

## Phono-Sociolinguistic Markers of Identity in Kogi State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Language is the first distinguishing factor in group identification. It serves as a means of identity in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria where English language is spoken as lingua franca by the people who belong to different ethnic groups and who need to communicate with one another. This study x-rays the three major ethnic groups in Kogi state, Nigeria. Though, three ethnic groups are spotlighted, the term variety is used to refer to the larger coalesce forms which represent the three groups as a microcosm of the macrolectal Nigerian English. To carry out this study, samples of recorded voices of penultimate and final year students of the Federal University Lokoja were randomly selected for this study for perceptual analyses only, since a theoretical framework has been identified for an underpinning of the data contents. The Phono-sociolinguistic theory justifies segmental and suprasegmental phonological variables. The theoretical application results in the conclusion that group characteristics and individual traits are recognized as different domains in terms of pronunciation of languages whereas Ebira, Igala and Okun-Yoruba English varieties share similar phonemic features with the Nigerian English.

**Keywords:** Language; Okun-Yoruba; Ebira; Igala; Segmental; Suprasegmental Nigerian English

### Introduction

Language differentiates one group from another. It serves as a means of identity in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria where English language is spoken as lingua franca by the people who belong to different ethnic groups and who need to communicate with one another. In communication, the native languages of many Nigerians are observed to interfere with their use of English. In this article, the variety of English spoken by the three major ethnic groups in Kogi state is investigated. Though, three ethnic groups are spotlighted, the term variety is used to refer to the larger coalesce forms which represent the three groups as a microcosm of the macrolectal Nigerian English. It is however, widely believed among researchers particularly in Nigerian English studies that the varieties of English language spoken by Nigerians reveal their identity. Thus, language is a major variable among others that reveal the identity of a people. Kristiansen (2003:104) asserts that “language forms part of a larger system of symbolic markers of identity, including dress, dance, song, property and manners. To some scholars, language is one of the most salient dimensions in group identification”. Sachdev and Bourhis (1990:216) suggest that language may even “be the central criteria attribute”. They suggest that language can act both as “a marker and a maker of social identities” (Kristiansen, 2003:104).

This study focuses on the features that identify Nigerian speakers of English in Kogi state, Nigeria. The focus here is on the second language phonology of Educated Nigerian English speakers. The scope of this study is “phonology” because linguistic identity is best revealed through “articulation” of distinct sounds in a language. The word “articulation” as used in this context is employed to describe the varying pronunciations of speakers of a language. Wells (1982:29) describes the articulatory possibilities with the word “accent” as the cognitive feature of language which constitutes an important part of many linguistic identities.

The word “articulation” is described by Cruttenden (2008:76-77) in terms of ‘multiplicity of accents’, ‘disparities in speech sounds’ and ‘kinds or other pronunciations’ of speakers of a language. These differences in articulation are said by Kristiansen (2003:106) to be sufficient in slotting speakers of a language into appropriate linguistic groups. In many cases, a linguistic group is identified when they display similar pronunciation traits in their language. In native speaker communities, there exist several pronunciations which are termed ‘standard’ or ‘prestige’ norm or ‘non-standard’ (Labov, 1972:65). Some pronunciation habits are referred to as dialects (Preston, 1989:91). Thus, there are social dialects, local dialects and prestige dialects (Trudgil, 1986:67-8). In the words of Halliday (1978:179), a social dialect is the embodiment of a mild but distinctly different world view - one which is potentially threatening if it does not coincide with one’s own. This is undoubtedly the explanation of the violent attitudes to nonstandard speech community held by speakers of a standard dialect: the conscious motif of “I don’t like their vowels ...”

The linguistic implication of Halliday’s expression above is evident in research findings of scholars in the phonology of English worldwide. In the literature of World Englishes, there are findings to support Halliday’s discovery of social dislike for the disparity in the pronunciations of other speakers of English (Schmied, 1989:23). It seems obvious that linguistic variety is a feature of human life in both the social and the individual sphere (Berñardez, 2008:138). In Nigeria, for instance, there are over four hundred linguistic entities (see Hansford *et. al.*, 1994; Bobda, 1995) culminating in the multifarious accents, dialects, varieties and diversities in the land. However, three major ethnic groups dominate the other ethnic groups which include Ebira, Igala and Okun groups, if considered from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. According to Brann (2006:32,56), they are Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English which are recognized in the academic circle as the major non-native varieties of English existing in Nigeria. Apart from being celebrated owing to their dominance in population (Urlike, 2009:1), they symbolically represent the semiotics of the Nigerian existence. In this research, salient features that identify Ebira, Igala and Okun speakers of English in order to position them as major minor varieties of Nigerian English.

### **Nigerian English (NE): A Review**

The relevant literature on Nigerian English to this study is being considered in this section. Scholarly reviews have addressed the features of consonant and vowel systems of Nigerian English. Scholars have also identified coalesce forms. Josiah (2009) for instance identifies popular models of the Nigerian English phonemes as including: Standard British English (SBE) Model, Jowitt’s (1991) Model (JM), Ekong’s (1978) Model (EKM), Jibril’s (1982) Model (JM), Eka’s (1985) Model (EM), Eka and Udofot’s (1996) Model (EUM), Odumuh’s (1987) Model (OM), Christopher’s (1954) Model (CM) and Udofot’s (2004) Model (UM). Others include Banjo’s Model (1995) (BM), Eka’s (2004) (EM2), Awonusi’s (2004) Model (AWM), Adetugbo’s (2004) Model (ADM), Bobda’s (1995) Model (BOM), Bamgbose’s (1995) Model (BAM) and other possible variants and alternants.

Findings about Nigerian English Phonemes have revealed that there are variants and there are coalesce forms. The studies reveal a number of discordant views on the quantity and quality of the vowels that constitute the Nigerian English variety. Adetugbo (1977a:2004) identifies a seven member vowel contrast system (i, e, a, ɔ, u, e, o) with the last two /e/ and /o/ monophthongised from RP /eI/ and /aʊ/ respectively. The diphthongs are given as six making a total of 13 vowels, with no triphthongs (Adetugbo, 1977:3-4; 2004:193-194). On the contrary, Eka (1985:24) argues that SNE vowel system is a more complex phenomenon comprising 19 vowels (i.e. 11 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs) as against Adetugbo’s 13 vowels. Odumuh’s (1987) findings also agrees with Eka’s both of who employed instrumental analysis using Oscillomink records. Unfortunately, too, Ekong’s (1978) study of vowels in NE differs from all the ones stated above. In the latter’s findings, the vowels in SNE comprises an 18 member system (i.e. 13 monophthongs, with one being marginal and six diphthongs with two functioning marginally).

Awonusi's (2004) findings differ from the ones we have outlined above. In his analysis, the author identified 7 basic vowels, 7 marginal ones and three diphthongs. Thus, the study isolates 10 basic vowels including diphthongs and 7 marginal ones (mostly acrolectal) as against Eka's 19 and Adetugbo's 13 vowel systems. Udofot's (2004) investigation also shows some variance with the others. In her analysis (which, like Eka's (1985) experiment, is instrumental), she identifies 6 pure vowels /i, e, ə, ə, a, o/ and three diphthongs (Ie) (Ia) and (ʊə). /u/ is left out, although it is recognized in Eka and Udofot (1996). Surprisingly Eka and Udofot (1996) isolate 6 pure vowels and 2 triphthongs /ua/ and /uə/ perhaps because the study considers the basic variety of Nigerian English. Jowitt (1991) seems to recognize an 11-member vowel system with 8 basic monophthongs /i, e, a, ə, u, o, ɔ: e/ and three basic diphthongs /aI, əI, aʊ / are considered to be alternants. These are also diverse from the other studies indicated above. Jibril (1982) identifies in what he tags "sophisticated English" a 12-member monophthongs with /i/ being non-existent and /a/ being marginal. He also recognizes a seven-member diphthong namely /ei, au, əI, aʊ, iə, eə, ʊə/ with /iə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/ being marginal in some cases. Thus, Jibril's (1982) "sophisticated Nigerian English has 19 basic vowel member systems. Again, Christopherson's (1954) study cited in Jibril (1982) identifies a vowel system different from the others. His vowel system comprises 8 members /i, e, a, ə, u, ai, iə, au/ (i.e. 5 monophthongs and 3 diphthongs with /ia/ and /ua/ being neutralized versions for /iə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/.

Still on vowels, Adetugbo (2004) identifies /o/ as a pure vowel in Nigerian English but Awonusi (2004) in the same published text, considers /o/ as being marginal. Again, Adetugbo (2004) and Banjo (1996) consider the central vowels /a, ə, ɜ:/ as non-existent or "obliterated in Nigerian English", but Jibril (1982), Eka (1985:2000) and Odumuh (1987) view them as phonemes present in acrolectal variety of Nigerian English. Moreover, Banjo (1996:75) opines that vowel contrasts are obliterated on NE and in many cases, RP diphthongs are monophthongised. But Eka (1985:24) illustrates with certain words (e.g. beat, but, bit; pool and pull) and insists that the vowel lengths were maintained by his informants based on observations on the instruments used for the analysis. He, therefore, draws the conclusion that "the question of vowel coalescence so frequently reported was not confirmed by our instrument". (Eka, 1985:24). Relatively, Udofot's (2004) instrumental analysis proves that 'vowel reduction' was not observed (by informants) in unstressed positions". However, the study confirms that diphthongs and triphthongs were either monophthongised or change to glides thus corroborating Banjo (1996).

There is another crucial point of disagreement between Banjo (1995), Jibril (1982) and Adetugbo (2004). Banjo concludes that, of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), 'none has up to ten vowels and only Hausa has diphthongs (Banjo 1996:75). But, Jibril (1982:117) proves rather convincingly that Hausa has ten pure vowels and two glides thus /i, i:, e, e:, a, a:, o, o:, u, u:/ and /aI/ and /au/. Jibril also adds that all five pairs of monophthongs in Hausa are distinguished by length alone. One wonders if this last contrast was deliberate, or an oversight on the part of Banjo (1996) particularly, considering the fact that Jibril's (1982) findings have lasted for close to one and a half decades before Banjo's (1996) publication came on board. It is not our preoccupation in this study to embark on a theoretical description of the phonemic systems in Nigerian English. Our interest in this study is to compare in practical terms the phonological and social features that mark Ebira, Igala and Okun speakers of English as non-native representative Nigerian English and to in-turn establish some sociolinguistic identity markers for these varieties. It is not enough to phonologically explain linguistic identity without giving sociolinguistic backgrounds which would explain why a people speak in a particular way. In other words a sociolinguistic analysis gives explanations to the sociolinguistic variables that pre-determine the articulatory linguistic behaviour of Ebira, Igala and Okun speakers of English. Meanwhile, we shall trace a brief history of Kogi people in the following section.

### **Kogi People and History**

Kogi, a state in the central region of Nigeria is popularly called the Confluence State because the confluence of River Niger and River Benue is at its capital, Lokoja which is the first administrative capital of modern-day Nigeria. Agriculture is a main part of the economy, and the

state also has coal, steel and other mineral industries. The main ethnic groups are Ebira, Igala, and Okun. The state was created in 1991 from parts of Kwara State and Benue State. The state as presently constituted, comprises the people of the Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria. One of the first *Qadi* in the Kogi State was Faruk Imam. There are three main ethnic groups and languages in Kogi: Igala, Ebira, and Okun with others such as Bassa-Nge, a people of Nupe extraction in Lokoja and Bassa Local Government Area, Bassa-Komo of Bassa Local Government Area, Gwari, Kakanda, Oworo people (A Yoruba Group), Ogori, Magongo, Idoma and the Egan community under Lokoja Local Government. The name Nigeria was coined in Lokoja by Flora Shaw, the wife of Baron Lugard, a British Colonial administrator, while gazing out at the river Niger. Kogi State consists of twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas, which include Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela-Odolu, Ijumu, Kabba-Bunnu, Koton Karfe, Lokoja, Mopa-Muro, Ofu, Ogori-Magongo, Okehi, Okene, Olamaboro, Omala, Yagba-East, Yagba-West. The state is marked, red in the map of Nigeria drawn below:



**Figure 1:** Map of Nigeria showing the location of Kogi state

### **Theoretical Framework: Phono-sociolinguistics**

A theory of phonology is abstract and not functionally explicable when addressing society or culture-based characteristics of ethnic groups such as we are doing in this study. The speech behaviour of Ebira, Igala and Okun speakers in Kogi state requires a theoretical framework which captures both the phonological and the sociolinguistic variables regarding the features of Kogi English varieties. Although, the theory appears larger than the scope of the analyses, the framework to be adopted for data explication is a synthesis of two linguistic theories – Phonological and sociolinguistic variation. The model presents the relationship between phonology and sociolinguistics as we have designed it to function in this study. The VARBRUL is a variational concept that unites Phonology and Sociolinguistics, since the two relate at the level of Linguistics. Thus, the connection between phonology and sociolinguistics will result in what we have called Variable rule (VARBRUL).

While Phonology is the subfield of Linguistics that refers to a part of the general theory of human language, concerned with the universal properties of natural language sound system, Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that x- rays society with a view to describing the linguistic variations in that society. Sociolinguistics is a field that recognizes that human language is fixed, uniform, or unvarying, and that all languages show internal variation (Akmajian, *et. al.*, 2001:275). Thus phonology is one of the sub-fields of sociolinguistics. The Phono-sociolinguistic theory shows that segmental and suprasegmental phonology are the two constituents of Phonology, whereas Sociolinguistics mirrors linguistic behaviours of the people in a society. In the attempt to investigate language use in society the model shows that group characteristic and individual traits are recognized as different domains in terms of pronunciation of languages (Akmajian, 2001:275).

Among the theories of Phonology, the Prime Feature (PF) has been chosen, because of its scientific approach, i.e. ‘measurable property for classifying sounds in language (Ladefoged, 1975:238)’ while in Sociolinguistics, Labov’s (1966, 2009) variationist concepts, which include sociolinguistic variables, elaborated in Preston (1989) have been reviewed in our framework. The two approaches have the variationist ideology as the meeting point. This similitude informs the choice of VARBRUL as a useful tool in the analysis of natural data. Some causes of variations in language have been identified.

The first variation is the environment of the learner of a first or second language. The linguistic and social environment of a learner may influence his use of the language variables are ascribed sociolinguistically to speakers of a language. They include age, sex, nativity, ethnicity and region. Unlike the ascribed variables, some variables are acquired. Such variables include roles, specialization, status, fluency and above all individuality. The model also recognizes some social and historical variables such as Topos (territory), Genesis (origin) Onyma (identity), Polis (organization), Ethos, (values /beliefs) Nomos (customs), Glossa (language), and Techné (material culture). The Prime Features of segmental phonology is a measurable property that can be used to classify the sounds of a language (Ladefoged, 1975: 238) as rendered by the speaker. The features basically specify sounds that act together in phonological rules. The PF include: Glottalic, Velaric, voice, aspiration, place, labial, stop, nasal, lateral, trill, tap, sonorant, sibilant, grave, height, back, round, wide, rhotacized and syllabic phonemes. Some difficulties may arise in the course of using the PF to explain the group and individual variations in speech sounds. However, we are relying heavily, on VARBRUL. Thus, our analysis in the next section will be both sociolinguistic and phonological, in our attempt to explain the variations in the phonemic articulations of Ebira, Igala and Okun people in Kogi State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section identifies the interference features and commonplace phonemic features among speakers of English in Kogi state. A contrastive study will enable us conclude if the three languages actually share similar phonemic features which are characteristic of Nigerian English at the larger domain. It is important we state clearly that only the major three languages – Ebira, Igala and Okun are being investigated in this study while the other minority languages are recommended for further research because of space and resources to carry out the study.

### **Trill and Liquid**

Trill is an articulation in which one articulator is held loosely near another so that the flow of air between them sets them in motion, alternately sucking them together and blowing them apart. In some forms of Scottish English, /r/ in ‘rip’ is trilled. On the other hand, ‘liquid’ is a cover term for laterals and various forms of *r-sounds*. The sounds, /r/ and /l/ are alternated by Ebira people. Phonetically, /r/ is one of the trilling sounds also referred to as “continuants”. They are referred as such because of the degree of vibration of the articulator, tip of the tongue dancing on the alveolar ridge. In Nigerian English literature it is remarked that trill is an area of high convergence, i.e., where educated speakers of English enjoy some level of comparative advantage.

In their articulation of the words, “rice”, “road”, “rubber”, careful listeners will hear uneducated speakers of English pronouncing what sounds like, /laIs/, /load/ and lDbə/, respectively. Ebira language although has the two phonemes in the inventory, its uneducated speakers have demonstrated difficulty in pronouncing the trill and the liquid phonemes distinctively. The liquid /l/ is a phoneme which is articulated with a degree of air stream flowing over the side of the tongue. The educated speakers of English in Nigeria have shown high convergence in terms of proficiency in the pronunciation of the liquid phoneme. It is worthy of note that some non-native speakers of the English language have difficulty pronouncing the frictionless continuants because of probably a physiologically-informed speech problem.

### Glossa and Onyma

Certain phonemes are absent in Ebira linguistic inventory like in other African languages. Phonemes, particularly vowels have their variant forms as actual and deviant realizations. Thus, the allophones of the different English phonemes produced by non-native speakers can be classified as allophones in their merits. Cardinal vowels also qualify as variant forms. The variant forms observed as produced by subjects in this study are explicable with their linguistic (glossa) background and their environmental (onyma) background. An articulatory characteristic is therefore a sociolinguistic factor.

The /æ/ sound is not realized by Ebira people. It is usually replaced by /a/ in such words as “trap”, /trap/, “cap”, /k ap/, “tap”, /t ap/, etc. The /ɜ:/ (long, half open, central vowel phoneme) is replaced with the /e/ sound in words such as “shirt”, “girl”, “genre”, etc., and pronounced /fet/ instead of /ʃɜ:t/, /gel/ instead of gɜ:l/ and /jen/, instead of /ʒDnrə/ respectively. The /ʌ/ sound is not realized at all in Ebira vowel inventory. Our subjects replaced /ʌ/ with /D/ in words such as “blood”, “love”, “come”, “some,” “money”, etc. We heard /blDd/ rather than /blʌd/, /lDv/ rather than /lʌv/, /kDm/, rather than kʌm/, /sDm/, rather than /sʌm/ and /mDnI/ rather than /mʌnI/ respectively. While interacting with a police officer from Ebira land, the word, “faithful”, /feItfl/ was pronounced /fetIful/ with the intrusion of vowel /I/.

### Articulation of Obstruents

Obstruents are the fricatives, stops and affricates in the English phonemic inventory. In the literature of Nigerian English, Hausa speakers of English are known relatively to demonstrate difficulty in producing affricates and fricatives as in /feefle/ for /people/, /shosh/ for /church/, etc. Ebira speakers of English in our present research displayed incompetence in the production of the voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ and the voiceless alveolar stop, /t/. In fact, there is a case of vowel /i/ intrusion in the pronunciation of “faithful” as “fetiful” by a respondent. The sociolinguistic reason for this performance is the absence of these obstruents in the Ebira language. We observed that Ebira people produce certain obstruents as a result of the interlinguistic repertoire available to them. Of course, Kogi is a multilingual state where several languages exist within a community as means of communication in the immediate environment. This diglossic situation enables an average Okun indigene of Kabba or Ogori in Kogi state speak Ebira language fluently and vice versa.

The voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ sound is also absent in Ebira language. Our subjects replaced /θ/, (the voiceless inter-dental fricative consonant) with the simplified /t/, (the voiceless alveolar stop/plosive) in their articulation of words such as “think”, “thank”, “path”, etc., as /tank/, /tink/ and /pat/ rather than /θɪŋk/, /θæŋk/ and /pæθ/, respectively. The voiced counterpart of the voiceless interdental fricative consonant is /ð/, usually replaced with its closest /d/ (voiced alveolar plosive) sound as in words such as “father”, “further” and “rather” where the “th” is voiced /ð/ and not the /d/ with which it is being replaced with in Nigeria. The voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ is rendered as /s/ in “sugar” and in the word, “sure”, a few of our subjects rendered it as /ʃD/ instead of /ʃuə/. We also observed very rare extreme cases of /r/ and /z/ alternatives by Ebira speakers of English in words such as “zeal”, /zi:l/ as /ril/, “zink”, /zɪŋk/ as /rɪŋk/, “zone”, /zəʊn/ as /rɜDn/ with an intrusive /r/ featuring at the pre-onset syllabic position during the articulation of the word. /tʃ/ (a voiceless palato-alveolar affricate) is often replaced with the voiceless counterpart /f/ by Ebira people.

The case is not different in the vowel articulations of Ebira people. The short central mid vowel /ə/ is absent in Ebira vowel inventory and so it is rendered as /D/ as done by many Nigerians. In the word, “commentator”, /kəmentetə/, our Ebira subjects pronounced /kDmentetD/ and the word, “contractor”, pronounced as /kDntraktD/, rather than /kəntraktə/. Typical word context examples of the Received Pronunciation and the Ebira version of some words include: /vɪrədz/ for /vɪlɪdz/, /bled/ for /bred/, /fæŋkwɪʃ/ for /væŋkwɪʃ/ and so on. We shall examine our findings in the renditions of Igala indigenes whose voices were recorded.

### Obstruent and Vowel Deletion in Igala Phonology

Mother Tongue phonological features are involuntarily used by Igala people, like by other ethnic groups in Nigeria too. /ʃ/ is pronounced /s/ in words such as “sugar”, “shun” for “sun”, “tin” for “thing”, etc. More often, we perceived the voiced labio-dental fricative consonant phoneme being pronounced with the voiceless counterpart at the syllable initial position as in “have”, /hæv/ pronounced as /haf/, “favour”, /fɛlvə/ as /fefD/ and “sailor”, /seɪlə/ as /seɪID/. The dental sounds /t/ and /d/, where they occur in cases such as “Dolphins”, “regarded”, “scientists” and “protect” are articulated with some level of proficiency by Igala speakers of the English language. The dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ are absent in the Igala phonemic inventory.

Illiterate Igala people have a way of including the vowel /I/ in mono and bi-syllabic words in usually the pronunciation of names like “Joy”, “Zak”, etc. which we observed in the preliminary research to this study. Igala people produce, “Ijoyi”, “Izaki” and other similar names. In the data gathering processes two of the subjects, probably 2% of them could not drop the Mother Tongue interfering syllabic /I/ in words such as “church”, “zenith” to pronounce “Ishorsh”, “Izenit” though very unconsciously done. Even the speakers would not notice the intrusive /I/. The major areas of difficulty to our Igala subjects were in the articulation of the following words: “church”, /tʃɜ:ʃ/, pronounced /ʃDʃ/, “mirror”, /mɪrə/, pronounced /mɪrD/, “phone”, /fəʊn/, pronounced //fəne/, “zenith”, pronounced as /senIt/, “blood”, /blʌd/, pronounced as /blDd/, “other”, /ʌðə/ pronounced as /Dda/, “each”, /i:ʃ/ pronounced /Iʃ/ and “through”, /θru:/, pronounced as /tro/, etc. Conclusions cannot be drawn with the features exhibited by the Igala subjects in this study until the features of Okun–Yoruba Phonology are highlighted in the next section.

### Vowel Articulatory Problems in Okun-Yoruba Phonology

Similar to the Yoruba macrolectal language, Okun, a dialect of Yoruba has areas of phonological divergence and convergence with Nigerian English and British English. The data gathered in the course of this study revealed that certain fricatives and central vowels pose difficult to Okun-speakers of English to articulate. In the attempts to pronounce the words, “church”, “spirit”, “shower”, “heaven”, “vacate”, “show”, “education”, “humble”, “iron”, the interviewed Okun speakers of English articulated as follows: /ʃDʃ/ instead of /tʃɜ:ʃ/, /spɪrIti/ instead of /spɪrIt/. The short /I/ sound which ends the Okun version of the word, “spirit” was not rendered in its full length as would be done by illiterate Okun speakers of English. Jibril (1982) places the illiterate varieties of Nigerian English under the terms, “Basic Hausa”, “Basic Yoruba” and “Basic Igbo” Nigerian varieties of English. The subjects pronounced /fawa/ instead of /faʊə/, /hevɪn/ instead of /evɪn/, /vəkeɪt/ instead of /fəkeɪt/, /ʃə/ instead of /ʃəʊ/, /edjʊkeɪʃn/ instead of /edʊkesən/, /hʌmbl/ instead of /Dmbu/ and /alən/ instead of /ayDn/. Before examining the coalesce forms of the three varieties of Kogi English, we shall attempt acoustic analyses of the phonemes articulated by our subjects.

### Conclusion

This study focused on the identity markers of Okun-Yoruba people at the phonological level of English usage. It has gathered some findings to corroborate earlier findings on Yoruba English in Nigeria and has also identified grey areas of convergence and divergence of the Okun-Yoruba speakers’ competences in the articulation of the English phonemes. We have observed that Ebira people in Kogi state also have a pseudo-rhotic accent. This is evident in the articulation of sounds, with /r/ and /l/ or similar environments. Phonetically, /r/ is one of the trilling sounds also referred to as “continuants”. They are referred as such because of the degree of vibration of the articulator, tip of the tongue dancing on the alveolar ridge. Physiologically, Ebira people seem to be configured to exhibit rhoticity just like Americans in their speeches.

The Glossa (linguistic) and Onyma (environmental) backgrounds of Ebira people and their culture seem to inform the inexact articulation of vowels. Of course, linguistic environment plays a vital role in the identity of the linguistic behaviour of people. The best that the Okun-Yoruba subjects in this study could produce are the cardinals and the variants of the phonemes. Rather than /æ/ Okun-Yoruba people pronounce /a/ and instead of /ə/ or /ʌ/ like other Nigerians do Okun-Yoruba.

Usually, the articulated phonemes are advantageously available in the native Okun-Yoruba phonemic inventory or alphabets. Similarly, the Igala natives produce an intrusive /l/ in clusters and semivowel or gliding palatal environments. But for the intrusive vowels in clustering consonants, Igala articulatory traits are similar to the Yoruba Nigerian English variety.

We conclude therefore that the phonological markers of socio-cultural identities actually determine the abstraction from or the grip in the linguistic constraints of behaviour among nonnative Kogi speakers of Nigerian English. In other words, the variables which reveal the phonological identity of a Nigerian include ethnicity and environmental factors as foreground by Brann (2006). In this present investigation of Kogi varieties of English, the segmental features have been the focus. In further studies, the suprasegmental aspects of Kogi dialects of spoken English will be investigated.

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### Appendix: Prepared Passage

The use of signs or non-verbal signs is an important means of communication, not only among Igala people but the use cuts across ethnic and geographical boundaries. Since it is not possible for one to learn all the languages of the world, one cannot but learn signs with their meanings and all interpretations consciously which varies from place to place. Among the Igalas, signs plays a complementary or supportive role to the better forms of modes of communication in daily interactivity. Signs have a better social function such as communication of agreement, expression of emotion, which include joy, surprise, and annoyance, among others