

**A GRAPHOPHONEMIC ANALYSIS OF MODERN BRITISH ENGLISH  
SPELLING AND STRESSING PATTERNS: THEORETICAL  
CONSIDERATIONS AND TEACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR  
CONGOLESE EFL LEARNERS: FINDINGS**

**Senior Lecturer DIMANCHE LINGOSO LIFENGO**

Graduate in English Language and Literature,  
University of Kisangani, DRC.

Phone numbers: (243) 812071356, 853830384, 998901488

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to find out the different kinds and sources of errors that the first and second grades students of the English department at the Faculty of Letters and English Civilisations at Kisangani University have made on orthography, pronunciation and stressing.

The main objective of the current paper is to present findings of the research that has been conducted and to briefly propose a sample of the way teachers should help students solve difficulties they face on the three parameters—orthography, Stressemics and pronunciation.

**Keywords:** interlingual, generalization, intralingual, confusion, extrapolation

**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Withdrawn from my doctoral dissertation entitled A Graphophonemic Analysis of Modern British English Spelling Patterns: Theoretical Considerations and Teaching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. A questionnaire has been submitted to the first and second to students who have answered it in the classroom under my guidance. I have assessed their answers and found some errors made by these students as will be seen in the body of the article.

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 Stressemics; that is, they 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**

After assessing students' papers, the results have revealed that students have made two major categories of errors namely intralingual and interlingual.

The intralingual errors are those made by students either because they have not mastered rules relating the notion or the notion has not been (well) taught. It is worth of frequency.

The interlingual errors are due to the influence of one of the languages that students speak namely French or some Bantu Languages (BLs) mainly Lingala and/Swahili.

It is important to mention that the same errors can be both intralingual and interlingual. In fact, when stressing some words, for instance, some students make interlingual errors because of the French influence; they can also make be intralingual errors when stressing some words because they have not mastered stressemic rules or because these rules have not been taught at all.

### **2.1 Interlingual errors**

#### **2. 1.1 Error on words Pronunciation**

The interlingual errors within this doctoral dissertation are noticed in three questions namely in the first, the third and the tenth questions.

In the first question a series of items has been given to the students who have been asked students to underline the consonant letter s where it is pronounced /z./. It has been noticed after the analysis of students' answers the deviation derives from the influence of a language that is different from English. As far as this study is concerned, the errors that are noticed derive mostly from the French language.

#### **2.1.2 Errors on Words Stressing**

The tenth question relates the word stressing. In fact, fifty items of different lengths and natures have been given and students have been asked to place stress in those words. After the assessment of the students' papers, it has been noted that these students are influenced by French, their first language. This is noted through the different and incorrect ways of stressing words. In effect, most of students have placed stress in the last syllables of words ending in –al, –gy, –tion on the one hand. For instance, students of first and second grades have placed stress as follows: optimal', psychology', repetition' because most words if not all words that end in –gie, –al(e), –tion bear stress in the last syllable. On the other hand students of these classes—first and second grades in the English department at Kisangani University have equally placed stress in the first syllable re- of many words such as repetition, relation. So, within this questionnaire students have placed the stress in these words as follows: re'petition, rela'tion. This pronunciation is heard when many Congolese speak.

### **2.2 Intralingual errors**

The intralingual errors or deviations noted within the present dissertation are Unawareness of rules, generalization, and confusion.

### **2.2.1 Unawareness of rules**

This deviation category means that students have made errors because they are unaware or ignorant of the rules relating orthography, pronunciation; stress. or they have not mastered these rules if any.

This can be seen in the answers of some students of both first and second grades as illustrated below:

First and second grade students have manifested unawareness or ignorance of some rules as far as spelling, pronunciation and stress are concerned.

#### **a. Unawareness of spelling rules**

As far as spelling is concerned, students of these two auditoriums were unable to justify their answers. In fact, the question number eight (q. 8) has been related to spelling and student have been asked to justify their answers, that is, to say why they have chosen such or such an answer is incorrect? For instance, they (students) have been asked to justify why the spellings such as underling (from underlie), funier (from funny), hiting (from to hit) are said to be incorrect.

#### **b. Unawareness of rule of the schwa use.**

Another proof of the students' unawareness of rules on spelling occurs through their incapacity to answer the question eleven (Q.11) related to schwa. A series of items has been given as follows: a. weak b. lake c. thorough d. sat e. like f. volunteer g. sad. h. surgeon and students have been asked to underline schwa /ə/. Finally, they have been asked to justify their answers, in other terms, they should say why such a vowel or such a group of letters is pronounced as schwa.

#### **c. Unawareness of Stressing Words**

The unawareness of the rule on the stress placement has been noted in two ways or two levels. At the first level, it has been noted that some students have not placed stress in any word while at the second level many students have placed stresses as many times as there are syllables in a word. The incapacity of the students of the first and the second grades to place stress in words or to place stress correctly in words is due to the fact that these students are unaware of the rule on stress placement. The unawareness is thus the logic consequence of the fact that they have not been taught rules on stress.

#### **d. Unawareness of Phonetic Transcription Rules**

Many students have failed in the questions relating the phonetic transcription, which displaces their unawareness or ignorance of the rules on phonetic transcription. This has been remarked in that some students have not transcribed too many words and sentences; others, by contrast, have left sentences without being transcribed phonetically.

This is due to the ignorance or the unawareness of the students to apply different connected speech processes—liaison, weakening, elision, and assimilation.

### 2.3 Bad application of rules

Bad application of rules within this work is characterized by generalization, confusion and extrapolation as illustrated in the following lines.

#### 2.3.1 Generalization

Within this dissertation, students have generalized the placement of stress in compound and complex words especially. In effect, students have gone from the rule according which each word bears a stress in a syllable and from this they have extended to all the components of compound and complex words as is shown in examples below:

'Three-'wheeler instead of three-'wheeler

'Back-'pedal instead of back-'pedal

'Second-'class instead of second-'class

'Type'writer instead of 'typewriter

'car-'ferry instead of 'car-ferry

#### 2.3.2 Confusion

Students of both first and second grades have made confusion in answering this question using some English sounds. The question was formulated as follows:

2. Make, leisure, nose, finishing, off, those, cheer, transcription, cheque, jail, voyage, lie, dismiss, jumps, cooks, joke, teacher, measure, zoo, breathe, sucks, czar, chess, judge, thought, tens, these, death, nightmare, breads, thick, yours, means, looks, houses (noun),

In the list items above find out the words containing the following sound:

a. / dʒ / \_\_\_\_\_

b. /f/ \_\_\_\_\_

c. /j/ \_\_\_\_\_

d. /z/ \_\_\_\_\_

e. / ð / \_\_\_\_\_

f. /θ/ \_\_\_\_\_

g. /z/ \_\_\_\_\_

When answering this question, as has been stated at the beginning of this paragraph, a lot of students in both first and second grades have confused some sounds. In fact, in the minds of the students of these classes, there is confusion between the sounds /dʒ/ and /ʒ/, /z/ and/ ð, and / ð and /θ/.

**2.3.3 Extrapolation**

It is worth mentioning here that extrapolation is an error less committed than all other errors relating bad application of rules. In effet, it is the error that has made one student out of twenty students of the second grade.

There are cases that illustrate extrapolation within students’ answers. One of these cases is for instance, the question relating the pronunciation of the consonant s, that is the first question of the questionnaire, some students have gone from some words namely means, ours, summons, yours and hustings within which s is sounded /z/ to deduce that it is pronounced as such, i.e. /z/ in all other words. As a consequence, students have underlined the consonant s prosecutor, disable, absurd, anniversary, decisive, generosity, wearisome, basis, crisis, heresy, jealousy, courtesy and probably in all other English words.

These categories of Errors can be summed up in charts as follows:

**3.0 INTERLINGUAL AND INTRALINGUAL ERRORS FREQUENCY IN THE FIRST AND SECOND GRADES**

**3.1 Interlingual Errors Frequency in the first grade**

<i>Negative interference of French</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>On the words pronunciation</i>	7/10	70 %
<i>On stress placement</i>	6/10	60 %

**Comments**

The above chart shows that of ten students, seven whether 70 % have made error relating pronunciation because of the negative interfere,ce of French or another language while six whether 60 % have made deviation related to the placement of stress in some words.

**3.2 Interlingual Errors Frequency in the second grade**

<i>Negative interference of French</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>On the words pronunciation</i>	17/20	85 %
<i>On stress placement</i>	10/20	50 %

**Comments**

The chart above shows that of twenty students, seventeen whether 85 % have made error relating pronunciation because of the negative interference of French or another language while six whether 50 % have made error on the placement of stress in some selected words.

### 3.3 Interlingual and Intralingual Errors Frequency in the First and Second Grades

#### 3.3.1 Intralingual Errors frequency in the first grade

<b>Unawareness / ignorance of rules</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>percentage</b>
<i>Spelling</i>	7/10	70 %
<i>Identification of schwa</i>	8/10	80 %
<i>Stress placement</i>	8/10	80 %

#### Comments

From the above chart, one learns that of ten students in the first grade, seven students whether 70 % have made errors on the spelling rules while eight students whether 80 % out of ten have not able to identify schwa in a word and say the kind of syllable within which it occurs; they have been equally unable at the same rate to place stress in words.

#### 3.3.2 Intralingual Errors frequency in the second grade

<b>Unawareness / ignorance of rules</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Spelling</i>	10/20	50 %
<i>Identification of schwa</i>	17/20	85 %
<i>Stress placement</i>	17/20	85 %

#### Comments

This chart shows that half of the class has made errors on the placement of stress in words. In fact, fifty words of different natures and lengths have been given and students asked to place stress in each of them where it is required. Still the same chart learns (informs) that seventeen students whether 85 % out of twenty have committed errors on the use of schwa and have been unable to place stress correctly in the series of words which have been given.

### 4.0 Bad application of rules by First and Second Grades Students

#### 4.1 Bad application of rules frequency by First grade students

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Generalization</b>	7/10	70 %
<b>Confusion</b>	9/10	90 %
<b>Extrapolation</b>	0/10	0 %

Comment

Researchers can read from the chart above that of ten students in this class seven students whether 70 % have applied rules so badly that they have generalised some notions for instance the pronunciations of the consonants s and l, they have confused also other notions for example tone and stress as has been demonstrated above. However, none of these students has made the extrapolation as can be seen in the last line of this chart.

**5.2 Bad application of rules frequency by Second Grade Students**

<i>Types of errors</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>percentage</i>
<b>Generalization</b>	12/20	60
<b>Confusion</b>	12/20	60
<b>Extrapolation</b>	5/20	2,5 %

Comment

The above table shows that 60 % of students whether 12 students out of twenty in this class have deduced from one case or some cases to generalize for example the pronunciations of some phonemes. Still sixty percent (60 %) whether 12 students out of twenty confuse stress with tone, syllable structure with translation, which is a logical of a bad application of rules. Yet, these students have extrapolated, though in few per cent, the pronunciation of some phonemes. In fact, five students out of twenty constituting the second grade whether 2,5 % have gone for instance from the pronunciation or the spelling of some sounds or words to extrapolate to all sounds or words. This is noted within their answers to some questions like those relating the pronunciation of some words. The origin of this deviation is due to bad application of rules in relation with pronunciation or spelling.

This section shows how frequent the kinds of an interlingual and or an intralingual error or deviation discovered within this doctoral dissertation occurs in an aspect-- graphology (spelling) and phonology (including stress) first in the first grade and then in the second grade in the question (s) they (deviations) are met. To put it otherwise, this section shows the number of students has made such or such an error. This is assessed in terms of percentage.

It is worth mentioning here that intralingual errors are more frequent than the interlingual ones.

**5.0 EXPLICATIVE MODEL ON THE PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS**

This sub point proposes the implementation of new methods of teaching of phonetics to Congolese learning English as a Foreign Language by applying Look-Stress-Say, LSS approach.

It is worth recalling that by the LSS approach, also called direct method (DM) students will be asked to look at a number of words selected by (a) teacher(s), to place stress and in the end to pronounce those words.

This approach shows how the three aspects spelling, stress and pronunciation work together. In fact, students must know that there exist rules relating the orthography (spelling), stress and

pronunciation. When writing any word, the spelling must be correct in order to facilitate the placement of the stress in the word and consequently to enable the correct pronunciation of the word.

This point is about putting in practise the Look-Stress-Say method invented within the present thesis when teaching the English pronunciation to Congolese Learners of advanced level.

The method is based on the cognitive approach rather than the productive one. This means that for Congolese already accustomed to the French orthography alike the English orthography (cognates) he/she must start by identifying (know/cognitive) the orthographic configuration (grapheme) of the English word before assigning it pronunciation following rules of correspondence grapheme (spelling) – sound (phoneme) that I have set out within the theoretical part of this dissertation.

In a concrete manner, for a Congolese Learner to be able to pronounce an English word correctly for example mat and mate, he/she must refer to their orthographic structures (and eventually stressing) which are respectively <CVC#> and <CVCV#>, which present a short vowel in the first case and a long vowel in the second case, applying the rules a, b, c, d, and e on the silent vowel e. These rules predict that a stressed vowel is short when occurring or when placed before a final consonant, but it is long before a consonant followed by final vowel.

The innovation is that traditionally they learnt directly the phonetic transcription (articulatory phonetics) of a word without knowing (showing) the reason why a letter should be pronounced in such a manner (the origin of the chaotic idea of English pronunciation). By contrast, with the LSS, which is a direct method, one must know how to deduce and justify the pronunciation of a word directly from its orthographic structure.

So, before (articulating) producing any sound, one must know how to identify which sounds to be assigned to such a letter in such a configuration.

The next series of exercises are about the implementation of different rules discussed within this dissertation. In other terms, this point shows how teachers of English phonetics should apply the Look-Stress-Say approach.

## 6.0 DIFFERENT EXERCISES FOR THE LSS APPLICATION

### 6.1 Exercises on Spelling

a. Underline the words which incorrectly spelt in the following list of items:

- |              |         |         |         |          |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| a1. Stopping | stoped  | skipped | hottest | omited   |
| 2. batted    | begged  | wrapped | tugging | recuing  |
| 3. running   | whiping | hopping | pinning | admitted |
| 4. planing   | siting  | getting | flatter | beginner |
| 5. fanning   | diner   | super   | middle  | apple.   |



6. rebelled cancelled signaled metallic leveled.

a2. Why do you think the spellings of these words are incorrect?

a3. Make the following words plural and justify your answers:

1. lash	buzz	stitch	six	mat
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. miss	coach	fox	loaf	life
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. tomato	volcano	veto	mosquito	innuendo
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. fly	cry	play	supply	rely
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. bunny	bully	penny	spy	lady
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

b. What is at the basis of the maintaining or the replacement of y by i in some pluralized words in the last columns of words above (3a)?

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a4. Circle words which are correctly spelt and underline once those incorrectly spelt :

1. Love→ loveable→ lovable→ lovely→ lovly
2. Like→ likly→ likely→ likeable→ likable
3. Manage→ managable→ manageable→ managably→ manageably
4. Nice→ nicely→ nicly
5. Trace → tracably→ traceable
6. Change→ changable→ changeably
- 7 ; Charge→ chargable→ chargeable
8. Lie→ liying→ lieing.

a5. Justify your each answer to a4.

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**6.2. Exercises on Phonemic awareness**

The following exercises focus on the use of phonemes. In fact, the mastery of different phonemes or the mastery of phonemic awareness plays an important role in not only pronouncing words and but also spelling them. This shows how it deems obligatory to teach phonemes in order to equip students with phonic knowledge and skills.

Sailing in the same vein, Ofsted (2001) states that phonics teaching has increased significantly, since the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy. The debate is no longer about whether phonic knowledge and skills should be taught, but how best to teach them.

Thus, teachers of phonetics and phonology should apply or give the kind of exercises as follows:

**6.3 In the chart below, determine the number of phoneme and letter (digraph, trigraphs, quadragraphs) in each word:**

Word	Number of phoneme	Number of letters	Digra ph	Trigraph	quadragraph
Big					
Chart					
Class					
Bridge					
Trousers					
Structure					
Bought					
Ink					
Trick					
Nation					
Book					

The aim of this exercise is to enable students to not confuse phonemes with letters as Ellis, M.L. (2006:36) states in his book.

Notice: di- means two, tri means three and quadra means four. Thus, digraph means two letters that make one sound while trigraph means three letters making one sound and Quadra graph is four letters that make one sound

**6.4 In the following list of items, underline the indicated sound:**

a./ u/: room, look, soup, drum, cool, result, you, school, do, sound, glue, goose, foot, stood, would, pudding, wolf.

b. /i /: bit, seek, milk, bee, sick, tea, fit, eat, free, kick, sit, it, deal till, fill, ink, feel, did, in, village, myth, building, hymn, cabbage.

c. /ʊ/: school, but, cut, youth, put, took, drew, flew, move, whose, bloom, smooth, should, do, food, bush, brush, new, few, look, who, stood.

d. /ei/: sake, sat, let, bath, last, make, taste, take, mat, sad, bet, gate, sand, can, wade, fat, wade, fate, pacy, bat.

e. /əʊ/: either, tone, some, no, lot, prone, washing, alone, what, later, now, bowl, spotted, hope, boat, flown, toe, hot, though, gone, code, cloth, robot, home

**6.5 Exercises on pronunciation**

Look at this list of items and classify words according to ending pronunciation indicated in each column: Make, leisure, nose, finishing, off, those, cheer, transcription, cheque, jail, voyage, lie, dismiss, jumps, cooks, joke, teacher, measure, zoo, breathe, sucks, czar, chess, judge, thought, tens, these, death, nightmare, breads, thick, yours, means, looks, houses (noun), cats, pushes, debts, grief's (overwhelming), goes, cups,

Sound /s/	Sound /z/	Sound /ʒ/	Sound /ð/	/θ/
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.	6.

**6.6 Word-Structure exercises**

Teachers of phonetics should give exercises on the structures of words, structures enable students to know the numbers of syllables and to identify the syllable (s) which can bear the stress.

Teachers can, for instance, give a chart with two columns the left of which contain words whose structures will be presented in the right column.

**6.7 Give the structure of each of the following words in the table below:**

No	Words	Structures
1	At	
2	This	
3	Mad	
4	Ear	
5	After	
6	Balloon	
7	Congress	
8	Comment	

9	Straight	
10	Canoe	

**6.8 Teachers can vary questions albeit given on the same point: structure of words. The question can be put as follows: find words having the structures given in the chart**

No	Words	Structures
1	CV	
2	VC	
3	CCV	
4	CVC	
5	CVCV	
6	CCCV	
7	CCCVVC	
8	CVVCC	
9	VVC	
10	VCV	

**6.9 Exercises on Stress**

The teachers of English phonetics and phonology have to train their learners in the placement of stress. They have to do so by giving many and various exercises on this point.

Words can be classified according to the number of syllables: monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic and longer words. The grammatical categories of words can be also indicated to let learners apply stress rules.

**6.9.1 Look at the words below and place the stress within them.**

- a. Take                      bite  
     arm                        under  
     case                      nose.
  
- b. Understand repeat
  - Sugar                      transcribe
  - Nation                     begin
  - Perhaps                    receive
  - Maintain                  beginner
  - Payee                      settee,
  
- c. Address (v),            address (n),  
     import (n),            import (v),  
     insult (n),             insult (v),  
     abstract (n)            abstract (n)  
     escort (n)              escort (v)  
     permit (n)              permit (v)

Content (n)	content (v)		
d. Realisation	nationalisation	continental	realistic
Exaggeration	Naturalisation	naturalism	catastrophic
Optimality	picturesque		
e. Internationalization,	intercontinental	antiretroviral	anti-Semitism
Anti-terrorist	Underestimate	coarticulation	unkind
f. Back-pedal	downstream	Typewriter	three-wheeler
Second-class	fridge-freeze	paint-poet	singer-songwriter
Car-ferry	brainstorm		

**6.9.2 Look at each word in the lists above and say its stress.**

**7.0 CONCLUSION**

This paper attempts to find out the different kinds and sources of errors that the first and second grades students of the English Department at the Faculty of Letters and English Civilisations at Kisangani University have made on orthography, pronunciation and stressing. Yet, the present paper presents a sample of the way teachers of English should teach English particularly English phonics in order to enable their learners to use English sound correctly

The main objective of the current paper is to present findings of the research that has been conducted and to propose in brief a sample of the way teachers should help students solve difficulties they face on the orthography, Stressemics and pronunciation.

Thus, the present article has been analysing types and sources of errors made by first and second students of the English Department when spelling, stressing words and pronouncing words in English. From the analysis done herein, it has been noted that these students have done intralingual and interlingual errors.

In order to avoid these errors and make students aware of good rules relating stress, spelling and pronouncing (phonics), solutions have been proposed through explicative model on the pedagogic implications, different exercises that treat these spelling, pronunciation and stressing.

All these exercises are applied through the LSS (Look-Stress-Say) method.

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