

## New Norms in English Teaching and Learning: The Preference Grammar Approach

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### Abstract

The pluricentricity of English language, which represents the new normal in the ideological sensibilities of the growing world democracies, presents the world with the obligation to make choices among standards and norms and associated structural and non-structural elements of the language. Making the choices (and not haphazardly) constitutes part of the challenges of English language pedagogy, teaching, learning and text development. This study presents a tool for a systematic quantitative computation of the characterising linguistic entities critical to norm selection at the phonological level, christened *Preference Grammar* (PG). Salient processing paradigms comparable to algorithms essential to its tenets are demonstrated and shown to be both efficient and facile; and the outcome includes delineating and formalising lectal preferences (social and regional), structural preferences, policy preferences, political preferences, institutional preferences, and learner needs and preferences, among others, which systematically address the questions of what the norm elements are, and which model(s) to teach or learn in the Englishes realism and investigative framework.

**Keywords:** Englishes; preference grammar; pluricentricity; English pedagogy; Nigerian Received Pronunciation

### 1. Introduction

The universalisation of English language is no longer controvertible in the intellectual investigative paradigms whose concern is with English language and linguistics. Its dimensions, spread and growth are unprecedented in linguistic history. Notably, since the sixties, critical research established this as a realism, and pursued further developments until the present time. Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens (1964, p. 293), for instance, state that

English is no longer the possession of the British, or even the British and the Americans, but an international language which increasing numbers of people adopt for at least some of their purposes...

Following Schneider (2007, p. 2),

what is perhaps even more interesting is that our virtual traveller will encounter **native speakers of English** not only in Canada and New Zealand, where this would be expected, but also **in Nigeria and Singapore** and many more parts of the world in which English is not an ancestral language [added emphasis]

It was however in the eighties that the realism became rooted, and the new Englishes subdiscipline emerged. The realism and its recognition gave rise to the terms 'Englishes', 'International Englishes', 'World Englishes', 'new Englishes', 'Postcolonial Englishes', 'Global Englishes, etc, the basis of which the terminological formula "English in x" is substituted with "x English" (x, a nation). The terminology, "x English" as against "English in x" however more clearly belongs to the English linguistics of the 90s, and follows from the gains of the ideological debates largely championed by Braj Kachru and his associates (cf. Kachru, 1985, 1990, etc; see Ugorji 2015).

For practical purposes, the term 'New Englishes' is adopted but may be interchangeable with the other terms, especially 'World Englishes'. It may (in a narrow sense) refer the indigenised and institutionalised varieties, the recognition thereof by the Inner Circle, the theoretical approaches to the phenomenon (following Jenkins 2006, Kachru (1990), and others, cf. Ugorji 2010a); or (in the wide sense) to include all varieties of English worldwide; which Mufwene (2019, p. 101) defines as World Englishes, 'an umbrella term for all English varieties, especially in the Inner and Outer Circles (Kachru 1985)'. These varieties bear their respective peculiarities consistent with the infusion of the more indigenous thoughts, philosophy, wisdom, worldview, language structures and pragmatics of the host ecology. For further discussions on the term and related concepts, see Jenkins 2006, cf. Mesthrie 2000, Mufwene 2001, 2019, etc.

As indigenised and institutionalised varieties, New Englishes are therefore not conceptually definable in terms of the norms of other Circles of Englishes (see Banda 1996, Ugorji 2010b); and Seidlhofer and Berns (2009, p. 190) emphasise:

It is now widely recognised that the varieties in the communities of the Outer Circle constitute different Englishes in their own right that express independent sociocultural identities, and whose legitimacy owes no allegiance to the so-called native speaker norms.

## **2. Assumptions in the New Norm Englishes Paradigm**

Synthesising the literature, the standpoint in this paradigm varies between nations and communities, according to perspectives. The Kachruvian perspective, for instance, is on nations; such that nations within the Inner Circle and nations within the Outer Circle respectively own their varieties of English. This is similar to the ecolinguistic perspective of Mufwene, Croft and others, but the latter does not emphasise nations, but contact ecology. The evolutionary perspective of Schneider and others draws from the ecolinguistic view and sociolinguistic history. The present research is positioned on the standpoint of language communities, defined as any minimum historic people dwellers definable by language or dialect, and contact linguistics; notwithstanding the parochial implications of community linguistics. This standpoint allows us to consider that within nations, there exist varieties of English, differing from one community to another, while still retaining norm development and its characterisation at national levels, as well as international lingua franca norms. Within this conceptualisation, international norms, national norms and regional norms may be described, as well as social and political language preferences, where necessary.

It is an axiom that lectal variation is the norm and not the exception. Thus, any estimated convergence of linguistic patterns might be variant or non-monolithic. There is also the realism of dialect loyalties. Accordingly, there should be consonance with the demands of the gains of growth with respect to New Englishes, in responding to the questions, as well as their ideological and cultural underpinnings.

Challenges then arise, namely: choice - making among lects, paedagogic norm development and selection; depending on situations,

political preferences, socio-economic preferences, among others; which model should be selected and for what purpose? For paedagogic programmes, for instance, failing to provide clear answers to such questions might verge on national chaos, so to say; since language educational development needs to provide uniform focus content for teachers and teacher education, as well as specify learning targets and measure paedagogic achievements, among others. Thus, resolving the question may in general be salient not only to language and paedagogic development but also to socio-cultural development, as a contribution from language planning and management. It is in view of resolving these challenges that *Preference Grammar* becomes crucial, as the device answers to the challenges elegantly. What follows is a presentation of the grammar.

## **3. Preference Grammar (PG)**

In view of the above background information, outlining the needs arising from the new norm, Englishes, certain considerations appear salient. Importantly, we note that irrespective of the stage of growth, standardisation is a necessary process in language planning and an imperative for education and language paedagogy. It is also an on-going process, at least, in principle. In given New English nations, accents are variable in various dimensions; and a tool for standardising them is what this study here presents. It was first proposed in Ugorji (2010); see also Ugorji 2013. However, for the moment, we limit our demonstration primarily to those varieties where endonormative stabilisation is achieved: “it is characteristic of this phase that the new indigenous language variety is perceived as remarkably homogenous, and that this homogeneity is in fact emphasised” (Schneider 2007, p. 57) or even to where nativisation is established.

### **An Overview**

Preference Grammar (PG) is a tool for standardising phonological corpora, including segmental constituents and prosodic elements. They are delineable as 'preferred' among competing related variables; see Ugorji 2010. The goal of the Grammar is to elicit the sounds and prosody from spoken data which should constitute the normative inventory or so, which teaching and learning should target, as well as other properties which may more adequately characterise the standard or model variety, regional or

social variety, glocally. This goal is pursued by engaging empirical procedures and tools that eliminate subjectivity, being democratic. It elicits materials which may formalise features of a lingua franca core (LFC) of phonological units, at the international level, as well as the features at national and local levels, irrespective of policy demands, needs or choices.

### Preference Grammar: Tenets

The grammar device defines six parameters for evaluating and identifying the elements of the phonology that may participate in the normative inventory. These parameters cooperate, and are synchronised in an elegant mechanism that borrows the metaphor of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993; cf. Archangeli 1997, Kager 1999, etc.): They are thus ranked but not inviolable. Consider, below, the parameters:

The parameters:

- 1) International acceptance, defined as close approximation to the more international norms that may be considered broadly as lingua franca;
- 2) Contrastiveness, defined as phonological distinctiveness;
- 3) Frequency, defined as overall high rate of occurrence;
- 4) Disambiguity, defined as preference for property or properties that diminish ambiguity or miscommunication or both;
- 5) Phonetic simplicity, defined as preference for feature(s) which seem(s) physiologically more plausible, and
- 6) Paedagogic convenience, defined as preference for feature(s) which advance(s) facileness in teaching and learning.

#### The parameters

#### Notes on the parameters

<b>1. International acceptance</b> , defined as close approximation to the more international norms that may be considered broadly as lingua franca;	While (1) addresses the need to understand and be understood by other competent speakers in the world and so remain relevant in the global community,
<b>2. Contrastiveness</b> , defined as phonological distinctiveness;	(2) permits those properties whose phonological status remains crucial to international intelligibility, even when learning them appears onerous.
<b>3. Frequency</b> , defined as overall high rate of occurrence;	

**4. Disambiguity**, defined as preference for property or properties that diminish ambiguity or miscommunication or both;

**5. Phonetic simplicity**, defined as preference for feature(s) which seem(s) physiologically more plausible, and

**6. Paedagogic convenience**, defined as preference for feature(s) which advance(s) facileness in teaching and learning.

(3) incorporates those properties which may suggest 'deviance', relatively, but bear distinguishable mark, in having a high rate of occurrence. While the latter is being considered, ambiguity should be kept to the barest minimum; which is the point in (4).

(5) is related to (6) in that what is physiologically more plausible may be relatively easier to learn, but not to be preferred over and above (4), for instance; hence, they are ranked.

### 3.3 Preference Grammar: Mechanism

#### PG Mechanism and ranked relations

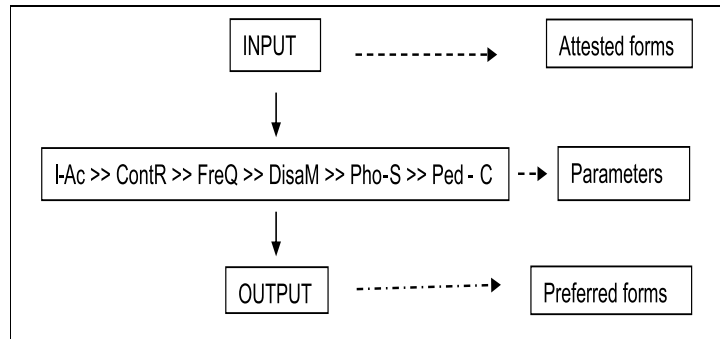
International Acceptance (**I-Ac**) dominates Contrastiveness (**ContR**), which dominates Frequency (**FreQ**); and the latter dominates Disambiguity (**DisaM**), which dominates Phonetic Simplicity (**Pho-S**), which in turn dominates Paedagogic Convenience (**Ped-C**), abbreviated thus (where >> stands for 'dominates'):

**I-Ac >> ContR >> FreQ >> DisaM >> Pho-S >> Ped-C**

PG Parameter Statements

- (a) \*No I-Ac  
Non-international acceptance is prohibited
- (b) \*No ContR  
Non-contrastiveness is prohibited
- (c) \*No FreQ  
Infrequency is prohibited
- (d) DisaM  
Ambiguity is prohibited
- (e) \*No Pho-S  
Phonetic complexity is prohibited
- (f) \*No Ped-C  
Paedagogic difficulty is prohibited

## PG: Mechanism & Architecture



### Preference Grammar: Components

#### 1. The input component (**input-C**):

All attested forms, within lexical contexts, in the clines; not underlying forms. Instead, written forms mark clues to context or orthographic spelling. Dispensing with underlying forms has two main advantages for New Englishes: to avoid estimating New Englishes in terms of any known other national model; to account for natural languages as social phenomena. Input units technically comprise all elements of a family of units occurring in the phonological (including phonetic) experience of speakers of the varieties, being investigated.

#### 2. The parameters-set (**param-C**):

It is the evaluation mechanism, involving ordered and ranked parameters; once determined, ranking is strict, but violable; and the parameters cooperate.

#### 3. The output component (**output-C**):

Output elements are representatives of classes of such items which emerge as being 'preferred' in the grammar, earning least violations, if any.

## PG: Operability

Fig. 1: <th> in 'think'

<th>	*No I-Ac	*No ContR	*No FreQ	DisaM	*Pho-S	*Ped-C
a. tɪŋk				*		
b. sɪŋk	*		*	*		
c. =>θɪŋk					*	
d. zɪŋk	*		*	*		

### PG Operability: Illustration

Figure 1, above, illustrates the evaluation procedure in PG:

Consider, for example, that /θ ð t d s z / may compete for 'preference' in contexts spelt with <th> in English lexical items. The segments are viewed as belonging to a phonological space definable, perhaps, as [coronal] or simply 'dent-alveolar', coordinated with the relevant items of the lexicon within which the options of those input units occur in speech. Applying the schema may then reveal the preferred candidate, the winning segment; and the winner becomes a member of the formal (standard) inventory.

### PG: Capacity

As so far shown, PG answers to the questions of the new norm, Englishes, not only in delineating normative inventories; but also in formalising lectal preferences (social and regional), structural preferences, policy preferences, political preferences, institutional preferences, and learner needs and preferences, among others; thereby answering to what model(s) to teach or learn in the Englishes realism and investigative framework. This capacity is crucial to the achievement of the Lingua Franca Core of phonological features for English language syllabus, when objective and unprejudiced results are considered most desirable, without limitations to Non-native to Non-native interlocutors or Native to Native interlocutors, in the perspective of English as an International language, EIL; see also Jenkins 2000. Importantly, it addresses both segmental and suprasegmental features; while Jenkins' LFC (lingua franca core) stresses segmental features (Barrera-Pardo, 2022). It achieves these by permitting promotion or demotion of parameters and holding out a principle, which

could be deployed in dealing with the standardisation of the phonological units of human language in general, with little adaptation. For fuller discussions, see Ugorji 2010, 2013, 2020, etc.

### One outcome: The Nigeria national model

	Formal/ allophone	informal	developmental	lexical set
1.	i	i/ɪ	i/ɪ	FLEECE
2.	ɪ	ɪ/i	ɪ/I	KIT
3.	e/eɪ	e	e/ɛ	FACE
4.	ɛ	ɛ	ɛ/e	DRESS
5.	ɜ/ɛ	ɛ/a/ɜ	ɛ/a/ɒ	NURSE
6.	a/æ	a	a	TRAP
7.	ɑ/a	a	a	START
8.	ɒ/ɔ	ɒ	ɒ	FORCE/LOT
9.	o/əʊ	o	o	GOAT
10.	ʊ	ʊ/u	ʊ/u	FOOT
11.	u	u/ʊ	u/ʊ	GOOSE
12.	ʌ/ɒ	ɒ/ʌ	ɒ	STRUT
13.	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	PRICE
14.	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	CHOICE
15.	ɑʊ	ɑʊ	ɑʊ	MOUTH
16.	ɪə/iə	ɪə	ɪə	NEAR
17.	ɛə/ɛɑ	ɛə/ɪɑ	ɪə	SQUARE
18.	ʊə/ʊ	ɪɒ/vɑ/ʊ	ɪɒ/ʊ	CURE

The first column represents the vowels of the formal standard, which teaching and learning target. That is, that priority is assigned the formal standard in teaching and learning, simply as pronunciation priority accent. The second column represents that of the vowels of the informal standard, which is not targeted, but not penalised; the third presents the vowels occurring in the colloquial inventory.

Other vowels which also constitute part of the model inventory, the formal model, are:

19. eɪə as in chaos, layer, crayon, etc.
20. aɪə as in trial, pliers, higher, iron, etc.

21. ɑʊə as in coward, nowadays, flower, etc.
22. ɒɪə as in buoyant, employer, lawyer, etc.

### 4. The Nigerian Received Pronunciation (NigE RP)

Critical to the above conclusion in respect to the normative inventory of Nigerian English vowels is Jowitt 2015, with the above title, *Nigerian Received Pronunciation*, where 'Received' conveys 'accepted' or 'approved'. In particular, Jowitt 2015 adopted the Nigeria national sound inventory, presented above, (see Ugorji 2010) and aptly christened it *Nigerian Received Pronunciation* (Jowitt 2015), with an adjustment in the choice of symbols for one or two. This christening puts paid to the question of what sounds to teach or learn as the norm and the question of standard(s) in Nigerian English pronunciation. It is also critical to the global recognition of Nigerian English as a canon of World Englishes and to the growth process that establish and codify endonormative standards. Thus, this defines standard English spoken in Nigerian RP, the Nigerian standard or normative accent.

The consonant inventory presents no radical difference; and includes the following:

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

However, “in view of the ethno-linguistic realism of contact situations, researchers (Jowitt 2008, Schneider 2003, Wells 1982a, b, etc.) agree that toponyms, flora and fauna, personal names, names of deities and other cultural items tend to be retained; and for new Englishes, they become part of the infusions from substrate cultures.” (Ugorji 2010:101). Consequently, the following sounds, are recognised as part of the phonological characteristics of Nigerian English:

- /gb/, the voiced labial-velar stop, in *agbada* 'type of male clothe'; *ogbanje* 'spirit girl'; *ogbunigwe* 'a type of bomb'; *ogbono* 'a type of soup'; *Agbor* 'place name'; *Akumgba* 'place name'; *Igbo* 'a tribe/language', etc.

- /kp/, the voiceless labial-velar stop, *kpatakpata* 'in entirety'; *kpomo* 'cow skin (usually eaten as a delicacy)'; *Popoola* 'personal name', etc.
- /ɲ/, the palatal nasal, in *Ebonyi* 'a river/State', *Inyanga* 'place/market name', *Nyanyaa* 'place name', etc.

The retention of toponyms, flora and fauna, personal names, names of deities and other cultural items is not new in language development and linguistics: As Schneider (2003, p. 245) observes, “we find heavy toponymic borrowing in a variety of situations...” and notes the occurrence of North American toponyms, Aboriginal names in Australia or Maori place names in New Zealand, as well as traces of pre-Germanic Celts, remaining in English. It is thus expected; and in African contact varieties, we find a preponderance of labial-dental stops, clicks, and tone, among others, (Ladefoged 1968, Clements 2000, Williamson & Blench 2000, etc.). This phenomenon is not only recognised; but Wells (1982b, p. 636) stresses, “African influence is seen in the retention of double-articulated [kp, gb] in words of African origin”. Similarly, Trudgill and Jean (1985, p. 9) provide some illustrations with respect to the contributions of Welsh to Welsh English: “the Welsh consonants /l/ and /x/ occur in place-names and loan words from Welsh. (/l/ is a voiceless, lateral fricative, and /x/ is a voiceless velar fricative ...), e.g.: Llanberis /lanbéris/; bach /ba:x/ (term of endearment).” It may also be noted (Ugorji 2010) that more of the infusions from substrate Nigerian cultures would be revealed the more one advances towards the more regional varieties of Nigerian English.

In addition to the consonants shown above, some complex consonants are part of the inventory of the sounds of the Nigerian Received Pronunciation. They include distinctive palatalised /Cj/ and labialised /Cw/ sounds:

- Palatalised consonants /Cj/: In due, music, tube, tune, cube, cue, cute, duty, mute, occupy, etc. Thus, Standard Nigerian English accent may not putatively be shown to be j-dropping.
- Labialised consonants /Cw/: In quit, language, acquire, request, conquest, quack, sequential, square, etc.
- It is also non-rhotic: post-vocalic r; and pre-consonantal r may not

be said to occur; but linking r does: In here [r]and there, where[r]abouts, for [r]instance, etc.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The new norm of democratised Englishes accent is addressed using the research tool, PG, for dealing with the phenomenon and associated challenges. Its advantage thus includes the capacity for addressing the challenges of the new norm Englishes, the New Englishes ideology and the sociolinguistic realism of their independence, as well as addressing the model(s) needed in paedagogies in New Englishes nations and world Englishes, further to the pluricentricity of English.

Also importantly, in PG, ranking may be adapted by demoting parameters, deleting parameters, and promoting parameters. This capacity is critical to planned language development and standardisation, which is putatively ongoing for all varieties of English. Accordingly, delineating and formalising lectal preferences (social and regional), structural preferences, policy preferences, political preferences, institutional preferences, and learner needs and preferences are natural results.

It is transparent and respecting democratic principles, as all clines are given equal opportunities to contribute to the input and to participate in the competition. By this property, PG therefore provides no room for language or dialect suspicion and conflicts.

For varieties of English across the world, it promises to be a useful tool especially in the standardisation of spoken forms and the achievement of endonormative stabilisation. Part of the potentials may also include the possibility of automating PG; and we do envisage this for the future.

By this study, we hope to have contributed a useful tool to the investigation, development, codification and promotion of 'accents' represented by New Englishes world-wide. What is left is the testing of the claims of PG. Thus, in the years ahead, we might expect research engagements to verify the assumption that an international lingua franca accent is readily computed in the PG framework, as well as national and regional and social accents, within given nations and within segments of given nations, understood in PG as communities, language or dialect communities.

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