

Question intonation patterns in educated Nigerian English

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The aim of this research is to investigate the prosodic marking of questions in Standard Nigerian English. The study focuses on intonation patterns used by educated Nigerian speakers of English when asking 'wh-' questions and 'yes/no' questions. Previous studies on intonation patterns in Nigerian English have suggested that intonation generally reflects the prosodic feature of the speaker's first language (Udofot 1997; Jowitt 2000; Gut 2005). However, there is a lack of systematic investigation of question intonation pattern and its correlation with social factors. In the present study, 101 speakers were selected from the International Corpus of English (ICE) Nigeria based on their sociolinguistic background. Social factors such as gender and ethnicity were considered. The audio recordings were annotated in Praat 5.4.0 (Boersma & Weenink 2015). The Tones and Breaks Indices (ToBI) transcription convention (Silverman et al. 1992) was used for the intonation transcription. Boundary tones (initial & final) were marked, transcribed and classified into fall, rise, fall-rise, rise-fall and level tones. Identified tokens were analysed using a mixed effects logistic regression model with Rbrul (Johnson 2008). Preliminary results show that there are similar question intonation patterns among speakers of Nigerian English, regardless of their ethnic origin or gender. The question type usually influences the final boundary tone- while the 'wh-' questions mostly end with a fall, the 'yes/no' questions end with either a rise or a fall. On the other hand, the initial boundary of the two question types mostly consists of a level tone.

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