

## A STRESSO-GRAPHOPHONEMIC ANALYSIS OF MAJOR ENGLISH PATTERNS PRONUNCIATIONS

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### Abstract

Congolese EFL Learners face various problems in acquiring English pronunciations in general. On the one hand they are at loss when to relate the way English is written –orthography and pronounced (sounds) , since, for them, this relationship is irregular, chaotic and illogic. On the other hand, they face similar difficulties in stressing accurately the words they encounter, since English stress is varying and shifting. This paper attempts to re-examine such typical Congolese students' pronunciation problems from a bases on a new global approach involving a triangular analysis of the phenomenon, that is, taking into account both the spelling (graphology), the pronunciation (phonology/sound) and the stress (stressology) under the appellation of ‘stresso-graphophonemics’

The main objective of this paper is to find out the particular spelling, stressing and phonological patterns that determine the relationship between the three factors and to make them explicit teachable/learnable enough for anyone interested in the teaching of the English language

**Key words:** Stresso-graphemics, graphology, graphophonemics, stressology, pronunciation.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Withdrawn from my doctoral dissertation entitled *A Graphophonemic Analysis of Modern British English Spelling Patterns: Theoretical Considerations and Teaching Implications for Congolese EFL Learners*, this article tries to find out and to make explicit some different rules and principles underlying the letter-to-sound relationship in **Modern British English**. It also shows how the placement of stress relates to the morphological aspect of words in which to place stress (spelling-to-stress relationship).

This article shows the triangular relationship between the spelling, pronunciation and stress.

In fact, it has been noticed that Congolese EFL Learners face difficulties in spelling, pronouncing and stressing English words. It is a proven fact that Congolese EFL ignore rules that underlie spelling, pronunciation and Stresseemics; they also ignore relationships that exist between these three parameters; spelling, pronunciation and stress.

So, the mastery of these rules and relationships between the three parameters will enable the Congolese EFL learners to solve difficulties relating to them (the three parameters).

It must be noted that only some points that deal with orthographic, phonological and stressemic rules, are analysed within this article.

## 2.0 DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. Analysis of the English spelling-to- pronunciation relationship. (The letter-to- sound relationship)

This sub point discusses out and explicits Graphological (spelling) rules with their phonological effects. To put it otherwise, the present sub point presents spelling rules and shows how words change pronunciations due to the spelling change or modification.

#### 2.1.1. The effect of the silent e on some vowels.

The silent **e** has effects on some vowels notably **a**, **i**, **o**, and **u**, i.e. the presence of silent *e* effects the change of these vowels that cease to be short (pure) and become long.

##### a. A—e = /ei /

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| (1) late → /leɪt/ | (4) hate → /heɪ / |
| (2) Make → /meɪk/ | (5) sale → /seɪl/ |
| (3) Save → /seɪv/ | (6) dale → /deɪl/ |

The dash between the vowel letter **a** and the silent **e** is replaced by a consonant. Thus, the rule can be formulated as follows:

$$a + c + e = /ei /$$

By contrast, if the silent is dropped, the vowel letter **a** becomes short and is pronounced /æ / which is different from /ei / in length.

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| E.g.(1) hat → /hæt/ | (4) dad → /dæd/ |
| (2) lack → /læk /   | (5) bad → /bæd/ |
| (3) tag → /tæg/     | (6) sap → /sæp/ |

##### b. I—e = /ai/

The above formula means that once the vowel letter **i** is followed by a consonant plus the silent e, it (i) becomes long or a diphthong as can be seen in the examples below:

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| (1) like → /laɪk/ | (4) mile → /maɪl/ |
| (2) bite → /baɪt/ | (5) bide → /baɪd/ |
| (3) hide → /haɪd/ | (6) time → /taɪm/ |

The above formula can be summarised this way:

However, the dropping of the silent e makes the vowel letter i short like in the words sit, bit, rip, pig, pic and bin. Thus, they are pronounced as follows:

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| (1) sit → /sɪt/ | (4) pig → /pɪg/ |
| (2) bit → /bɪt/ | (5) pic → /pɪk/ |
| (3) rip → /rɪp/ | (6) bin → /bɪn/ |

### c. o—e = əʊ

The vowel letter **o** becomes a diphthong /əʊ / in **British English** when met in the structure **o + c + e**.

- |                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| E.g. (1) note → /nəʊt / | (4) coke → /kəʊ/  |
| (2) hole → /həʊl/       | (5) rote → /rəʊt/ |
| (3) sole → /səʊl/       | (6) nope → /nəʊp/ |

This rule can be structured this way:

$$\mathbf{o + c + e = əʊ}$$

Some words do not follow the above rule: some, love...which are respectively pronounced /sʌm or səm/ and /lʌv/. Notice /sʌm/ is a strong form while /səm/ is a weak form.

By contrast, the vowel letter o becomes short /ɒ / when the silent e is dropped.

- |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| E.g. (1) not → /nɒt / | (4) mob → /mɒb/ |
| (2) lot → /lɒt /      | (5) rob → /rɒb/ |
| (3) hot → /hɒt /      | (6) job → /dʒɒ/ |

### d. u—e = /jʊ/ or /u:/

The above rule means that if the vowel u is followed by a consonant and the silent e, it becomes either a long /u:/ or a diphthong or /jʊ / or /ju:/.

- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| E.g. (1) mute → /mjʊt/ | (4) tune → /tju:n/  |
| (2) cute → /kjʊt/      | (5) mule → /mju:l/  |
| (3) muse → /mju:z/     | (6) huge → /hju:dʒ/ |

In other cases the vowel letter u becomes the short vowel sound /ʌ / or /ʊ/ as can be seen in some words below:

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| E.g. (1) but /bʌt/ | (4) put → /pʊt/ |
|--------------------|-----------------|

(2) luck /lʌk/                      (5) nut → /nʌt/

(3) cut /kʌt/                        (6) nun → nʌn/

So, the structure of this rule is the following:

<b>u+ c + e= jʊ:, u: or ju:</b>
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As a conclusion, the silent *e* makes the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, and *u* long vowels or diphthongs.

### 2.1.2. The importance of the silent *e* in the spelling of some words.

From Allan's writing (1977:10), it is noticed that the use of silent *e* is very important even obligatory in the spelling of some words ending in *u* or *v* for two reasons (constraints). The first reason (constraint) is Graphological while the second is phonological. In fact, it is not graphologically correct to end a word in *u* or *v* in English. Yet, phonologically, the silent *e* is obligatory in the spelling of some words because it permits changing the sound of the preceding vowel. Allan, B.V. (ibidem) states that when you are spelling a word, never end with *U* or *V*. Always put an *E* if the last sound you hear is *u* or *v*.

Examples:

- (1) clue
- (2) strive
- (3) blue
- (4) give
- (5) issue

### 2.1.3. Dropping or retaining the silent *e*

The silent *e* can be either dropped or placed at the end of a word and this latter operation gives room to the creation of a new word with a new pronunciation.

In the following lines some rules that show relationship between spelling and pronunciation are discussed.

The silent *e* is retained when a consonant suffix is added in order to create a new word.

Examples:

- (1) Force → forceful
- (2) amuse → amusement
- (3) awe → awesome
- (4) achieve → achievement

The retention of silent *e* is obligatory before adding an appropriate suffix because the dropping of the silent *e* will give way to the creation of a new word (spelling) that probably does not

exist and consequently give rise to a non-existing pronunciation or to a pronunciation different from that of the source word.

Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) like /laik/ → likely /laikli/
- (2) love /lʌv/ → lovely /lʌvli/
- (3) force /fɔ:s / forceful /fɔ:sfl

In the above examples it is clearly noticed that the derived words keep the spelling, that is, the silent e is kept and thus the pronunciations of the source words are kept as well. .

By contrast the dropping of the silent e is not acceptable because it will, as has just been stated, give room to not only new spelling but also new pronunciation different from the spelling and pronunciation to the source words. Thus, if we drop the silent e we will have example the following:

- (1) like /laik/ → \*likly /likli/
- (2) (2) love /lʌv/ → \*lovly /louvli/
- (3) force /fɔ:s / → \*forcful /fɔ:kfl

So the above words do not exist and neither do the derived pronunciations.

While the above rule dictates to keep the silent e, this one, by contrast, allows dropping the silent e.

The reason for dropping the silent e is to avoid the abnormal (incorrect) vowel team, which creates a non-existing word with a non-existing pronunciation in English.

Examples:

- (1) like → **likable**
- (2) wase → **wasing**
- (3) love → **lovable**

In the above words, it is noticed that suffixes are added. The suppression of the silent e is due to the need or obligation to keep the pronunciation of the root vowel in the source word. It is a fact that the retention of silent e before adding a vowel suffix changes the spelling and consequently changes the pronunciation too. To put it otherwise, the retention of the suffix entrain the creation of a word that probably does not exist in English.

Examples:

- (1) like → \*likeable
- (2) love → \*loveable
- (3) wase → \*waseing

#### 2.1.4. Silent e following soft c and g.

The silent e is obligatorily retained after soft c and g.

The motive behind the retention of the silent e within the words above is twofold. Firstly if the silent e is dropped before adding a suffix, the soft consonants c and g will become hard; secondly the silent e is retained as the suffix begins with a hard vowel or a consonant. In the end, the silent e is retained for a phonological reason as to keep the spelling, the pronunciation of the vowel and the consonant of the source word.

Examples: (1) Trace → traceable

(2) Nice → nicely

(3) Age → ageless

Following Fulford, J.(2012:60;64), I realise that once the silent e is suppressed (dropped), c and g become hard and thus there will be creation of a word different from the source word or better there will be creation of a word that does not exist in English.

Examples: (1) changable

(2) tracable

(3) nicable

(4) agless

All the above words do not exist in English as far as the spelling is concerned. Even if by chance, they existed would be new words and would be pronounced differently from the ones mentioned earlier.

There is a large number of words that end in e; as a consequence there are many exceptions and anomalies to this rule as stated by Fulford, J.(2012:42), ‘*Because of the large number of words that use the silent e, it is only to be expected that there might appear to be numerous exceptions and anomalies. Most of these apparent anomalies fit into patterns and obey the rules.*’

#### 2.1.5. The use of the silent e in a word ending in u.

Not many words end in u in English language. In almost every case, the silent e is dropped from these words when adding a suffix. The obligation to drop the silent e is due to the avoidance of creating a new word and thus a new pronunciation. One can see that the change of spelling alters the pronunciation of the word.

Examples: (1) argue → argument

(2) sue → suing

(3) blue → bluing

To put it otherwise, if the silent e is kept before adding a suffix, this will give way to creating new word with a pronunciation that does not probably exist.

Thus \*arguement, \*sueing, and\* blueing do not exist in English.

The asterisk means that the word is not correct or does not exist in English.

### 2.1.6. The use of the silent e with word adding in oe.

The words ending in oe keep the silent e before adding the suffix –ing. The reason is that the dropping of the silent e causes the change of the spelling and inevitably that of the pronunciation.

Examples: (1) hoe → hoeing

(2) toe → toeing

(3) shoe → shoeing

If the silent e is dropped the spellings will be different from the above ones that are correct and keep the pronunciation of the source word. So, once the silent is suppressed, the spelling will be as follows: (1) hoe → hoing (2) toe → toing (3) shoe → shoing

The aforementioned spellings do not exist in the English language and since these words do not exist in English, the pronunciation do not exist either.

This sub point has attempted to show the relationship that exists between spelling and pronunciation through the use of the silent e also called magic e.

### 2.1.7.: Words ending in -ie + suffing –ing

When a word ends in ie, we drop the e and change the i to y to avoid producing a double i:

Examples:

(1) rie → rying

(2) die → dying

(3) lie → lying

(4) vie → vying

The obligation to drop the silent e is due to the avoidance of the succession *i+e+ing*, which does not exist phonotactically speaking. In fact, this succession of vowels causes the creation of a non-existing word or non-existing spelling English. On change of pronunciation, Fulford, J.(2012: 44) states this: “Note that at times, the pronunciation changes when a suffix is added and this causes a spelling change.”

Examples:

- (1) analyse → analysis
- (2) line → lineage
- (3) prestige → prestigious

## 2.2. Relationship between Graphology and phonology through the noun pluralisation

This sub point attempts to prove the relationship existing between spelling and pronunciation in English. Along this point I will be discussing some rules on pluralisation of nouns.

The pluralisation of nouns is made by appending the bound morpheme **-s** to the singular nouns.

E.g.: (1) a book → books

(2) A lap → laps

(3) A bag → begs

(4) A pen → pens.

(5) A pencil → pencils

The plural morpheme **-s** in the above nouns is pronounced in two different ways depending on the environment or on the consonant ending the word. In fact, in (1) and (2) the plural morpheme (**-s**) is pronounced /s / since these nouns end in silent consonants (voiceless). By contrast, in (3), (4), and (5), the plural morpheme **-s** is pronounced / z / because these nouns end respectively in voiced consonants.

The nouns ending in sibilant, that is, nouns ending in **-c, -ge, -s, -ss, -x, -ch, -sh, -tch** and **-z** take **e** before adding **s**. It is an obligation to insert **-e** between the root and the plural morpheme **-s** because it is not acceptable in the English orthography to have the following successions **-ss, -xs, -chs, -shs,** and **-zs** as plural endings. So, the plural ending **-es** is pronounced /ɪz/ in English.

E.g.: (1) Race → races

(2) Charge → charges

(3) Bus → buses

(4) Kiss → kisses

(5) Box → boxes

(6) Church → churches

(7) Brush → brushes



The addition of any morpheme when making nouns plural in English causes the pronunciation change. This is one of many proofs of the direct relationship that exists between a letter and sound.

Other cases of the letter-to-sound direct relationship are found in the examples below as illustrated respectively by Venesky, R. (1970:98) and Fulford, J. (2012:48):

- (1) Leaf → leaves
- (2) Knife → knives
- (3) Calf → calves
- (4) Knife → knives

In the above given nouns it is noticed two remarkable changes, the first of which being the transformation of /f/ to /v/. Besides this transformation, there is change of the pronunciation: /f/ becomes /v/. The fact is that the singular ending /f/ is voiceless while /v/ which is part of the plural ending is voiced.

Even in the irregular plurals there is the change of pronunciation due to the change of spelling as can be noticed in some examples in the examples below:

- (1) foot → feet,
- (2) mouse → mice,
- (3) child → children,
- (4) Woman → women

The above examples show equally the relationship between the spelling and the pronunciation. As can be seen, in (1) the short vowel sound [ʊ] becomes the long vowel sound [i], in (2) [aʊ] becomes [aɪ] while in (3) [aɪ] becomes [i] and in (4) the vowel sounds [ʊ] and [ə] simply become [i].

### 2. 3 Stressing words

The placement of stress within words causes a great deal difficulties to EFL learners such as Congolese.

However, Roach, P.(2009:87) states that there exist some pieces of information to know or have before deciding on placing stress in words namely (a) *the morphology* of word, that is, you must discover whether the word is *simple* or *complex*; (b) *the nature of word (grammatical category)*, i.e. look whether the word is noun, a verb or an adjective; (c) the *length of the word* (number of syllables) and (d) *phonological structure of the syllable*, that is, see whether the syllable is strong or weak.

So, to solve the difficulties related to the stressing of words, the Congolese EFL Learners should be equipped with notions or better rules on the stress placement. In fact, the placement of stress in words depends on the pieces of information as given above.

**(a) One syllable content words (monosyllabic words) .**

One syllable content words are stressed on the only syllable/

Eg.: cat, hat, kit, sit, try, boys, buy...

One or more syllable function words are not relatively stressed. The following examples are WEAK (unstressed) FORMS, their strong forms being left out.

Eg.: have [(h)əv], an [(ə)n], you [jʊ], she [ʃɪ], they [ðə], from [frəm], of [əv], to [tə], am[əm], were [wə], can [k(ə)n], could [k(ʊ)d], would[w(ʊ)d],[(h)əv], must [məst], and [(ə)n], should [ʃ(ʊ)d]

**(b). Two syllable words (disyllabic words)**

Two syllable verbs ending in consonant clusters (CC) or in tense vowels are generally stressed on *the second syllable*. Eg.: *to abstrACT, acCENT, conDUCT, conTEST, conVERT, exPORT, present etc.*

(c) *Two syllable Nouns (adjectives) and verbs* with other endings are generally stressed on the first syllable. Eg. *ABStract, ACcent, CONduct, PREfix, PROgress, REcord, SUBject, PROtest, ATtribute, SURvey...*

Roach, P.(2009:77) states that if the final syllable is strong, then that syllable is stressed even if the first syllable is also strong. Thus:

‘apply’ ə'plai            ‘attract’ ə'trækt            ‘rotate’ rəʊ'teɪt

**(d). Three or more Syllable Words (polysyllabic).**

The words of three syllables or more are stressed according to their endings. Thus, the stress is placed:

On the syllable that immediately precedes the endings *-ic, -ical, -ity, -ia(n), io(n), -iuos, -graphy, -meter*, etc. Eg. *fanaNTtic, enerGETic, poLIitical, geoGRAPHical, uniVERSity, opporTUNity, therMOMeter*,

On the last syllable ending in *-ee(r), -oo(n), -ette, esque, ese* etc. Eg: *refueGEE, nomiNEE, volunTEER, guaranTEE, congoLESE, chiNESE, portuGESE*,

On the third syllable from the end of the words endings in neither of the above endings, except when that third syllable is a meaningless prefix: *MINIster, CONsonant, Element, COMarade, SOMetimes, CRITicism, POLicy, Politic...* **But:** *incorRECT, coOperate, biLateral, disCONtentr...*

On the first element of a compound word with a subordinate meaning: *SCHOOLboy(girl), FOUNtain-pen, SITting-room, LIFE-jacket, STEPfather, DRESSmaker.*

On both elements of a compound word with independent meaning. Eg: HEAD-WAIter, APPLE-PIE, FRONT-DOOR, TICK-TACK, SUMMer-MORning, UNbutTON, MIS JUDGE, Archi-Episcopal.

On the second element of a compound word which is the leading meaningful element. Eg: archiBIshop, to outNUmber, outRUN, overLOOK, overRULE, overDRESS, outSIDE, fourTEEN, sixTEEN, fifTEEN, chiNESE, prinCESS, afterNOON,..

### (e) Weak and Strong Forms

Busaki (2007:26) states that the most important or content words in a sentence receive the primary stress in English. These words are usually nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

By contrast, the less or function words which just connect content words to form grammatical sentences receive less stress, unless emphatically or at the end of a phrase.

Function words are in general **articles** (definite and indefinite), **pronouns**—*you, your, she, he, her, his, him, they, them*, **prepositions**—*for, of, to, at, into, from*; **auxiliary and modal verbs**—*am, are, was, were, have, has, had, been; can, could, must, should, would, shall*; **conjunctions**—*and, as, or, but, than, that* and **demonstratives**—*this, that, there, where*.

Function words have therefore two pronunciations namely **stress strong form** and **unstressed (or reduced) weak form**.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

This article aims at analysing some relationships existing between three parameters namely orthography, pronunciation and stress. Some rules relating to these three parameters have been presented herein. In fact, researches have showed that Congolese EFL Learners face tremendous difficulties in these three parameters.

Thus, the present article has been discussing the direct and triangular relationship between the spelling, pronunciation and the stress. To speak English fluently with a good accent and write it correctly Congolese EFL Learners have to be aware of rules related to spelling, pronouncing and stressing words.

For Congolese EFL to solve different problems raised within this paper, they must master rules related to graphology, phonology (pronunciation) and Stresseemics. To put it otherwise, Congolese EFL, for instance, must take into consideration the length (monosyllabic, disyllabic or polysyllabic) and the nature (verb or adjective, content or function) of words in order to correctly place stress on words. Yet, they have to master the endings of nouns (stops, voiced, sibilant etc.) in order to pronounce words correctly

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