

## **Ebira English – how many vowels?**

*Lasisi Adeiza ISIAKA*

Studies on Nigerian English accent(s) are awash with basic structures of its phonemic constituents and their geolinguistic inflections for major ethnics. Formal parameters (Brosnahan 1958, Banjo 1971, Bamgbose 1982, Udofot 2003, Gut 2004), speakers' ethnicity and social hierarchy (Jibril 1982, Jowitt 1991, Adetugbo 2004, Olaniyi 2014, Jowitt 2015) often feature as basic predictors. Based on these, widespread mergers between vowel classes, monophthongisation and speakers' vocalic catalogue have thus been reported – albeit impressionistically. Using sociophonetic parameters, I take a procedural departure in the assessment of patterns already attested for the variety – so as to dependably relate the scope of commonalities or differences, and the effects of socio-linguistic variables on vowel realisations.

24951 vowel tokens of wordlist, read speech and interview data were drawn from 30 educated Ebira English speakers of two generations: 'younger' and 'older'. All speakers were fluent bilinguals who had lived mostly in Ebiraland. Unstressed vowels and those in semi-vowel contexts were excluded. Formant values were extracted using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2013), and Lobanov-normalised for analysis.

Eleven phonemes measure as pure vowels; three of which are complex vowels reduced to monophthongs (FACE, GOAT & CURE). Five vowel classes, i.e. NEAR, SQUARE, PRICE, MOUTH & CHOICE demonstrate diphthongal quality for all speakers based on Euclidean metric between their nuclei and glides. Excluding the younger male speakers, all groups tend towards split for high back in following lateral, fricative and nasal contexts, and for low back in following nasals environments. There is however no split-conditioning effect for low central vowels. The finding is thus at variance with some earlier accounts on NigE – such as: a-thirteen vowel system (7 pure & 6 diphthongs) in Adetugbo (2009); and a 14-vowel system (8 pure vowels & 6 diphthongs) in Ugorji (2010). Also, the trajectory of some previously merged classes towards split in certain phonological contexts could signal a prospect of change-in-progress.

**Keywords:** accent, Nigerian English, variety, sociophonetics, vowels, mergers