WORD ACCENTUAL PATTERNS IN GUYANESE ENGLISH (GE) COMPARED WITH BRITISH ENGLISH (RP NORM)

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The following is a set of rules for the transformation of RP accentual patterns into GE. Examples are from Gimson 1970:228-230.

1. GE PATTERNS PREDICTABLE FROM RP

1. Pattern similarities. — GE has a similar accentual pattern to RP in the following cases:
   (1) When the accent falls on the final syllable in RP. Examples: unknown, Chinese, alone, understand, entertain.
   (2) When the accent falls on the penultimate syllable in words of three or more syllables in RP. Examples: important, foreknowledge, tobacco, September, education, unrealistic.
   (3) When the accent falls on the initial syllable in RP, in words of two syllables whose final syllable carries a secondary accent. Examples: profile, placard, female, invoice, programme, radio, yellow, hollow, swallow; exceptions: GE windów, pillów, rebáte.
   (4) When the accent falls on the antepenultimate syllable in RP, in words whose final syllable is unaccented. Examples: arithmetic, catholic, lunatic, rhetóríc, allergy, quantity, tendency, innocence, bachelor, sensible, impossible, unfortunate. Exceptions: GE yellowish, Bailiewick, mãnáger, bicycíc, bántíster, cáldéndar, cárpénter, mãníster, pássénger.

2. Pattern deviations. —
   (1) When the accent falls on the antepenultimate or the ante-antepenultimate syllable in RP, in words whose final syllable carries secondary accentuation, the accent is shifted to the final syllable in GE. Examples: constitute, appetite, realize, photograph, telephone, acclimatize, enumerate, capitulate, almanac, capitalize (pronounced in GE, constitítite, appetite, etc). Exceptions: GE cátaract, Árawak, acétylene.
   (2) When the accent falls on the ante-antepenultimate syllable in RP, in words whose final syllable is unaccented, the accent is shifted to the penultimate syllable in GE.
Examples: caterpillar, criticism, appetizing, educated, catholicism, empiricism, television (pronounced in GE caterpillar, criticism, etc.).

2. PATTERNS IN GE NOT PREDICTABLE FROM RP

In words of two syllables whose final syllable is unaccented, place of accent seems to be arbitrary in GE. Examples are given in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accent on Initial syllable</th>
<th>Accent on Final syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>battle</td>
<td>bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wrestle</td>
<td>saucer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pudding</td>
<td>orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selfish</td>
<td>greenish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic</td>
<td>Patrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coward</td>
<td>voodoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>door</td>
<td>taboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hand</td>
<td>cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhythm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exceptions: father, brother, mother, over, etc.: distinctive accent: father = progenitor; father = member of clergy. School over = school is over; but, come over: under-one hears both under and undér without difference in meaning.

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REFERENCE


DISCUSSION

WELLS (London)
I am sceptical of the can/can’t tone difference claimed for Jamaican Creole, having witnessed a misunderstanding between JC speakers due precisely to the ambiguity of /kja:n/. It is difficult to sort out the respective roles of stress, intonation and vowel length in such cases; but I believe that extra stress and/or special intonation are used with can/can’t to mark the change of polarity from can to can’t rather than to distinguish either of them as such from the other.

Your most important claim concerns the stress difference you mention between pairs such as bottle and battle in Guyanese English. If this does indeed indicate a lexical stress difference rather than a generally applicable device for emphasis by stress-shift, you have discovered a very interesting phenomenon.

HOLDER
The stress difference is lexical.

OLSEN (Toronto)
1. Does accent tend to appear more near the end of the word in Guyanese than in Received Pronunciation?
2. If question (1) is answered in the affirmative, is this tendency due to a language substratum?

HOLDER
Shift of accent is due to the West-African substratum, there is no influence of French.