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## **Spectrographic Analysis of Articulatory Variations in the Vocalisations of Selected Nigerian Newscasters**

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### **Abstract**

Since the 20th century, with the launch of natural language processing software, such as the Praat software in 1995, speech analysis has transcended subjective interpretations to scientific evaluations. This study aimed to carry out a spectrographic analysis of articulatory variations in the vocalizations of selected Nigerian Newscasters using the application of the Praat software. More importantly, the articulatory variations traceable in the vocalizations of the newscasters that are indicative of hyperarticulations and hyper-articulations are examined. Ten (10) words were selected from a corpus of spoken texts collected through the survey method—the interview of selected Nigerian newscasters. From the data analysis, it was found that hyperarticulations are marked by phonemic substitution, /r/ intrusion, and vowel length elongation while a lack of pitch variation, phonemic reduction, and syllabic reduction indicates hypoarticulations. Also, it has been found that both hyperarticulations and hyper-articulations are reflections of the attitudes of the studied newscasters as second-language speakers of English towards the attainment of proficiency in the standard variety. Not only attitude but also variations impact other cognitive and social factors that are manifestations of the sociolinguistic realities of the studied context.

### **Keywords:**

Cognition,  
Manifestations,  
Praat,  
spectrogram

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### **Introduction**

The issue of language variation is a universal phenomenon. More specifically, language contact has a significant influence on the level of variation. This applies to English in non-native contexts, where it serves in the second language (L2) capacity. The English language in Nigeria has several differences. The spoken varieties that abound in Nigeria as categorized by Nigerian scholars using the educational parameter include the acrolect, which is spoken by people with a university education, the mesolect, spoken by people with a secondary school education and the basilect, spoken by people with a primary school education (Banjo, 1971, 2012; Jowitt, 2001).

Aside from these three varieties which are measured using the educational parameter, there are two major varieties to reckon with, Standard British English (SBE) and Popular Nigerian English (PNE). These varieties of spoken English have also been recognized by scholars in the field of Nigerian English phonology. The first is classified based on education and exposure to the native English speaker's settings, the Standard British English (SBE); while the second is typified based on speakers' scope, general acceptability and mutual intelligibility within the Nigerian environment,— the Popular Nigerian English (PNE).

Despite the classification of the varieties of Nigerian English pronunciation using different parameters, it has been observed that some Nigerians, irrespective of their level of education and exposure have problem attaining proficiency in the Standard British English. The renditions of people in this category are characterised with variations which are indicative of Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation (Gobir, 2021). Many studies of this nature previously carried out have identified these variations using subjective interpretations. It is based on this trajectory that this study sets out to evaluate the variants of Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation in the renditions of selected Nigerian newscasters using the Praat software, to ascertain the factors responsible for these variations in the Nigerian newscasters' renditions.

To justify the positions maintained in the foregoing discussion towards the conceptualisation and taxonomy of Nigerian English, it is pertinent to examine scholarly perspectives and positions on the subject matter. There have been vast literatures on the subject of Nigerian English classification at the phonological level. Several scholars have carried out myriads of studies on this subject matter as a book, book chapters and journal articles. For instance, Banjo (1971) identifies four varieties of Nigerian English based on the variables of social acceptability and international intelligibility. According to him, the first variety is marked by a total transfer of the mother tongue phonologically, syntactically, and lexically into English language. He gave the example of the features of Kwa and Niger-Congo languages to English. This variety is spoken by those whose knowledge of English is very imperfect. This is socially acceptable in Nigeria but not internationally intelligible.

The second variety of Banjo has a syntax that is close to that of the Standard British English but with strongly marked phonological and lexical peculiarities (it is spoken by up to 75 percent of those who speak English in the country. It is socially acceptable, but with rather low international intelligibility). The third variety is close to the Standard British English both in syntax and semantics and is similar in phonology but different in phonetic features as well as with regard to certain lexical peculiarities. It is socially acceptable and internationally intelligible (it is spoken by less than ten percent of the population). The last variety which is the fourth is similar to the Standard British English in syntax and semantics and has similar phonological and phonetic features of the British Regional English. It is internationally intelligible but socially unacceptable (it is spoken by only a handful of Nigerians born or brought up in England).

Unlike Banjo, Jowitt's (1991, pp. 47-48) variety differentiation is based on three classifications: Nigerian English; Standard Nigerian English or Educated Nigerian English and Popular Nigerian English. To him, Nigerian English is the totality of the English usage of Nigerians which is distinct from pidgin on the one hand and from Standard British English on the other; Standard Nigerian English is the acrolect of Nigerian English, which has been enriched with the Nigerian Indigenous accents but has not been codified. Popular Nigerian English emerges, and these have been accepted by the Nigerian community and utilised in teaching. The term, 'popular' in Popular Nigerian English means the variety spoken by a larger population of the country. Therefore, we can say it is used not only as a medium of instruction but also for commercial purposes, entertainment, religious purposes, cross cultural communication (Gobir, 2021), by the media, etc. it is an 'educated' variety of Nigerian English. According to Jowitt (2007), in general, 'educated' can mean either "having undergone some education" or, more often, "highly educated". While the use of the concept in the first perspective aligns with Jowitt's perspective on Popular Nigerian English, it is used in the second sense by, among others, Bamgbose (1982), to refer to Variety 3 synonymously.

Jowitt avers further that both the Standard Nigerian English (SNE) and Popular Nigerian English (PNE) constitute what we have as the Nigerian English (N.E.). Jowitt backed up his argument stating that the variety of English language spoken in Nigeria is ameliorating since a remarkable number of Nigerian speakers and writers of English manifest the educated native speaker-like facility at all levels of language study ((Jowitt 1991; 2007; 2013, p. 5). Apart from this, Jowitt (2016, p. 6) clarifies that his notion of 'Popular' in his variety, Popular Nigerian English (PNE), contrasts with the – yet to be codified – 'Standard' Nigerian English (SNE), that is, the characteristics of the Popular Nigerian English are different from those of the Standard Nigerian English.

The third variety identified by Banjo possesses the characteristics of Jowitt's variety, the Popular Nigerian English. Not only Jowitt and Banjo but also scholars such as Igboanusi (2002; 2006), Blench (2005), Wunder et al. (2010), and a host of others have attested to the existence of a variety of English that is common to all Nigerians at the levels of phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Scholars such as Kperogi (2011), Alabi (2012), Olaniyi (2014), Adedimeji (2007), Lawal (2013), Awe (2014), Jowitt (2013, 2016), Alabi & Gobir (2020, 2021), Gobir (2021), Gobir & Adwoa (2022), among others, have also conducted researches on variety differentiation of the Popular Nigerian English and most of these studies takes from the previous studies highlighted.

### Methodology

For the investigation of the articulatory variants of Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation in the renditions of the selected newscasters, the original data set of contemporary speech samples from volunteer subjects (newscasters) across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria was recorded in the course of face-to-face interviews and were analyzed. The interviews with the research subjects were based on an open-ended list of questions (questionnaire). This was carried out to ensure consistency in the interviews across the geopolitical zones. This was also done to make the interviews more structured and systematic.

The research population consists of those whose first languages are categorically Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. They also constitute speakers of English as a second language. A few of these respondents studied other languages, mostly French and German, during the course of their formal education. they reported that Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Tee, Kalabari (spoken in some areas of Rivers state), etc. are their native languages. To the respondents from

the northern axis, the native language (Hausa/Kanuri) is their best as they have claimed. It is the language used at home but no regular communicative use of another language besides English outside of their homes (especially in formal gatherings). Ten (10) words were selected from a corpus of spoken texts collected through the survey method (interview) that was adopted as the research instrument.

Due to the centrality of the articulatory variations of Hypoarticulation, hyperarticulation to this study, the study adopt and Praat application as a software for the analysis of the data. Praat software is a programme, which was launched in the year 1995. According to Jolayemi (2013, 2019), the Praat software is multi-task software useful for different categories of users such as phoneticians, phonologists and speech pathologists. Not only are the aforementioned categories of users beneficiaries of the Praat software, it is also useful to voice coaches and forensic experts. The Praat software is capable of assessing sound files such as MP3, AIFF, AIFC, .WAV among other file categories.

Praat software was designed primarily to analyse speeches in relation to their acoustic characteristics, such as pitch of the voice, duration of rendition, formants. The Praat software was introduced as a means of processing natural languages through the use of computerised means other than subjective perception to generate objective results. Praat software serves as a more scientific means of processing natural language.

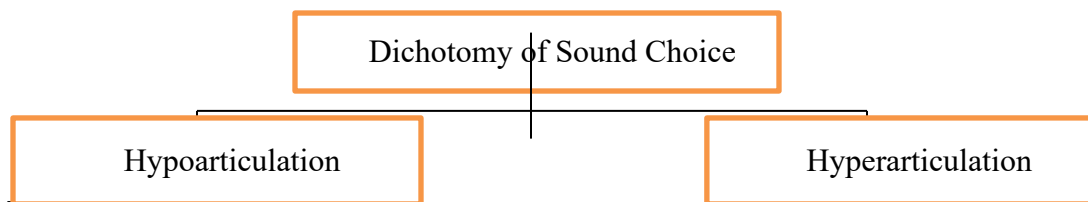
The analytical framework adopted for this study is an adaptation of two models of language variation, constituting Blevins' (2004; 2006) Evolutionary Phonology and Labov's (1966-2010) Variationist Approach, as well as the concept of Cognitive Linguistics. Blevins (2004) in an attempt to examine the sources of natural sound change, an important phenomenon in Evolutionary Phonology, posits that language change is a norm, not a deviation, hence, her choice of the term 'natural'. She claims that:

Languages have a much less precise inheritance mechanism than DNA as no molecule exists. A child is born and the child learns natural language through exposure to the language the way it is spoken in the surrounding speech community. Neurological mechanisms make language learning different from other learning types because there is no direct replication of language in anything resembling a genetic blueprint. Languages are learnt over years with a learning process of trial and error which is highly individualistic as no two children acquire language the same way (Blevins, 2004, p. 31).

Blevins' above notion establishes the relationship between her theory of Evolutionary Phonology and Variationist Sociolinguistics and reveals the interconnectivity of these two approaches to Cognitive Linguistics. To her, variation is a constant phenomenon in linguistic descriptions. Hence, she embraces the behaviourists' notion of environmentalism and decries the mentalists' perspective of genetism. She avers that neurological mechanisms are responsive to environmental variables, which are determinants of individual linguistic variation.

Cognitive Linguistics provides a productive theoretical basis for the description of the second language pronunciation. This is achievable as second language speakers of English compare two forms of the same statement, their own and another, by drawing from their cognitive skills to discern differences and learn how to correctly categorise the second language's sounds. According to Flege (1995), Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (2010), adult learners form new categories through perceptual training, identification training, implicit language learning based on the learners' exposure to the target categories (a natural way of category formation) and target training.

Hypoarticulation and Hyper articulation in relation to this study emanate from Blevins' (2004; 2006) theory of Sound Patterns, which is situated within the premise of language variation—Evolutionary Phonology. More specifically, these two concepts are components of Blevins' model of sound choice which is presented in Figure 1.



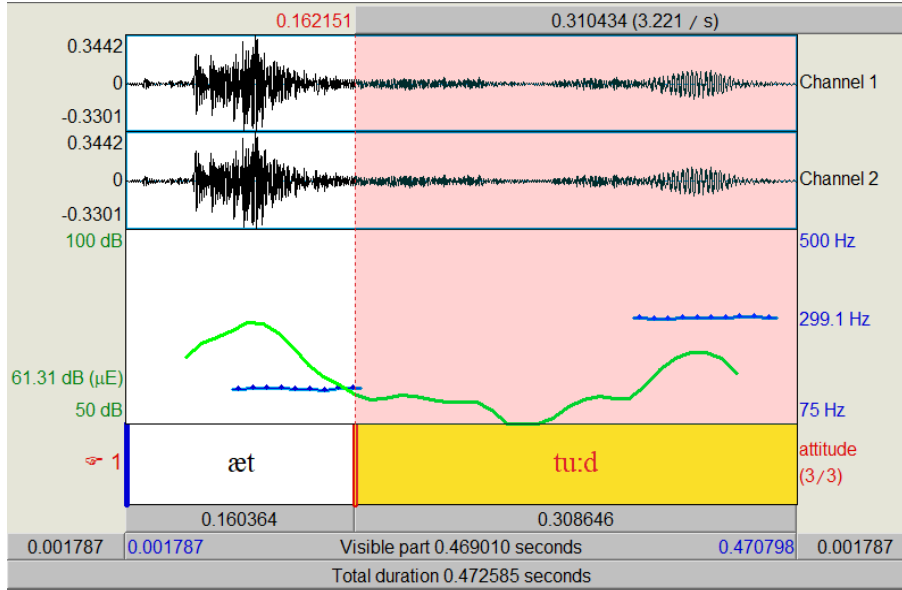
**Figure 1: Model of Sound Choice**

Blevins' (2004; 2006) describes sound choice as the variation in production as falling largely on a continuum from relatively hypo-articulated variants to relatively hyper-articulated ones. In fig. 1 above, it is obvious that the two variables, Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation are distinct but interrelated phenomenon. The two terms from the perspective of Blevins are phonological concepts which refer to reduced articulation in speech and exaggerated articulations.

### Results and Discussion

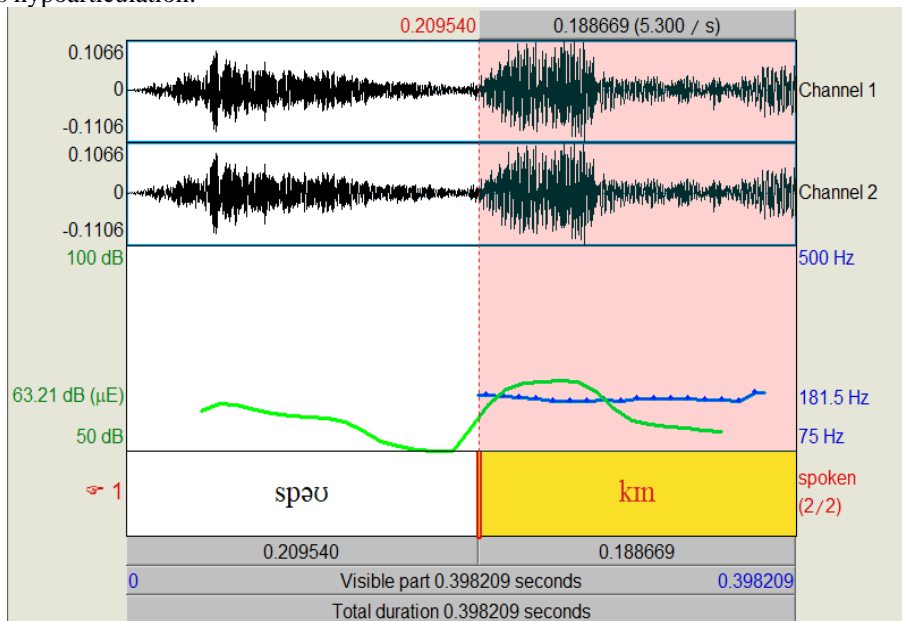
The data for this study which constitute the renditions of selected Nigerian newscasters have been examined at the phonological level of linguistic analysis using the Praat software application to examine the variants of

Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation. The study found that Hypoarticulation resulting from syllabic or phonemic elision is evident in some newscasters' renditions across the six geopolitical zones. However, illustrations are drawn from the north-east and south-east regions. For the north-east region, the words, 'attitude' and 'spoken' as rendered by Speaker 1 is analysed on spectrograms, while the words, 'Nigerian' and 'mothertongue' as uttered by Speaker 2 is analysed.



**Figure 2: A Presentation of 'attitude' by Speaker 1 Yobe state**

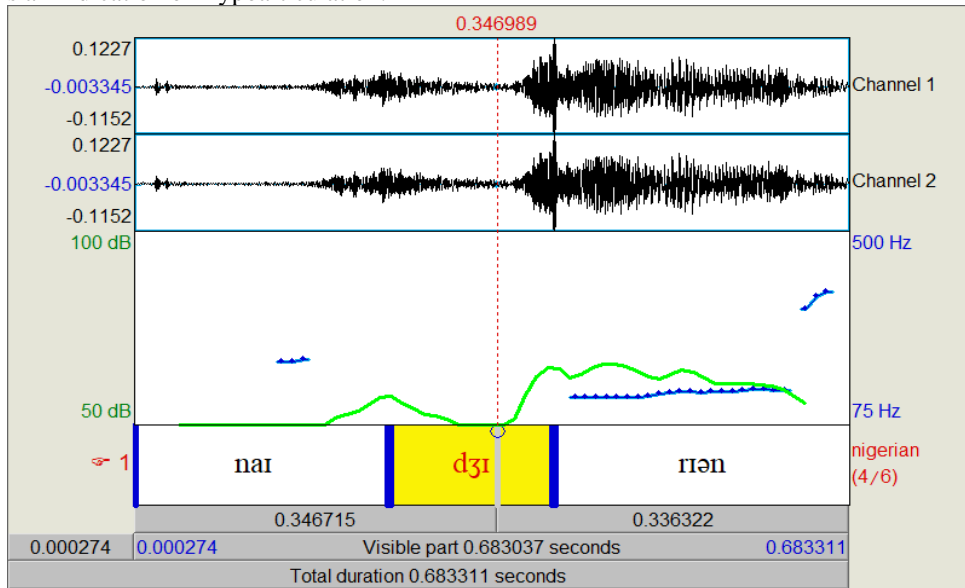
The spectrogram analysis above represents the articulation of the word, 'attitude' by Speaker 1 of Yobe state. As the diagram indicates, the word has two syllabic divisions instead of three, with the second syllable being the longest. The differences in the duration of articulation indicate this. The first syllable is realised within 0.160364 seconds while the second syllable is realised within 0.308646 seconds. The syllabic reduction simply illustrates the speaker's hypoarticulation.



**Figure 3: A Presentation of 'spoken' by Speaker 1 Yobe state**

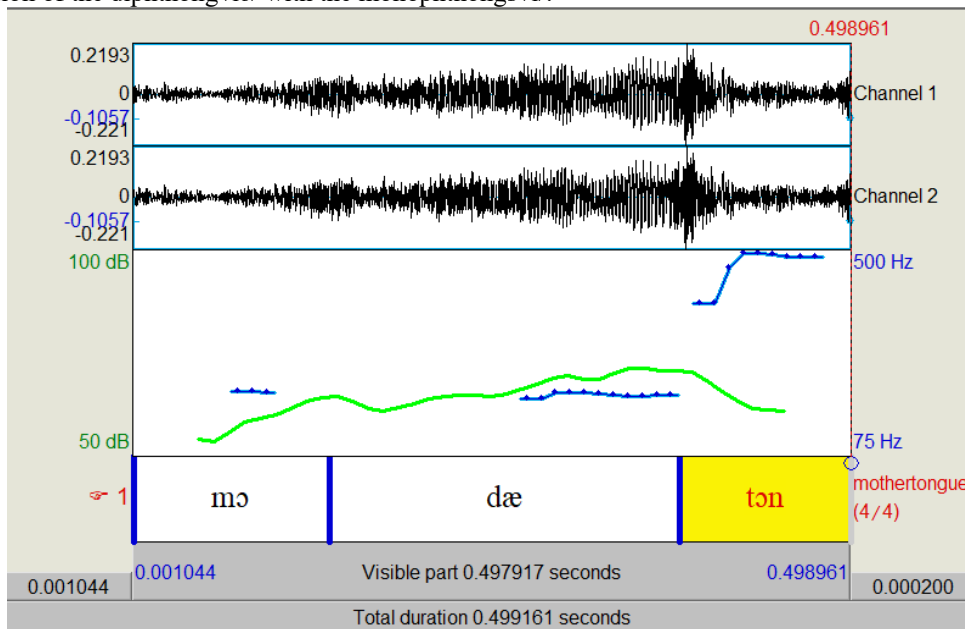
From the spectrogram analysis above, it can be deduced that the word, 'speaker' is rendered as di-syllabic. The first syllable is rendered in 0.209540 seconds while the second syllable is articulated in 0.188669 seconds. This is because the first syllable is the longer; it has a diphthong as its peak while the peak of the second syllable is a short

vowel phoneme, a substitute of /ə/ which supposed to be the actual sound. The substitution of the sound in the second syllable is an indication of Hypoarticulation.



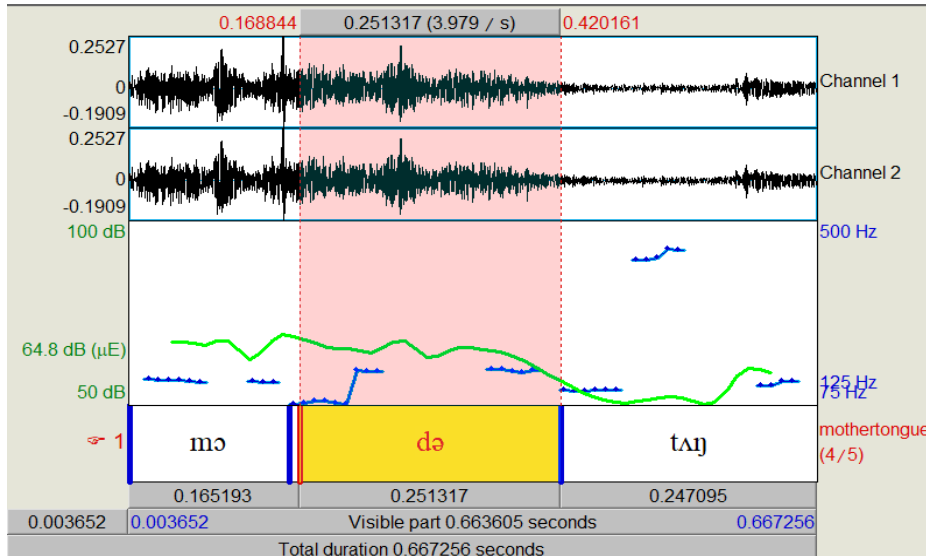
**Figure 4: A Presentation of 'Nigerian' by Speaker 2 Abia state**

The spectrogram above represents a rendition closer to the superstrate. The first syllable is in conformity with the Standard Nigerian English. Contrarily, Hypoarticulation is evident in the second syllable. This is as a result of the substitution of the diphthong /ɪə/ with the monophthongs /ɪ/.



**Figure 5: A Presentation of 'mother tongue' by Speaker 1 Abia state**

The spectrogram above presents the rendition of 'mother tongue' by Speaker 1 of Abia state. On the spectrogram, there are variations in the rendition of the three syllables. These variations are peculiar to the peak in the first two syllables while the variation is specific to the peak and coda in the third syllable. The phoneme, /ɔ/ is used in place of /ʌ/ in the first syllable, /æ/ is used instead of /ə/ in the second syllable while /ɔ/ and /ŋ/ are used instead of /ʌ/ and /ŋ/ in the third syllable. The substitution of phonemes across the three syllables is an evidence of Hypoarticulation in the speaker's rendition.

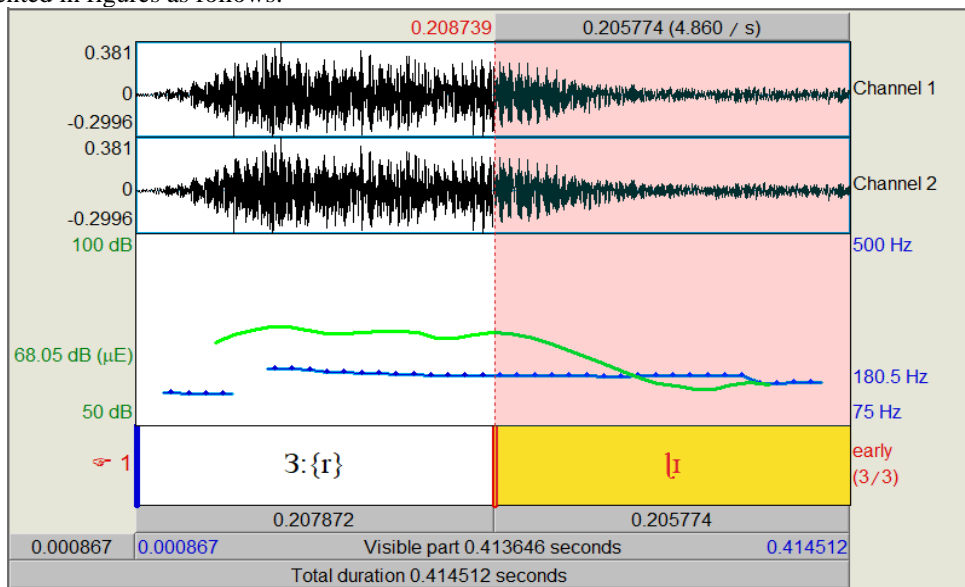


**Figure 6: A Presentation of 'mother tongue' by Speaker 2 Abia state**

In the spectrogram presentation of 'mother tongue' by Speaker 2 Abia state, the variation is peculiar to the first syllable only. The peak of the syllable has /ɔ/ instead of /ʌ/. The second and third syllables conform to the norm of the superstrate realisation. Hence, hypoarticulation is only characteristic of the first syllable. This indicates that Speaker's 2 renditions are closer to the superstrate than that of Speaker 1 as presented in Fig. 10.

**Hyperarticulation**

Like Hypoarticulation, hyperarticulation also abounds in the renditions of the studied newscasters. This characteristic is not peculiar to a specific region, it cuts across the regions. However, samples that are analysed using spectrograms are drawn from the south-south and north-west regions. The samples drawn from the south-south are those of Edo and Rivers states. The renditions of Speakers, 1 Edo in the realisation of 'early', 'word' and 'birth', are analysed while the sample drawn from Rivers state is that of Speaker 1 which is 'first'. Contrarily, one word each is drawn from each of the two states in the southwest region, Ekiti and Oyo, due to the fact that hyperarticulation is more characteristic of respondents from the southwest region than the southeast. Speaker 2's rendition of the word 'course' is the sample chosen from Ekiti state. Likewise, the sample from Oyo state, 'colonise' is that of speaker 2. The words are presented in figures as follows:

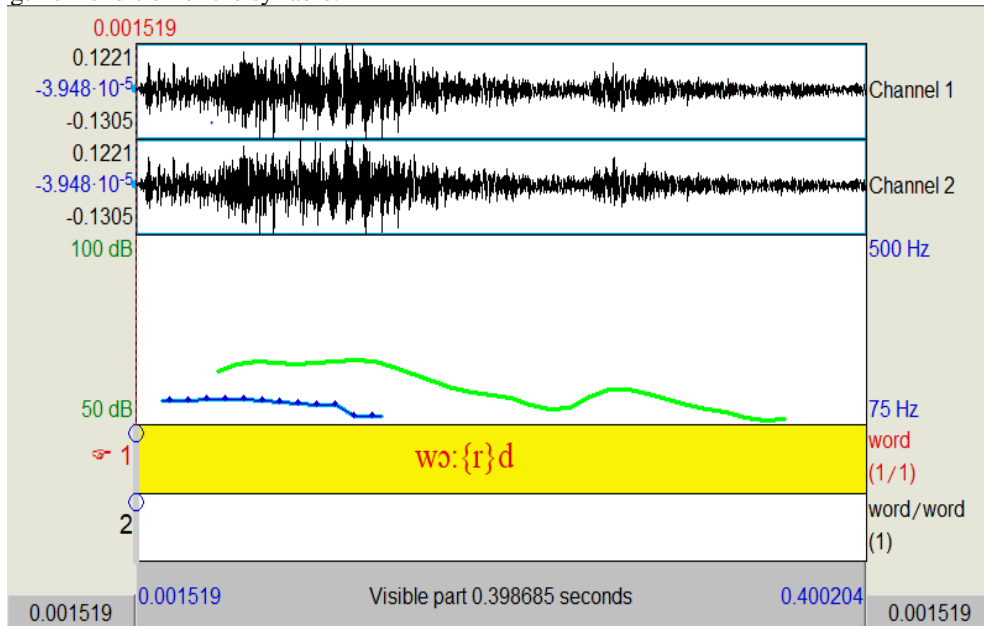


**Figure 7: A Presentation of 'early' by Speaker 1 Edo**

From the spectrogram analysis of the word, 'early' above, hyperarticulation is characteristic of the first syllable. This is indicated by the intrusion of /r/. This makes the first syllable longer in terms of the duration of

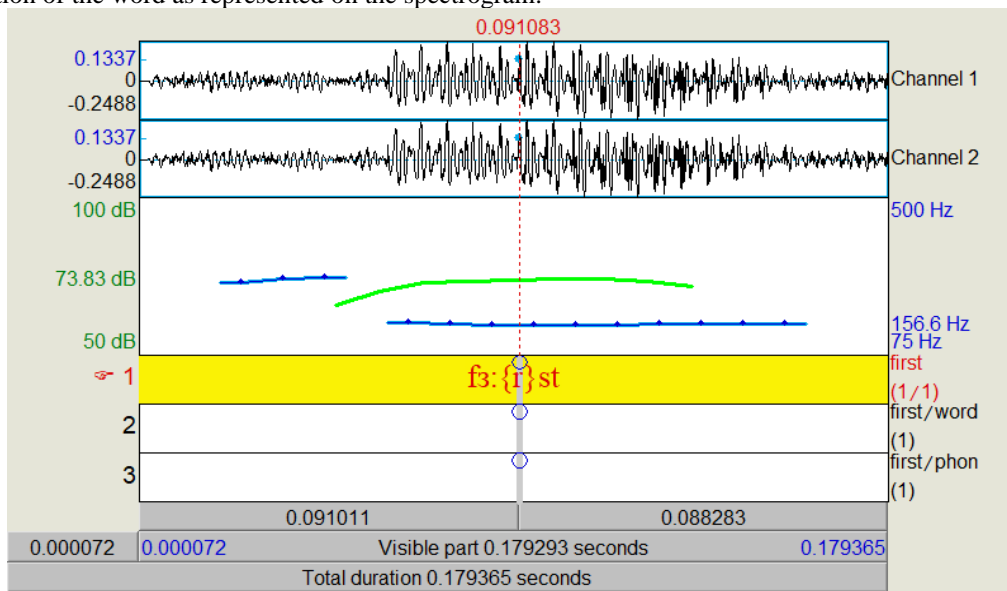


rendition. The first syllable naturally is a long syllable due to the constituent phoneme, /ɜ:/. The intrusion of /r/ adds to the length of rendition of the syllable.



**Figure 8: A Presentation of 'word' by Speaker 1 Edo**

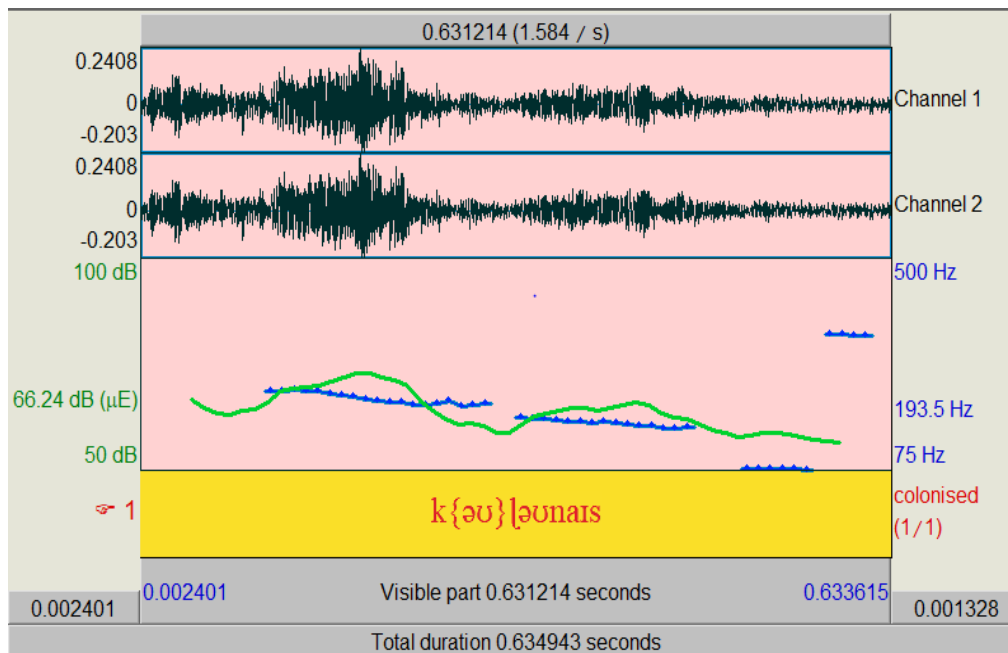
Like the spectrogram presentation of the word, 'early', the spectrogram above represents the phonemic realisation of 'word'. Apart from the peak of the syllable, /ɜ:/, which varies from the superstrate, the evidence of hyperarticulation that abound in the analysis is /r/ intrusion. This intrusion is responsible for the descending manner of rendition of the word as represented on the spectrogram.



**Figure 9: A Presentation of 'first' by Speaker 1 Rivers state**

The spectrogram above presents the analysis of the word, 'first' by speaker 1 of Rivers state. On the spectrogram, the peculiar marker of hyperarticulation like the previous spectrogram presented in this section is /r/ intrusion.

The spectrogram above presents the word, 'birth' as rendered by the respondent from Edo state. Like the previous spectrogram analyses, the intrusion of /r/ is the marked hyperarticulatory feature in the newscaster's rendition. Aside the intrusion, the coda of the syllable does not conform to the superstrate. Instead of /θ/, the newscaster resorted to the substitute, /t/. This indicates that Hypoarticulation also characterises the rendition of the speaker.



**Figure 10: A Presentation of 'colonise' by Speaker 2, Oyo state**

The spectrogram above presents the analysis of the word, 'colonise' by speaker 2 of Oyo state. On the spectrogram, the peculiar marker of *hyperarticulation* is sound substitution. /əʊ / occur as the peak of the first syllable instead of /ɔ/. The implication is that the first syllable becomes equivalent to the second syllable, which is supposed to be the most prominent of the three syllables constituting the word. The reversal effect of this variation is indicative of *Hypoarticulation*, which lacks pitch variation.

From the data analysis, it was found that hyperarticulations are marked by phonemic substitution, /r/ intrusion and vowel length elongation while hypoarticulations are indicated by lack of pitch variation, phonemic reduction and syllabic reduction. More specifically, it has been deduced that most illustrations on /r/ variation are the product of hyperarticulation rather than slips of the tongue and spelling-pronunciation inadequacies. In an attempt to display articulatory proficiency, some newscasters mispronounce certain syllables by inserting the tongue-twister /r/ where it is not supposed to be.

Not only attitude, the variations indicative of Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation in the newscasters' renditions are not devoid of cognitive interference. This means that even though the newscasters know the rules, they tend to become unconscious of the rules in the course of interaction. Also, despite the newscasters' knowledge of the rules, specific cognitive and social factors such as code-mixing/shifting, linguistic interference, anxiety, self-consciousness and impressibilities are possible reasons behind the linguistic variation. From the cognitive perspective, the newscasters' inability to maintain consistency and orderliness in their renditions often results from shift in code. Environmental factors such as the inability to differentiate which code in which context and slips are responsible for the inconsistencies in the newscasters' renditions.

### Conclusion

The issue of whether Standard British English, (SBE) or the Popular Nigerian English (PNE) is predominant among people with the highest level of education and exposure, such as newscasters due to their output in the official situations, especially, in national news has triggered the researcher's interest to embark on a study of the articulatory variations of Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation in Nigerian newscasters' renditions using the Praat software. This is carried out to unravel the myth behind argument on whether the Nigerian educated class accents can be adopted as the R.P. in this non-indigenous context. From the study so far, it has been found that the Nigerian newscasters speeches are characterised with Hypoarticulation and hyperarticulation. The use of the cognitive linguistic approach which incorporates social variables as determinants of sound variation and change, and more specifically, the adaptation of Blevins' (2004, 2006) Model of Sound Choice has served as eye-opener to the reasons behind specific synchronic patterns in the Nigerian newscasters' renditions.

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