel inventories generally suggest, UE monophthongal vowel inventory is seven as opposed to standard accent twelve. There is parity however between the number of UE diphthongal vowel inventory and that of native accent which is eight, though the quality of UE vowels, as remarked earlier, is markedly different.

4. Some Regular Phonological Features of Spoken Urhobo English and Nigerian English

In dealing with varieties differentiation, especially in contact linguistics, it is expected that certain aspects of convergence will be attested, given the fact that languages, as Clements and Hume (1995) opine, do not vary without limit, but reflect a single general pattern which is rooted in the physical and cognitive capacities of the human speeches. Some of the regular patterns are discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Some Regular Consonant Features of Nigerian English and Urhobo English

In comparing the consonant inventories of NE and UE as Tables 2 and 3 indicate, the two English accents have the same system, except for the absence of voiceless and voiced palato-alveolar /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ in UE which are present in NE as claimed in the literature (Jibril, 1982; Jowitt, 1991; Udofot, 2004, among others). Nonetheless, the core phoneme absent in NE accent is the voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/, owing to absence of it in native phonology of the three major Nigerian languages, Hausa, central Igbo and Yoruba under which the so-called 'standard' or 'popular' NE is defined.

The consonant inventories of the two English accents hold the same class of labial, coronal and dorsal consonants. However, both inventories have system gaps which cuts across the cline as it relates to dentals, /θ/ and /ð/, where speakers of both varieties find it difficult to articulate the dentals, rendering native items such as /θi:f/ 'thief', /θɪn/ 'thin'; /faðə/ 'father', /taɪð/ 'tithe' as /tif/, /tin/, /fada/ and /tait/ respectively.

4.2 Some Regular Vowel Features of Nigerian English and Urhobo English

The basic fact of the vowel systems of NE and UE is that both have a paucity of vowels (Onose, 2003; Utulu (2014). The English speech of (un)educated speakers of these varieties is that which is replete with the quality of vowels that range between seven and nine. The vowels are specifically /i, e, ɛ, a, u, ʊ, o, ɔ, a/. Restrictedly, Hausa adds to the system the neutral vowel /ə/ and functional vowel length (Jibril, 1982).

The rather 'meagre' vowel inventories of NE and UE are manifested in the mode of realisation of long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs, though, as mentioned in the foregoing, orthographical and contextual factors also play significant role in the indigenisation of native English vowels in both Englishes. In these two systems long vowels are typically under-differentiated, in which the duration distinction between tense-lax vowels e.g, between /i:/ versus /ɪ/, /u:/ versus /ʊ/, is employed or not at all (Adejare, 1995; Utulu and Akinjobi, 2015). The quality of the individual twelve native English monophthongs (with the exception of /e/) is altered; each is substituted with approximate mother tongue vowel quality.

The quantity of diphthongs is sustained but altered in approximation to vowel qualities of Nigerian mother tongues. In sharp contrast to this effect, closing diphthongs /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ which Wells (1982) describes as the FACE[1] and GOAT, are characteristically reduced to /e/ and /o/ respectively (Utulu, 2014). However, an evolving nativised /ɛ:/-pronunciation in place of native /ɛə/ in SQUARE vowel, suggested by <are> or <air> spelling (also CARE, FAIR) is used in place of the attested /ia/- or /iɛ/-pronunciation in NE (see Table 2 and Section 5). Triphthongs as mentioned earlier are typically re-syllabified, in which closed vowels /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ realised as glides, /j/ and /w/, as in /leɪə/, 'layer', /taʊə/ 'tower' realised as /leja/ and /tawa/ respectively (Utulu, 2014).

5. Some Unique Phonological Features of Spoken Urhobo English – the Focal Issue

This section is devoted to discussions and revelations of a number of unique phonological features of spoken UE, differentiating it from the regular features of NE. The revelations are brought forward to evaluate Jowitt's (1991) claim, and more specifically, that of Simo Bobda's

(2007) which assert that 'the segmental features of NigE are not only widespread enough not to be termed "idiosyncratic", but they often occur according to largely predictable patterns' (Simo Bobda, 2007: p. 279-80). It does seem that the purport of this remark is sheer overgeneralisation, given the phonological facts of (Educated) Urhobo English discussed below.

5.1 [ʒ]-pronunciation
UE accent demonstrates the use of [ʒ] in place of [ʤ], the latter which is a regular feature of NE. UE differs in this respect, as native [ʤ] is typically rendered as [ʒ] (Utulu, 2017) both in educated (sophisticated) and semi-literate (non-sophisticated) English speech, as the examples in Table 5 suggest:

Table 5: [ʒ]-pronunciation in Urhobo English

British English/RP		Urhobo English		
Standard native pronunciation	Uneducated/illiterate pronunciation	Semi-literate pronunciation	Educated pronunciation	
a. [mɔ̃ːʤ]	[meʒ] or [maʒ]	[mɛʒ] or [maʒ]	[mɛ(d)ʒ]	'merge'
b. [ʤɔːʤ]	[iʒɔʒi]	[ʒɔ(d)ʒ]	[(d)ʒɔ(d)ʒ]	'George'
c. [ʧɑːʤ]	[ʃaʒ]	[(t)ʃa(d)ʒ]	[(t)ʃa(d)ʒ]	'charge'
d. [ʤẽĩmz]	[iʒemisi]	[ʒems]	[(d)ʒems]	'James'
e. [ʧẽĩnʤ]	[iʃeʒi]	[(t)ʃe(n)ʒ]	[(t)ʃe(n)(d)ʒ]	'change'

The patterns in Table 5 reflect those documented in Utulu (2014; 2017), specifically the latter study, whose statistical results, showed that, of the 1000 tokens expected of educated EU performance on [ʤ], 60.2% of the participants realised native [ʤ] as [ʒ]. The remaining figure represents the English speech of educated Urhobo speakers of English. Crucially, the percentage score clearly indicates that [ʒ]-pronunciation is significantly a feature intrinsic in UE, and perhaps might be a feature attested in other ethnic/regional varieties of NE but remain uncovered. However, more studies are required to confirm this feature which has been claimed to be absent in NE.

5.2 Type-[o] l-vocalisation
Most research accounts, many of which have been mentioned in the outset of this work, have established type-[u] l-vocalisation in NE. However, on observation of UE data, [o] and not [u] is attested. The native dark ɫ is realised as [o] or [ol] rather than NE [u] or [ul] where English words have the spelling <Cle>. The pattern of vocalisation of native English dark [ɫ] as [o] is shown in Table 6 as follows:

Table 6: Type-[o] l-vocalisation in Urhobo English

British English/RP		Urhobo English		
Standard native pronunciation	Uneducated/illiterate pronunciation	Semi-literate pronunciation	Educated pronunciation	
a. [kʰetɫ]	[ikɛto]	[kɛto]	[kɛto(l)]	'kettle'
b. [baɪbɫ]	[ibaibo]	[baibo]	[baibo(l)]	'bible'
c. [tʰeɪbɫ]	[itebo]	[tebo]	[tebo(l)]	'table'
d. [æpɫ]	[apo]	[apo]	[apol)]	'apple'

e.	[sɛtɫ]	[sɛto]	[sɛto]	[sɛtol]	'settle'
f.	[tʰẽmpɫ]	[itɛpo]	[tɛ(m)po]	[tɛ(m)po(l)]	'temple'
g.	[bʌ̃ndɫ]	[ibɔdo]	[bɔ(n)do]	[bɔ(n)dol]	'bundle'
h.	[fʌ̃mbɫ]	[fɔbo]	[fɔ(m)bo]	[fɔ(m)bol]	'fumble'
i.	[sĩŋgɫ]	[sigo]	[si(ŋ)go]	[si(ŋ)gol]	'single'

Note: the motivation for the noticeable options indicated by parenthesis in the use of nasal consonants in in in UE is discussed in section 5.3

It should be noted that the options in the selection of [l] along with [o] in parenthesis are most salient in connected speech than in citation forms. In rapid speech [l] tends to be dropped. In fact, the most nativised forms are those which represent the performance of uneducated and semi-literate UE speakers. These twin UE accents are coterminous with Banjo's (1995) varieties I and II and unequivocally rules out the fact that type-[u] l-vocalisation is systematic in NE.

5.3 NC-cluster simplification

Native Urhobo phonology is exceptional with respect to the use of the phonotactically constrained NC-cluster (i.e. homorganic nasal or prenasalised consonant) in English speech (see bold print units in Table 7). This is so because the cluster has not been reported to be lacking in NE accent. The sequence does not occur in native Urhobo phonology (Aziza, 1997). Consequently, the phonological gap is readily affective in UE accent. This scenario is different from languages such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba where NC sequence operates in their native phonology (see Yul-Ifode, 1999). In the English pronunciation of the native speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, three major Nigerian languages, the nasal component is articulated, but in Urhobo it is deleted, leaving the consonant component of it preserved, as the examples in Table 7 (see also Table 6, f – i) indicate:

Table 7: NC simplification in Urhobo English

	British English/RP		Urhobo English		
	Standard native pronunciation	Uneducated/illiterate pronunciation	Semi-literate pronunciation	Educated pronunciation	
a.	[bæ̃ndɪdʒ]	[ibadeʒ]	[ba(n)deʒ]	[ba(n)de(d)ʒ]	'bandage'
b.	[əsẽmbli]	[asɛbli]	[asɛ(m)bli]	[asɛ(m)bli]	'assembly'
c.	[əkʰaʊ̃ntənt]	[akatat]	[aka(n)ta(n)t]	[akau(n)ta(n)t]	'accountant'
d.	[kʰɔ̃ntrəʊl]	[kɔtro]	[kɔ(n)tro(l)]	[kɔ(n)trol]	'control',vb
e.	[baʊ̃ndri]	[ibadri]	[ba(n)dri]	[bau(n)dri]	'boundary'
f.	[pʰẽnsɫ]	[ipɛso]	[pɛ(n)so(l)]	[pɛ(n)sol]	'pencil'
g.	[deɪndʒə]	[deʒa]	[de(n)ʒa]	[de(n)(d)ʒa]	'danger'
h.	[lʌ̃ndən]	[inɔ̃dɔ]/[inɔ̃dɔnĩ]	[lɔ(n)dɔ]	[lɔ(n)dɔn]	'London'
i.	[tʰʌ̃mblə]	[itɔbla]	[tɔ(m)bla]	[tɔ(m)bla]	'tumbler'

It is crucial at this point to note that cluster simplification of this sort is quite common in variety I (uneducated pronunciation), variety II (semi-literate pronunciation), and even in variety III (educated pronunciation) in UE, yet this nativised unique phonological marker in a NE dialect is rarely if ever mentioned let alone discussed in the phonological literature of NE.

In educated speech in which negative transfers are expectedly negligible, the /N/ component of the cluster is often 'swallowed up', leaving the C component preserved.

Questionnaire information (Utulu, 2017) reveals that the educated Urhobo indigenes born and raised to adulthood in rural Urhobo communities often drop the nasal consonant. This observation confirms Jibril's (1982) and Udofot's (2004) remark that educational status do not necessarily determine correct English pronunciation among Nigerian users of English.

5.4 [ɛ]-pronunciation of *nurse* vowel

The accounts on patterns of realisation of the *nurse* vowel, that is, [ɜː] in NE (e.g. Jibril, Jowitt, Udofot) associate nativised [a]-pronunciation to the NURSE vowel, if suggested by <er> or <ear)> orthography. In UE, [ɜː] is realised as [ɛ], a front mid low vowel articulated with relatively tongue body raising as opposed to tongue body lowering in NE. Surprisingly however, a word like 'alert' is rarely [*alɛt] but [alat] for no obvious phonetic/phonological reason. Table 8 shows the peculiarity in *nurse* vowel pronunciation suggested by <er> and <ear> spellings in UE:

Table 8: [ɛ]-pronunciation of *nurse* vowel in Urhobo English

	Standard native Pronunciation	Nigerian English Realisation	Urhobo English Realisation	
		<er> spelling		
a.	[mɜ̃ːdʒ]	[mãdʒ]	[mɛ̃(d)ʒ]	'merge'
b.	[tʰɜ̃ːm]	[tãm]	[tɛm]	'term'
c.	[pʰɜ̃ːm]	[pãm]	[pɛm]	'perm'
d.	[tʰɜːmãɪ̃t]	[tamãɪ̃t]	[tɛmãɪ̃t]	'termite'
e.	[spɜ̃ːm]	[spam]	[spɛm]	'sperm'
f.	[dʒɜ̃ːm]	[dʒam]	[(d)ʒɛm]	'germ'
		<ear> spelling		
g.	[lɜ̃ːnt]	[lant]	[lɛ(n)t]	'learn/t'
h.	[ɜ̃ːn]	[an]	[ɛn]	'earn'
i.	[ɜːli]	[ali]	[ɛli]	'early'
j.	[ɜːθ]	[at]	[ɛt]	'earth'

5.5 Word final [ɛː]-pronunciation of *square* vowel

In word final position, the *square* vowel [eə] with the spellings <are>, <air> is pronounced rather differently from what has been claimed to be NE usage, particularly if orthography suggests <er> or <ear> (and also <ere>, as in 'there'). In word final position, [eə] is realised as [ɛː], sometimes [iɛ], depending on whether the UE speaker is sophisticated or not. Sophisticated Urhobo English speakers have preference for a lengthened monophthong [ɛː] over [iɛ]. In NE accent however, *square* vowel (see Table 2) is normally realised as [ia]. Table 9 shows the divergence in pronunciation, as follows:

Table 9: [ɛ:]-pronunciation of *square* vowel in Urhobo English

	Standard native pronunciation	Nigerian English Realisation	Urhobo English Realisation (Non-sophisticated pronunciation)	Urhobo English[2] Realisation (Sophisticated pronunciation)	
			<are> spelling		
a.	[kʰeə]	[kia]	[kiɛ]	[kɛ:]	'care'
b.	[beə]	[bia]	[biɛ]	[bɛ:]	'bare'
c.	[deə]	[dia]	[diɛ]	[dɛ:]	'dare'
d.	[feə]	[fia]	[fiɛ]	[fɛ:]	'fare'
e.	[ʃeə]	[ʃia]	[ʃiɛ]	[ʃɛ:]	'share'
f.	[reə]	[ria]	[riɛ]	[rɛ:]	'rare'
			<air> spelling		
g.	[feə]	[fia]	[fiɛ]	[fɛ:]	'fair'
h.	[fleə]	[flia]	[fliɛ]	[flɛ:]	'flair'
i.	[heə]	[hia]	[hiɛ]	[hɛ:]	'hair'
j	[ʃeə]	[ʃia]	[ʃiɛ]	[t(ʃ)ɛ:]	'chair'
i	[pʰeə]	[pia]	[piɛ]	[pɛ:]	'pair'

As Table 9 shows, the *square* vowel in UE is markedly different from that in NE. Such differences need further scholarly studies in other varieties of NE for a proper definition of the segmental features of NE.

5.6 [iɛ]-pronunciation of *near* vowel

One other area UE accent differs in some respect with NE accent is in the pattern of realisation of the *near* vowel [ɪə], predominantly pronounced as [ia] in NE but usually [iɛ] in UE. Frequently referenced works (e.g. Jibril, 1982; Jowitt, 1991; Simo Bobda, 2007: see Table 2) show that [ia] is typically used in NE, even the three major English varieties under which NE accent is defined, namely Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English are more predisposed to the use of [ia] than [iɛ]. Jowitt's (1991) claim (see p. 77) that the use of [ɛ] in NE by some speakers is not unconnected with mother tongue influence appears oversimplified. This is so because native Yoruba and central Igbo phonologies employs phonemic /ɛ/ and phonetic [ɛ] respectively, yet Yoruba and central Igbo English speakers use /a/ in both *near* and *square* vowel. In Table 10, the difference in pronunciation of *near* vowel between NE and UE is illustrated:

Table 10: [iɛ]-pronunciation of *near* vowel in Urhobo English

	Standard native Pronunciation	Nigerian English Realisation	Urhobo English Realisation (Non-sophisticated pronunciation)	Urhobo English Realisation (Sophisticated pronunciation)	
			<ear> spelling		
a.	[nĩə]	[nĩã]	[nĩɛ]	[nĩɛ]	'near'
b.	[fɪə]	[fia]	[fiɛ]	[fiɛ]	'fear'
c.	[gɪə]	[dʒia]	[ʒiɛ]	[(d)ʒiɛ]	'gear'
d.	[dɪə]	[dia]	[diɛ]	[diɛ]	'dear'

| e. | [tʰɪə] | [tia] | [tiɛ] | [tiɛ] | 'tear' |
| f. | [hɪə] | [hia] | [hiɛ] | [hiɛ] | 'hear' |

<p style="text-align:center"><ere/eir> spelling</p>

g.	[dɪə]	[dia]	[diɛ]	[diɛ]	'deer'
h.	[hɪə]	[hia]	[hiɛ]	[hiɛ]	'here'
i.	[bɪə]	[bia]	[biɛ]	[biɛ]	'beer'
j	[mĩə̃li]	[mĩãli]	[mĩɛ̃li]	[mĩɛ̃li]	'merely'
i	[ðɪə]	[dia]	[diɛ]	[diɛ]	'their'

6. Conclusion

This study has discussed and revealed some segmental features of Urhobo English (UE) which are to some extent different from the ones documented for the parent variety, Nigerian English (NE) or Popular Nigerian English (PNE). The useful contributions of this work via the revelations of attested unique segmental features of UE have revealed the fact that features are not entirely definitive and systematic as earlier claimed. Thus the study concludes by recommending the need to attend to the following critical issues that bother on codification/standardisation of NE that would truly reflect the unique sociolinguistics and linguistic ecology of Nigeria. First, there is the need for NE phonologists/researchers to identify more areas of convergence and divergence of phonological features among various ethnic varieties of NE, particularly those with sizeable population in order to elicit more potentially divergent features that would help establish the degree of homogeneity of phonological features amongst different regional/ethnic English varieties. Second, NE researchers need to take the first critical issue more seriously without which existing and prospective documentations/literature on NE phonology will be replete with overgeneralisation of features. Lastly, the two issues raised above need to be put into proper perspective so that definitive, systematic features that truly reflect 'Standard'/'Popular' NE accent can be established.

Notes

1) The term, FACE vowel (consider also GOAT vowel, NURSE vowel, SQUARE vowel and NEAR vowel) taken from Wells (1982) was used to represent the respective Received Pronunciation vowels, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /ɜ:/, /ɛə/ and /ɪə/.
2) The emerging /ɛː/-pronunciation as opposed to /iɛ/-pronunciation appears to be influenced by American pronunciation, in which /eə/ is monophthongised as /e/ in General American.

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