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CONVERGENCE TOWARD THE ENGLISH MONOPHTHONGS: YOUNG LEARNERS IN AN L2 CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: *This paper investigates differing forms observed in the oral production of 250 respondents. These were early teenage pre-intermediate second-language learners of English. They were final-year students of two basic schools located in two different regions in Ghana, a multilingual post-colonial African country south of the Sahara. The respondents read aloud sections of familiar texts they themselves chose. The reading sessions and subsequent oral interaction sessions were video-taped, transcribed verbatim, and analysed. The respondents' oral production of the English monophthongs as captured in the recordings was compared with corresponding forms in the Ghanaian school variety of English. This variety served as the reference point for the comparisons made. Differences observed were categorised and described focusing on their plausible sources. The findings indicate that all the differing forms recognised in their oral production were mother tongue induced. This has implications for second language theory, second language research, and second language pedagogy.*

KEYWORDS: Klo-Agogo Presbyterian School, La-Bawaleshie Presbyterian School, Ghanaian School Variety, Oral Production, Young Learners.

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a complex and a puzzling phenomenon (Larsen-Freeman, 1997:141; O'Grady, 2005:43); no wonder, its cognate field of language teaching is characterised by controversy and debate (Ellis, 2011:2). One such debate currently running has to do with the model that should serve as reference point in the teaching and learning of spoken English. The current state of affairs in this regard indicates divided opinions. Some researchers, mostly practitioners of English (as a first, as a second, and as a foreign) language teaching, are of the view that because almost all the major examinations conducted on behalf of educational institutions reflect particular varieties and standards, a high amount of value should be attached to the defined varieties and standards. Other researchers (e.g. Dauer, 2005; Firth, 2009; House, 2002, 2003, 2010, 2011; Jenkins, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2014; Walker, 2010), mostly with inclination to sociolinguistics, assert that the most important thing is that the non-native user of English should try to be intelligible to other non-native users and that the context of speech would disambiguate the majority of 'problematic' pronunciations. These two clearly opposing views about language learning and language use are to be expected because of the orientation and the focus of members of each of these two somewhat different fields.

The business and focus of language teachers are different from those of sociolinguists. Sociolinguists are interested in how language is used differently in varying social contexts and how specific functions of language are used to convey social meanings and to convey aspects of users' identity. Sociolinguists, therefore, focus on users of language and have the notion that language users do not need to adhere to native-speaker norms. According to Coulmas (2013),

the principal task of sociolinguists is to uncover, describe and interpret the socially motivated choices individuals make. They are concerned with how language use interacts with, or is affected by, social factors such as gender, ethnicity, age or social class, for instance. This endeavour is clearly different from the enterprise embarked upon by language teachers. Language teachers focus on language learners and their main business is to facilitate language learning; they teach language learners to pick up a defined standard of a specific variety or varieties of a language, and the content to be taught and learnt is determined by a syllabus. So, clearly, whereas the sociolinguist would normally focus on ethnic, regional, and dialectal varieties, the language teacher would normally focus on standard varieties.

In Ghana, the high school English syllabus is categorised into five sections: Listening and Speaking, Reading Comprehension and Summary, Grammar, Composition, and Literature. Of these five aspects, it is Listening and Speaking, popularly called Oral English, which receives the least attention. The main objective of the listening and speaking section is to enable students to recognise English sound patterns so that they understand fully the English spoken to them by not only Ghanaians but also other non-native speakers as well as native speakers (CRDD 2010: xviii). The listening and speaking section of the English syllabus is designed also to help the students understand the nuances carried by the different stress patterns, especially those that relate to such common expressions as doubt and certainty.

In spite of the importance of teaching listening and speaking at this level, this section of the English syllabus rather appears to be the most neglected. According to Agor (2010:163), teachers he interviewed confessed that in many cases students were not taken through the contents of the listening and speaking section of the English syllabus. Some explained that what usually happened even in many senior high schools in Ghana was that towards the commencement of the final West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, students were usually rushed through some aspects of the listening and speaking contents with the view to preparing the students to pass the examination. So, because most of the students did not benefit much from this section of the syllabus, they usually had difficulty distinguishing between minimal pairs when speaking. For example, *pull* /pul/ may be heard as *pool* /pu:l/. In the same vein, when writing, they did not distinguish between such minimal pairs; they confused them.

The ultimate aim of this study, therefore, is to find out whether or not the respondents' oral production in English is converging toward the standard set in the Ghanaian school variety of English. The purpose is to investigate the sources of observed differing forms in their oral production. In order to achieve this aim, four objectives were pursued. These were to:

i. videotape reading sessions of 250 final-year students in two public junior high schools in order to harvest differing forms in their oral production in English.

ii. videotape interaction sessions between the respondents and the research team.

iii. compare elements of the respondents' oral production with corresponding elements in the Ghanaian school variety of English.

iv. suggest sources of differing forms and discuss their implications for pedagogy, research and theory.

Two research questions guided the execution of the objectives listed above.

i. What are the observed differences between the respondents own oral production in English and the corresponding features inherent in the Ghanaian school variety of English?

ii. What accounts for each differing form observed in their oral production of words involving the English monophthongs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fields of language teaching and language learning are characterised by lack of consensus in relation to the use of certain terminologies such as *mistakes, errors, mother tongue, second language, transfer, acquisition,* and *learning.* The first part of this section covers conceptual issues and reviews the terms listed above so that readers will be clear in their minds what these terms convey in this paper. The second part reviews the Ghanaian school variety of English which serves as the standard and yardstick for measuring the respondents' oral production in English.

Conceptual Issues

This subsection presents a kind of working definition for each of the terms listed above. There are two main categories of linguistic deviations made by second language learners: mistakes and errors. A mistake occurs when a learner fails to perform to reflect his/her competence. It may result from processing problems that prevent the learner from accessing his/her knowledge of the language rule and causing him/her to fall back on some alternative non-standard rule that he/she finds easier to access. In other words, mistakes are considered to be slips of the tongue or performance deviations and may result from tiredness, nervousness, anger, emotional stress, memory lapses, or preoccupation with something else. Mistakes do not reflect the learner's competence; they are considered to be performance phenomena and are even said to be a regular feature of native-speaker speech. It is, however, argued that mistakes may result from lack of automaticity. Errors, however, are distinguished from mistakes. An error takes place when the deviation arises as a result of lack of knowledge. Errors are recurrent and systematic and reveal one's level of competence. The term 'error' has been defined variously in the literature. Yankson (1994:xi) defines it as 'a noticeable deviation from the norm of a target language system'. He explains that an error is a breach of a target language code. A language code is a set of rules for generating well-formed structures. According to Yankson (1994:1), "a violation of this set of rules may result in errors". For Hendrickson (1987:357), errors are signals that indicate that an actual learning process is taking place but that the learner has not yet mastered that target language feature.

Mother tongue refers to the language that a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication. It need not be the language one's parents use(d) nor the language one first 'picks up' since special circumstances may cause one to abandon this language more or less completely at an early age. Mother tongue is also referred to as first language (L1). Second language, however, refers to any language other than a person's mother tongue that he/she learns or acquires irrespective of the type of the learning environment and also irrespective of the number of other non-native languages

possessed by the learner. A second language may be either a foreign language or an indigenous language. It may be spoken regularly in one's own community. It is often abbreviated to 'L2' (Ellis 2015:6).

Transfer refers to the situation where a language learner uses his/her previous knowledge as a means of organizing new linguistic data. There are two main types of transfer: intralingual and interlingual transfers. Intralingual transfer occurs when the L2 learner uses his previous knowledge of the L2 in L2 learning tasks and this may be facilitative or debilitative. Therefore, there are two types of intralingual transfer: generalisation and overgeneralisation. Generalisation occurs when the L2 learner uses his previous knowledge of the L2 in situations where that L2 rule applies. Generalisation, then, is facilitative and does not lead to errors. Overgeneralization, however, occurs when the L2 learner uses his previous knowledge of the L2 in situations where that L2 rule does not apply. This has debilitative effect because it leads to errors.

The second type of transfer, interlingual transfer, occurs when the L2 learner uses his knowledge of the L1 in L2 learning tasks. There are two types: interference and positive transfers. Interference occurs when the L2 learner uses his L1 experience as a means of organising the L2 data leading to errors. Positive transfer refers to transfers from the L1 that promote the learning of the L2. It refers to the positive influences that the L1 has on the L2. Transfer may also be categorised into forward transfer and reverse transfer. Forward transfer is the effects that the L1 has on the learning and the use of the L2 whilst reverse transfer relates to the effects that the learning and the use of the L2 can have on the L1.

Acquisition refers to the spontaneous and incidental process of 'picking up' a language. This usually results from natural language use where the language acquirer's attention is focused on meaning rather than structure. According to Krashen (1981:1; 1982:10), acquisition involves a subconscious process and bears a great deal of similarity to the way children acquire their first language. Through acquisition, people naturally develop speech proficiency and may not be consciously aware of the formal rules of the language they are acquiring. Acquisition contrasts with learning. Learning refers to the conscious processes of 'picking up' a language and usually results from consciously studying a language. Learning usually occurs in formal settings and involves the development of formal rules of a language. As Krashen (1985:1) suggests, learning contrasts with acquisition.

Two types of English as a second language contexts are distinguished. In the first context, the second language learner relocates to an English-speaking community and is helped to acquire or learn the second language. This is the type found in communities where English is used as a first language such as Britain, the United State of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In this type of context, the learner may benefit from one of two programmes – submersion or immersion. Submersion programmes place learners in mainstream English only classrooms from kindergarten. Learners are given the opportunity and the motivation to pick up the language within a few years, and this may cause subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism refers to the situation where the addition of a second language causes gradual erosion of the first language. Immersion programmes, however, gradually ease learners into the English language while they are still speaking their first language some of the time in the classroom. This helps to increase comprehension, maintain cultural ties, and promotes balanced bilingualism. Balanced bilingualism refers to the situation where the addition of a second

language leads to equal competence in the first and the second languages. In this first context, second language learners of English are usually referred to as ESL learners.

In the second type of English as a second language context, the learner does not relocate to an English-speaking community. Rather, his home country uses English as the official language. Generally, these communities were colonised by Britain and include Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Zimbabwe, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. In the process of colonisation, the English language was transplanted into these second language settings centuries ago. Because of its long contact and association with the indigenous languages, the English language has augmented itself with characteristics that were originally shared by the indigenous languages. The current paper derives from and is situated in this context. English as a second language is distinguished from English as a foreign language.

In communities where English is used as a foreign language, English has no special status. It is only recognised as an important international language. English is mainly used for inter-community purposes such as between a Russian scientist and a Japanese business person, for example. In other words, Germans, Italians, Russians, Brazilians, Moroccans, and other foreign language users of English would normally be expected to use English in interaction with people from countries other than theirs. So, in a foreign language situation, English is used as a vehicle for international communication. Countries where English is used as a foreign language do not have any history of colonisation by Britain or by any other mother-tongue speaking country. The standard of English usage in foreign language communities is closely tied up with native speakers' usage. Foreign language users of English try as much as possible to imitate native accents. English as a foreign language is often abbreviated to EFL.

The Ghanaian School Variety of English

Several varieties of English are spoken in Ghana, but the variety that serves as the point of reference for evaluating the spoken language of the respondents in this study is what is known as the Ghanaian school variety of English (henceforth: the school variety). The school variety is the standard for all educational institutions in the country. For example, it is the variety of English used by the West African Examinations Council, the National Board of Professional and Technical Examinations, by all public and private universities in the country, and by all other examination boards operating in the country. The school variety is the most prestigious and the most enviable in Ghana; it is spoken without any identifiable ethnic accent.

The Ghanaian school variety of English is the standard variety deliberately chosen on attainment of independence in March 1957 to be taught, learnt, and acquired in the school system in Ghana. It is the same variety currently being promoted among recipients of formal education throughout the country by the Ghana Education Service, the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Professional and Technical Exanimations, and by the West African Examinations Council. For example, the Ministry of Education, on behalf of the Government of Ghana, endorses the teaching, the learning, and the acquisition of the school variety in three main ways. First, it upholds the school variety through the contents suggested to be taught, learnt, and acquired in school in the form of English syllabuses designed for use at the pre-tertiary levels. Second, the Ministry sponsors the training of Ghanaian citizens (English teachers) to be equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes to confidently teach the school variety of English wherever they are stationed in the country. The Ministry of Education also

ensures that books it procures and supplies to schools throughout the country reflect the school variety of English,

On its part, the Ghana Education service promotes the teaching of the school variety by posting teachers trained in the teaching of English as a second language to all public schools in the country to teach the Ghanaian school variety of English so that products of the school system will be able to use this variety with facility. This is determined through the examination results school leavers obtain in English. The West African Examinations Council is not left out in the agenda of promoting the teaching, the learning, and the acquisition of the Ghanaian school variety of English. This council does so through the contents of English examination papers set and administered at the high school levels: junior high school and senior high school. Notwithstanding this agenda, the high school English syllabuses mandate the teaching of certain aspects of specific varieties of English including the United Kingdom Standard English, the General American English, and the Educated Ghanaian English although these labels are not explicitly used. This inclusion is necessary for making products of the school system able to communicate not only with Ghanaian citizens but also with all native and non-native speakers of English.

With this understanding, most Ghanaian citizens expect every product of the school system to be able to use the Ghanaian school variety of English with a certain level of proficiency. Consonant with this expectation, Oral English has constituted a prominent component of the high school curriculum since 1990, and is externally examined by the West African Examinations Council as Core English Paper 3 at the senior high school level since 1999. Core English is a compulsory subject studied at all the pre-tertiary levels and externally examined at the junior and the senior high school levels. Before 1999, Oral English was taught as an elective subject. So, key players in the Ghanaian school system have always ensured that products of the school system are orally proficient in the Ghanaian school variety of English.

Because the Ghanaian school variety of English is the national norm, it is commonly referred to as the Ghanaian Standard English, a label that corresponds with that found in many first language communities of English. For example, in the United Kingdom, the norm is called the United Kingdom Standard English; and in Scotland, the standard variety is called Scottish Standard English. In the United States of America and in Australia, however, the standard spoken is referred to as the General American English and the General Australian English respectively. The Ghanaian Standard English, the school variety, is not exactly the same as the variety referred to as *Educated Ghanaian English* (Sey, 1973) which is also known as *Ghanaian Variety of English* (Asante, 1997:36) because certain variations of language features that are encouraged in Ghanaian Educated English are considered unsuitable in the Ghanaian school variety.

The spoken form of the Ghanaian school variety was modelled on British Received Pronunciation, and this was to be expected. Received Pronunciation is the term that describes the regionally neutral accent used by many middle-class speakers in the United Kingdom, particularly in England. It is concerned exclusively with pronunciation and is widely used as a reference point in dictionaries and as a model for teaching English as a second language. It is the accent usually described as typically British. The term Received Pronunciation (RP) was introduced by Ellis (1869) and popularised in the 20th century mainly by British phoneticians including Jones (1917). The origins of RP are traceable to the public schools and universities of 19th-century Britain. Jones (1917) originally referred to RP as Public School Pronunciation

because it was the variety promoted by the public schools and the universities. During its heydays, RP enjoyed high social prestige in Britain, being thought of as the accent of those with power, money, and influence. No wonder, it was adopted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), it was referred to as Oxford English, it was described as posh accent, and above all, it was called the Queen's English. Although RP could be heard from educated native speakers throughout England and Wales, it was defined by Soanes and Stevenson (2011: xv) as "the standard accent of English as spoken in the south of England". The prestige enjoyed by RP began to be undermined in the 1960s and the 1970s particularly through the works of British sociolinguists. Their promotion of regional and dialectal varieties resulted in a drastic reduction of the status enjoyed by RP. For example, the British dialectologist, Trugill (1974), estimated that only 3% of people in Britain were RP speakers but this rough estimate was immediately questioned and rejected by British phoneticians including Lewis (1975). The works of advocates of non-native varieties have further reduced the status of British Received Pronunciation.

Indeed, the Ghanaian school variety currently plays the role that RP played between the 1920s and the 1970s in the British public-school system, the British civil service, and in the British Empire as a whole. It is observed in Ghanaian schools that whereas the same system of symbols is used in teaching the consonant sounds, the diphthongs, and the triphthongs, two different systems of symbols are used in teaching the English monophthongs. The first system of symbols (System A), though consists of twelve vowels, makes use of eight different symbols with the length-mark /**ː**/ succeeding some of the symbols. The length-mark accompanying the symbol indicates that the vowel is relatively long in its realisation. This system of symbols is used for teaching English as a second language at the lower levels of education in the country because it adheres to the principle of economy. The principle of economy, in this regard, holds that it is more efficient to use fewer symbols than to introduce many different symbols at lower levels of education. The other system, System B, consists of twelve different symbols and is mostly deployed at the higher levels of education. The membership of the two systems of symbols used in Ghanaian schools is shown in *Table 1* below.

Table 1: The Monophthongs and their Realisation

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
System A	iː	i	e	æ	aː	ɔ	ɔː	u	uː	ʌ	əː	ə
Example Words	eat see	fit fill	bed set	man fat	car park	pot hot	port mall	full foot	fool food	bus cup	hurt bird	ago afar
System B	i	ɪ	ɛ	æ	a	ɒ	ɔ	ʊ	u	ʌ	ɜ	ə

The British Received Pronunciation section of the literature review serves as inspiration for the use of the spoken form of the Ghanaian school variety of English as the standard and the yardstick for measuring the respondents' oral production of the English monophthongs. Also, between the two systems of symbols used for teaching the monophthongs in Ghanaian schools, System A was adopted in this paper for transcribing the words listed subsequently; firstly, as used by the respondents and secondly, as heard in the Ghanaian school variety. System A was adopted because that was the transcription system familiar to the respondents and their school teachers. So, the literature reviewed has been very instructive in guiding the current study.

Method

The context of the current study is presented in some detail in order that both the analysis and the findings would be fully appreciated. The initial part of this section attempts to fulfil this demand.

General Setting

The general setting of the study is basic schools in Ghana. These are educational institutions of eleven years' duration established to admit children of ages four and five and to prepare them to enter second cycle institutions such as senior high, technical, commercial, and vocational schools. Children who had the privilege of attending nurseries are also admitted into the basic school system at Kindergarten One. The basic school in Ghana comprises three main sections: the kindergarten, the primary, and the junior high sections. The kindergarten section is of two years' duration where, through play, storytelling, rhymes and songs, children are exposed to initial life skills, literacy skills, and numeracy skills. This two-year programme prepares the children to enter the primary section at Basic One.

The primary section spans six years, from Basic One to Basic Six. These used to be known as Classes One to Six. At this point of their education, the pupils are patiently and gradually equipped with knowledge in all the four language components of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in two languages – a Ghanaian language and English – to enable the pupils to achieve set standards for each of the six classes. Other curriculum subjects taught at the primary section include Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Music and Creative Art, Religious and Moral Education, Physical Education, and Civic Education. This six-year exposure leads the pupils to the junior high section. The junior high section comprises Basic Seven to Basic Nine and prepares the students for senior high school and its equivalent institutions.

Specific Settings

Specifically, the data for this study were obtained between October 2016 and April 2018 from final-year students of two basic schools, La-Bawaleshie Presbyterian Basic School at East Legon and Klo-Agogo Presbyterian Basic School at Klo-Agogo. It is imperative to reiterate here that, during the period mentioned above, a huge amount of data was collected from ten schools across the ten regions of the country for a more comprehensive research. But La-Bawaleshie Presbyterian Basic School (henceforth School 'A') and Klo-Agogo Presbyterian Basic School (henceforth School 'B') have been specially chosen for this publication because, out of the ten schools, these two were the only schools observed to have implemented the bilingual education policy the way they did, as reported subsequently in Section 3.3. So, in one respect, the two schools are similar; but in several respects, they are dissimilar as explicated below.

First of all, whilst School 'A' is located in the Greater-Accra Region where the capital city of the nation is situated, School 'B' is found in a remote part of the Eastern Region. There are historical and geographical relationships between these two regions. Until 1960, the Greater-Accra Region, then referred to as Accra Capital District, was geographically part of the Eastern Region. Secondly, the two schools are different in terms of context (i.e. urbanity-rusticity dichotomy). Whereas School 'A' is in an urban setting and is the nearest Presbyterian basic school to the University of Ghana at Legon, School 'B' is in a rural setting about ten kilometres

further away from Boti Falls. Also, these two schools differ in terms of population and are dissimilar with respect to facilities available to them.

School 'A' is accommodated in four standard classroom buildings of different dimensions. In addition, there are two other non-standard structures that appear to have been abandoned. The most enviable building on the compound is a two-storey building containing eighteen classrooms and other facilities. Each floor of this building contains six classrooms, two offices, one big staffroom, one storeroom for keeping cleaning tools, two big lavatories for learners, and two small washrooms for teachers. The first floor of this building accommodates one stream of the primary section, the science laboratory, and the office of the District Guidance and Counselling Coordinator. The second floor accommodates the second stream of the primary section, the School Library, and the Sick Bay. The third floor accommodates two streams of the junior high section, the computer laboratory, and the office of the School Guidance and Counselling Coordinator.

The second building is a three-classroom block that houses first-year kindergarten pupils. It contains an office, a kitchen, a storeroom, and lavatories. The third building is a six-classroom block that houses the third stream of the primary section. The fourth building is also a six-classroom block accommodating the third stream of the junior high section and three second-year kindergarten classes. But School 'B' has no standard classroom block; the primary section holds classes in a dilapidated pavilion under torn roofing sheets. The rest of the classes, including the kindergarten, are held under sheds erected by the pupils and their teachers. The two classroom structures abandoned in School 'A' would be most welcomed in School 'B'. These inequalities in educational settings and their effects on performance will be investigated in another study.

Participants and their Linguistic Backgrounds

In all, 250 participants were involved in this study, 200 from La-Bawaleshie and 50 from Klo-Agogo. They were all born in Ghana and were between ages 14 and 16. They were functionally multilingual in English and two or three indigenous Ghanaian languages. They had varying degrees of proficiency in English. In both schools, two different languages were used as medium of instruction from Kindergarten One to Basic Three, usually the dominant Ghanaian language spoken in the community where the school is situated and English. The amount of the two languages used as medium of instruction during the first five years in these two schools is approximated in percentages as follows. In Kindergarten One, 90% of academic instruction was transmitted in a Ghanaian language and 10% in English. In Kindergarten Two, the percentages changed to 80% conveyed in a Ghanaian language and 20% in English. This systematic variation of the amount in percentage of the two languages used as medium of instruction continued up to basic three where the approximations were 50% communicated in a Ghanaian language and 50% in English.

This special linguistic arrangement adopted by these two basic schools is in tandem with a version of bilingual education programme introduced in all public kindergarten and lower primary classes in Ghana in September 2008 by the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service. The policy, known as National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP), was meant to promote literacy in two languages – a Ghanaian language and English. Unfortunately, the policy was not successfully implemented at the school level perhaps because of unforeseen challenges. This issue needs further investigation. The assumption and

conviction of the teachers of the two schools was that at Basic 4, the pupils would have acquired enough English for them to be comfortably instructed in that language. This assumption resonates with the language policy for education in Ghana. (McWilliam, 1959:54). It is also worth noting that, right from Kindergarten One to Basic Nine, the pupils in both schools were taught English as a curriculum subject through the medium of English and were taught Ghanaian language as a curriculum subject through the medium of that Ghanaian language.

Specifically, two Ghanaian languages are mounted and taught as curriculum subjects at La-Bawaleshie Presbyterian Basic School and each student is required to study only one. The two languages studied are Ga and Akwapim Twi. Ga is taught in School 'A' because it is the language of the community in which the school is located, and Twi is taught because most of the learners are Twi speakers. These two languages form part of eleven indigenous Ghanaian languages approved by the Ministry of Education to be studied at the basic school level. The rest are Asante Twi, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, Guruni, Kasim, and Nzema. However, in School 'B', Dangme is the only Ghanaian language studied because all the learners speak that language.

One fascinating observation about the participants relates to the languages they used on the playground. There were numerous languages of the playground in School 'A'. These included Ga, Dangme, Twi, Fante, Ewe, Dagbani, Guruni, Dagaare, Nzema, and Guan. These numerous indigenous languages spoken in this school clearly reflects the multilingual nature of the country. According to Dakubu (1988:10), Ghana is linguistically heterogeneous with about forty-five different indigenous languages. The actual number of languages in Ghana has been variously given ranging between thirty-four and sixty depending on the individual linguist's perception of what constitutes a language. While Bamgbose (1976:14) talks about thirty-four distinct, mutually unintelligible indigenous languages in Ghana, Hall (1983:6) names forty-four languages as indigenous to Ghana. Criper (1971:6) had earlier put the figure at sixty. However, the only language of the playground in School 'B' was Dangme.

Negotiation of Objectives and Procedures

In September 2016, the current researcher introduced himself on separate occasions to the headmasters of the two basic schools for collaboration to conduct this study. At La-Bawaleshie Presbyterian Basic School, the Assistant Headmistress in charge of the junior high section was nominated to assist this researcher to source the data needed from the respondents. She held a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). She had taught at the basic school level for a total of twenty-two years, and had taught at the teacher-training college level for 3 years. At Klo-Agogo Presbyterian Basic School, the Headmaster offered to assist the current researcher in collecting the data needed from his school. He held a bachelor's degree in Education and had taught at the basic school level for nineteen years. The collaborators from both schools were very enthusiastic about the study.

Two separate meetings were held in the two schools in September 2016 where the nature and the objectives of the study were discussed. The part each party would play in the collaboration and the benefits both parties would derive from the project were clearly negotiated. The two nominated were primarily to ensure that the respondents were available and active during data collection sessions. They were generally to create a conducive atmosphere for the data to be collected from the respondents whilst the researcher was to share the results of the research

with the two schools. The respondents and their parents were supplied relevant consent forms to complete. They were taken through the various sections of the forms and the contents were fully understood. In all the parents of all the 250 pupils signed and returned the consent forms. Many visits were made to the two schools during the data collection phase of the study and the needed data for the study were successfully sourced.

Tasks Designed and Data Collected

The study sought to investigate the respondents' oral production of the monophthongs. In order to do so, the respondents graciously agreed to choose any four familiar texts and to read aloud three paragraphs from any two of the chosen texts. They also agreed to interact with the research team on individual basis. Both the reading and the interaction sessions were to be videotaped. These recorded video sessions were played back and transcribed verbatim to determine the specific monophthongs whose realisation in the respondents' speech did not conform to the school variety of English. Additionally, the actual words containing the non-converging sounds have been categorised and analysed. All these were done in order to provide adequate foundations for discussing plausible sources of the differing spoken forms identified. These tasks were executed also to suggest theoretical and pedagogical implications of the findings.

RESULTS

Differing Spoken Forms Recognised

The term "differing spoken form" refers to any realisation of an English phoneme which is not a predictable variant of that phoneme. Differing spoken forms lead to word pronunciation deviations. The Ghanaian school variety of English promotes oral productions whose segments are predictable variants of the English phonemes. In all, seven different categories of monophthong related divergence from the spoken form of the school variety were observed in the speech of the respondents. These are listed in Table 2 below. Each category of differing monophthongs was observed in more than one word. In other words, each unpredictable variant recurred in different words – between five and fourteen words. Corresponding to each differing type on the list is the number of different words whose pronunciation has been inadvertently modified by the respondents.

Table 2: Monophthong Differing Type

SN	Monophthong Differing Type	Words	Learners
1.	Intrusion of Approximant /j/ preceding Vowel /e/	14	34
2.	Replacement of Vowel /ʌ/ with Vowel /ɔ/	7	182
3.	Replacement of Vowel /i/ with Vowel /iː/	8	220
4.	Replacement of Vowel /iː/ with Vowel /i/	6	220
5.	Replacement of initial Vowel /ə/ with a foreign vowel /a/	11	250
6.	Replacement of final Vowel /ə/ with a foreign vowel /a/	10	250
7.	Intrusion of Vowel /ə/ between a cluster of consonants	5	32
Total		**61**	**250**

The actual words mispronounced by the respondents have been categorised and included rather as an appendix to this article. Corresponding to each mispronounced word on the list finds the phonetic transcription of how the respective respondent or respondents pronounced the word. Also accompanying each word on the list is the Ghanaian school variety of English transcription of the respective word.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The Oral English component of the English language syllabi introduced in Ghanaian public schools is aimed at helping learners of the school system to become intelligible to both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian users of English. To facilitate the attainment of this aim, the Ghanaian school variety of English was constituted and institutionalised in all public schools in the country as the standard variety to be taught, learnt, and acquired. In fact, the purpose for which the Ghanaian school variety of English is promoted in Ghanaian schools is not just for achieving intelligibility among speakers but more importantly for creating an enabling linguistic environment that will equip learners of the school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to acquire an ethnically neutral accent. With this in view, it is expected that the respondents in the current study, who were junior high school students, would have their diction converging to the Ghanaian school norm as they progressed in the learning of English as a second language. However, the results of the data analysed indicate seven specific areas where the respondents' realisation of some of the English vowel sounds does not appear to be converging toward the school norm. This section discusses the potential factors delaying the convergence of their oral production toward the spoken form of the Ghanaian school variety of English and how these challenges could be resolved.

The first phenomenon observed in the oral production of the respondents relates to intrusion of the voiced palatal approximant /j/ between an initial bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ and the front vowel /e/. In the Ghanaian school variety of English, the front mid vowel /e/ is considered a pure vowel and so its production is not clouded by any sound quality. However, the production of this vowel by the respondents exhibits the intrusion of the voiced palatal approximant /j/ between an initial bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ and the front vowel /e/. This finding was observed in the pronunciation of 34 respondents involving 14 words. The respondents involved in this category pronounced *beg* as /bjeg/ instead of / beg/. *Bell* was heard as /bjel/ instead of /bel/ and Belinda was heard as /bje'lində/ instead of / be'lində/. Also, some of the respondents pronounced *Pearl, pen,* and *pet* as /pjə**:**l/, /pjen/, and /pjet/ instead of /pə**:**l/, /pen/, and *pet* respectively. It was noticed that all the respondents who introduced the approximant /j/ between the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ and the front vowel /e/ are Fanti learners of English. Fanti, the dominant language spoken in the Central and the Western Regions of Ghana, is the mother tongue of these 34 respondents. The language they speak at home with their family members is Fanti. Interrogation of this situation led to the observation of a common practice among some Fanti speakers. In Fanti, when the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ precedes a back vowel, the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ is not palatalised; but when it precedes a front vowel /e/, the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ is palatalised. So, Fanti learners of English who are yet to be systematically deconditioned are likely to introduce the approximant /j/ between a bilabial plosive and the front vowel /e/. This peculiar phonological process observed in the speech of the 34 respondents is clearly a blind spot to them. The second language teacher's task in this regard

is to help turn each blind spot to a strong point in order that the learners successfully acquire the Ghanaian school variety realisation of such words.

The second clear instance of difference between the respondents' oral production and the spoken form of the Ghanaian school variety of English has to do with articulation of words containing the central vowel /ʌ/. In the Ghanaian school variety of English, the central vowel /ʌ/ is heard in words such as *bus, cup, front,* and *love* transcribed as bʌs/, /kʌp/, /frʌnt/, and /lʌv/ respectively. But these words were pronounced by 182 respondents as /bɔs/, /kɔp /, /frɔnt/, and /lɔv/. Also, the respondents replaced the central vowel /ʌ/ in the words *brother, monkey,* and *mother* with the back vowel /ɔ/ and thereby pronouncing the words as /'brɔ'da/, /'mɔn'ki/, and /'mɔ'da/ instead of /'brʌðə/, /'mʌnki/, and /'mʌðə/ respectively as pronounced in the school variety of English. It is clear, therefore, that whereas the vowel /ʌ/ exists in the phonological category of the Ghanaian school variety of English, it was not used by the respondents in the linguistic environments described above. Our checks revealed that the 182 respondents came from all the languages represented in this sample. Our checks also revealed that the central vowel /ʌ/ is not a phoneme of any of the indigenous languages spoken in the country. The nearest mother tongue sound to the target monophthong /ʌ/ is the back vowel /ɔ/ they appropriated. So, although they always heard the sound /ʌ/ in the input, they could not auditorily perceive it. An obvious deduction relative to this deficiency, therefore, is that the respondents' mother tongue is a primary source of this differing type. Implementation of the contents of the Speaking and Listening section of the English syllabus will help resolve the challenge faced by these respondents.

Another observation is that 220 respondents did not neatly distinguish between the short front vowel /i/ and its long counterpart /iː/ in their oral production. In a systematic fashion, the respondents replaced the short vowel /i/ with its long counterpart /iː/ in eight words. The words are *bill, fill, fit, hit, rich, ship, sit,* and *still*. These were heard as /biːl/, /fiːl/, /fiːt/, /hiːt/,/riːʧ/, /shiːp/, /*siːt*/, and /stiːl/. There were also instances where the long front vowel /iː/ in certain words including *beach, neat, need, teach* and *preach* were pronounced by the respondents as /biʧ/, /nit/, /nid/, /tiʧ/, and /priʧ/. The 220 respondents who confused the optimal duration for the realisation of these two front vowels came from all the ethnic groups involved in this study. It was noted that the languages represented by the respondents do not distinguish between the two vowels under discussion, so their listeners, the research team, initially did not understand exactly what they meant. These disturbances, the slight difficulty to understand instantly what a listener hears, may arise from the speaker's failure to articulate certain sounds appropriately. Disturbances may also arise from failure of the listener to recognize, by ear, certain sounds because the way the listener pronounces these sounds is different from how the speaker pronounces them. Indeed, studying oral English will help eliminate disturbances speakers create or experience when they speak or when they listen to others speak. This is why it becomes necessary that learners of English in Ghanaian schools address themselves to the speech features of that language and learn to articulate sounds and pronounce words with precision.

The fifth difference between the oral production of the respondents and the spoken form of the Ghanaian school variety of English has to do with replacement of the short central vowel /ə/ in word initial position with a modification of the long back vowel /aː/. This modified back vowel, as heard in their oral production, is not a clear member of the phonological category of English. Its realisation is equivalent to the first half of the production of the English vowel /aː/. For the

purpose of this discussion, the resultant back vowel, as heard in their speech, is represented in this paper with the symbol /a/. None of the 250 respondents could produce this vowel /ə/ appropriately when it occupied word initial position. For example, the words *about, above, afraid,* and *again* were heard in the respondents' oral production as /'a'baut/, /'a'bav/, /'a'freid/, and /'a'gein/ respectively. Meanwhile, in the Ghanaian school variety of English, these four words are pronounced as /ə'baut/, /ə'bav/, /ə'freid/, and /ə'gein/. The respondents also pronounced the words *allow, apart, avoid,* and *away* as /'a'lau/, /'a'pa:t/, /'a'vɔid/, and /'a'wei/ instead of /ə'lau/, /ə'pa:t/, /ə'vɔid/, and /ə'wei/ respectively.

In word final position too, the short central vowel /ə/ was replaced by all the respondents with the same non-English monophthong /a/. For example, the words *father, mother, brother, and sister,* which are pronounced in the school variety as /'fa:ðə/, /'mʌðə/, /'brʌðə/, and /'sistə/ were heard in the oral production of the respondents as /'fa'da/, /'mɔ'da/, /'brɔ'da/, and /'sis'ta/ respectively. Also, *doctor, teacher, farmer,* and *driver* which are produced in the school variety as /'dɔktə/, /'ti:ʧə/, /'fa:mə/, and /'draivə/ were pronounced as /'dɔkə'ta/, /'ti'ʧa/, /'fa'ma/, and /'drai'va/. This unusual shift in their realisation of the schwa /ə/ is a feature observed in the speech of some educated Ghanaian speakers of English. The respondents stressed every syllable. This tendency to stress every syllable is a transfer from the indigenous Ghanaian languages and is referred to as *syllable timed rhythm* as opposed to *stress timed rhythm* inherent in the school variety. Indeed, the spoken form of the school variety observes both stressed and unstressed syllables, and it is this stress placement feature that defines the melody of an English word. The oral English contents, which are based on the Ghanaian school variety of English, should resolve the challenge if taught and learnt as required.

The final monophthong differing category observed in the oral production of the respondents is described as intrusion of the short central vowel /ə/ in environments where it does not belong. Thirty-two of the respondents varied the pronunciation of the words *belt, film, milk, Valco,* and *Volta* during the interaction sessions. They consistently split a sequence of two consonants – the lateral /l/ and a succeeding consonant – and inserted the short central vowel /ə/ between the two consonant sounds. This category of respondents pronounced the words *belt, film,* and *milk* as /'belət/, /'filəm/, and /'miləк/ respectively, but these words are pronounced in the school variety as /belt/, /film/, and /milk/. Also, *Valco* and *Volta* were heard as /'vʌləko/ and /'vɔləta/ instead of /'vʌlkə/ and /'vɔltə. Even though the 32 respondents heard the school variety pronunciation of these words regularly in the input, they were unable to auditorily perceive the sounds involved; they could not distinguish between what they regularly heard in the input and what they themselves produced in their speech. This pronunciation challenge is known as perception blind spot. The 32 respondents spoke Dagbani, Dagaare, Kasem, or Gurune as their home language. They spoke these languages on the school playground with their siblings whenever they did not want a third person to understand the contents of their conversations. Respondents whose home languages were Akwapim Twi, Asante Twi, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, Ga, and Nzema did not exhibit this monophthong differing type in their spoken English.

There are implications of this finding for theory and research. In tracing the underlying source of this differing type, some revelations emerged. First, the four home languages of this category of respondents are spoken mainly in the northern part of the country where Arabic schools are popular. The usual practice in the north is that most parents enrol their children in an Arabic school first before signing them up in the formal English school system. It is also the case that some families make their young ones attend both Arabic and English schools concurrently. So,

is this differing type traceable to Arabic? Second, all these four languages belong to the Gur language family. So, is the Gur language family influencing the respondents' spoken English in this way? But the absolute revelation is that this monophthong differing category is traceable to the respondents' mother tongue. This revelation essentially questions the validity of Error Analysts' refutation of the statement of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Fries, 1945:9; Lado, 1957). Further research conducted in different second language contexts is needed to help unravel these questions.

This specific challenge displayed by the 32 respondents could be eliminated from their speech by deploying pedagogical interventions to systematically decondition them to auditorily perceive the difference between each pair: /'belət/ and /belt/, /'filəm/ and /film/, /'milək/ and /milk/ for example. The guarantee that this strategy would yield results is amply demonstrated in the second language literature. Corder (1967) asserts that second language learners' deviations provide the language teacher with information about how much the learner has learnt; they equip the researcher with evidence of how language is learnt; and they serve as devices by which the learner discovers the rules of the target language. This idea is supported by Broughton et.al. (1978:120) who declare that, "certainly, unless the learner is made aware of his errors, he cannot learn from them". Yankson (1994:1), expressing the same opinion, concludes that "the student must also be made aware of his systematic and recurrent errors, otherwise he cannot learn from them.

CONCLUSION

The Ghanaian school variety of English is the standard variety deliberately chosen to be taught, learnt, and acquired in the school system throughout the country. It is deployed in the school system as a way of creating an enabling linguistic environment to equip learners with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to acquire an ethnically neutral accent. It was, therefore, expected that the respondents, who were junior high school students, would have their pronunciation converging toward the Ghanaian school norm. However, the study presents five key findings derived from analysis made in relation to seven differing forms observed in the respondents' oral production of the monophthongs. All the five key findings point to the mother tongue as the underlying source of the deviations.

First, thirty-four respondents, whose mother tongue is Fanti, inserted the approximant /j/ between the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ and the front vowel /e/. This phenomenon is traceable to Fanti where whenever the bilabial plosive /b/ or /p/ precedes a back vowel, the bilabial plosive is not palatalised; but when the bilabial plosive precedes the vowel /e/, it is palatalised. Second, thirty-two respondents inserted the schwa /ə/ between clusters of consonant sounds because their source languages belong to the Gur language family. Third, all the 250 respondents consistently replaced the central vowel /ʌ/ with the back vowel /ɔ/ because the target sound does not exist in the indigenous languages spoken by the respondents; but the vowel /ɔ/ that they appropriated is a clear member of the phonological category of their mother tongues. Fourth, 220 respondents from all the ethnic groups represented in the sample failed to distinguish between the vowels /i/ and /i**ː**/ because such a distinction is not normally made in the indigenous languages in Ghana. Finally, all the 250 respondents stressed every syllable in their speech because this feature is traceable to the mother tongues of the respondents.

The study concludes that the mother tongue is the underlying source of all the differing oral forms analysed in this study. This conclusion is consonant with current thoughts held by practitioners in second language communities about the role of the first language in the acquisition of the second language, and it confirms Ellis's (2015:139) assertion that "the effects of L1 transfer on L2 learning are extensive, varied, and persistent". Pedagogical implications could also be inferred from this conclusion. The English language teacher, acting as friends with her students, could have them systematically deconditioned to auditorily perceive the difference between their own oral productions and the equivalence in the school variety. The motivation for this suggestion comes from what we already know about second language learning. Second language learners' deviations are good learning, teaching and research material (Corder, 1967). This view is consistent with Yankson (1994:1) who makes it crystal clear that "the student must also be made aware of his systematic and recurrent errors, otherwise he cannot learn from them.

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APPENDICES

Intrusion of the Short Central Vowel /ə/ Between a Cluster of Consonants.

1. *belt* was heard as /'belət/ instead of /belt/
2. *film* was heard as /'filəm/ instead of /film/
3. *milk* was heard as /'milək/ instead of /milk/
4. *valco* was heard as /'valəko/ instead of /'væ:lkə/
5. *volta* was heard as /'voləta/ instead of /'voultə/

Intrusion of the Approximant /j/ Preceding the Front Vowel /e/.

6. *bear* was heard as /bje/ instead of /bɛə/.
7. *bed* was heard as /bjed/ instead of /bed/.
8. *beg* was heard as /bjeg/ instead of /beg/
9. *best* was heard as /bjest/ instead of /best/
10. *Belinda* was heard as /bje'lidə / instead of /be'lidə/
11. *bell* was heard as /bjel/ instead of /bel/
12. *belt* was heard as /bjelt/ instead of /belt/
13. *bet* was heard as /bjet/ instead of /bet/
14. *pear* was heard as /pjɛ/ instead of /pɛə/
15. *pearl* was heard as / pjə**:**l/ instead of / pə**:**l/
16. *peggy* was heard as / 'pjegi/ instead of / 'pegi/
17. *pen* was heard as / pjen/ instead of /pen/
18. *pencil* was heard as / 'pjesil/ instead of / 'pensl/
19. *pet* was heard as / pjet/ instead of / pet/

Replacement of the Central Vowel /ʌ/ with the Short Back Vowel /ɔ/.

20. *brother* was heard as /'brɔda/ instead of /'brʌðə/
21. *bus* was heard as / bɔs / instead of / bʌs /
22. *cup* was heard as / kɔp / instead of / kʌp /
23. *front* was heard as / frɔnt / instead of / frʌnt /
24. *love* was heard as / lɔv / instead of / lʌv /
25. *monkey* was heard as / 'mɔnki/ instead of /'mʌnki/
26. *mother* was heard as / 'mɔda:/ instead of /'mʌðə/

Replacement of the Short Vowel /ə/ with a foreign vowel /a/ in Word Initial Position.

27. *about* was heard as / 'a'bout/ instead of / ə'bout /
28. *above* was heard as / 'a'bav/ instead of / ə'bout /
29. *abroad* was heard as / 'a'broad/ instead of / ə'brɔ**:**d /
30. *accept* was heard as / 'a'sept / instead of / ək'sept /

31. *afraid* was heard as / 'a'freid/ instead of / ə'freid /
32. *again* was heard as / 'a'gein/ instead of / ə'gein /
33. *allow* was heard as / 'a'lau/ instead of / ə'lau /
34. *apart* was heard as / 'a'pat/ instead of / ə'pa**:**t /
35. *around* was heard as / 'a'raund / instead of / ə'raund /
36. *avoid* was heard as / 'a'vɔid/ instead of / ə'vɔid /
37. *away* was heard as / 'a'wei / instead of / ə'wei /

Replacement of the Short Vowel /ə/ with a foreign vowel /a/ in Word Final Position.

38. *brother* was heard as / 'brɔda / instead of / 'brʌðə /
39. *doctor* was heard as / 'dɔkəta / instead of / 'dɔktə /
40. *driver* was heard as / 'draiva / instead of / 'draivə /
41. *farmer* was heard as / 'fama / instead of / 'fa:mə /
42. *father* was heard as / 'fada / instead of / 'fa:ðə /
43. *marker* was heard as / 'maka / instead of / 'ma:kə /
44. *master* was heard as / 'masta / instead of / 'ma:stə /
45. *mother* was heard as / 'mɔda / instead of / 'mʌðə /
46. *sister* was heard as / 'sista / instead of / 'sistə /
47. *teacher* was heard as / 'ti:ʧa / instead of / 'ti:ʧə /

Replacement of the Short Front Vowel /i/ with the Long Front Vowel /i:/

48. *bill* was heard as / bi**:**l / instead of / 'bil /
49. *fill* was heard as / fi**:**l / instead of / fil /
50. *fit* was heard as / fi**:**t / instead of / fit /
51. *hit* was heard as / hi**:**t / instead of / hit /
52. *rich* was heard as / ri**:**ʧ / instead of / riʧ /
53. *ship* was heard as / ʃi**:**p / instead of / ʃip /
54. *sit* was heard as / si**:**t / instead of / sit /
55. *still* was heard as / sti**:**l / instead of / stil /

Replacement of the Long Front Vowel /i:/ with the Short Front Vowel /i/.

56. *beach* was heard as / biʧ / instead of / bi**:**ʧ /
57. *neat* was heard as / nit / instead of / ni**:**t /
58. *need* was heard as / nid / instead of / ni**:**d /
59. *preach* was heard as / priʧ/ instead of / pri**:**ʧ /
60. *speak* was heard as / spik / instead of / spi**:**k /
61. *teach* was heard as / tiʧ / instead of / ti**:**ʧ /