Exploring the Feasibility of a Proposed Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard

Stephen Gyasi Ofori[1] *, Ishmael Duah[1], Kingsley Cyril Mintah[2]
1.   Liberal Studies Department, Koforidua Polytechnic, P. O. Box KF 981, Koforidua E/R
2.   General Studies Department, Wisconsin International University College, Ghana
*osgyasi@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract
This paper focuses on the Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard (GhEPS) proposed by Koranteng (2006) with modifications suggested by Ofori (2012).
The paper seeks to move for the acceptance of this local standard of Ghanaian English pronunciation (especially for teaching and examining of our students) over the Received Pronunciation. It is time a local pronunciation standard was accepted in Ghana since Görlach (1988:12) observes that English as a Second Language (ESL) countries like India and Nigeria seem to have advanced in accepting local Englishes.   After all, "the task of promoting local varieties of English cannot be left to generous outside donors alone. It is a task that must be faced squarely in our various countries" (Bamgbose 1996:16).
This paper argues that the proposed Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard to a large extent is already in practice even at the lower level of education in the country. To arrive at this, recordings obtained from some basic school pupils were analyzed phonemically. The results show that a majority of the segmental features can be identified as Ghanaian, and these features are significantly similar to the proposed Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard.
Keywords: Ghanaian English, English Pronunciation, Proposed Standard, ESL

1.   INTRODUCTION

English continues to enjoy some prestige in Ghana since it remains the de facto official language of the country. It is used in practically all formal situations and it is also the medium of instruction in schools. It is the language of the legislature, the executive, and the national newspapers. It is one of the non-native varieties of the English Language. Ghanaians have had continuous contact with the English Language from the sixteenth century (Adjaye 2005) and the language has continued to be used with varying degrees of competence in the country over the years. Today, we can identify a variety which reflects characteristics that mark off its users as Ghanaians.

It is a general feeling by some Ghanaians that their accent is better than some West African English accents, especially the Nigerian one. However, most people frown on others who deliberately sound foreign since speaking with a native-like British accent is not the aim of the educated Ghanaian (Dako 2001).

Speakers with accents that sound too British are usually ridiculed (Huber 2008). One of the identities that mark off a Ghanaian is the accent with which he or she speaks English: therefore, trying to sound foreign is a way of shedding the Ghanaian identity. The disapproval of people who try to sound foreign is also true of Nigeria and Zimbabwe where a phrase like "speaking through the nose" is heard. Again, the expression "been tos" is used to describe those English speakers who try to sound native-like in India and Nigeria (Mesthrie 2008). It is clear that English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers do not necessarily want to sound foreign but maintain their identities in their spoken English.

1.1. AIM

Over the years, it has been on paper that Ghanaian school children are taught English pronunciation which is perceived as the Received Pronunciation (RP). However, studies have shown that this model of English speaking is not attained by the children. In 2006, Louisa Ann Koranteng in her PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of English, University of Ghana sought to establish a pronunciation standard that could serve as a model with which the Ghanaian school child could be taught: a standard which could be more realistic and achievable than the RP which has proved to be a myth in the country.

To this end, this paper seeks to show how realistic and achievable Koranteng's (2006) proposed Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard (GhEPS) is. As a result, the spoken English of some final year pupils of the basic school is studied to arrive at this determination.

2.   GHANAIAN ENGLISH

The term 'Ghanaian English' has been subjected to scrutiny by some writers on the subject. While some scholars accept and use it simply as a descriptive term of a particular variety of English, others object to its acceptability. A question is raised on the use of the term: "is there a variety of English that can be legitimately described as distinctly Ghanaian?" (Gyasi 1991). It is quite true that theoretically, English spoken in Ghana is not recognized

as a legitimate variety, but in practice, a variety can be identified with the Ghanaian.

Ghanaian English can be defined as "a mode of speaking English that is recognized as of the geographic territory Ghana and can therefore be identified as Ghanaian" (Dako 2001). Most Ghanaians who speak English in Ghana or elsewhere can be identified as such without much difficulty. This means that irrespective of how hard Ghanaians, who acquire English in Ghana, strive to use the standard British accent or any other, their pronunciation always gives them away as Ghanaians.

It can be understood that "there is nothing like 'Ghanaian English' if we base our judgement on the occurrence of such errors as *equipments; voice out our views; I am going to come*" (Gyasi 1991). Interestingly, it can equally be understood that there is Ghanaian English when the argument is based on the pronunciation features that can be found in the spoken English of Ghanaians. It can also be those pronunciation features which Ghanaian English shares with some other English accents particularly English as Second Language (ESL) varieties.

From the on-going discussion, it is possible to tell if a radio discussant is Ghanaian by just listening to his or her accent (Dolphyne 1995). A Ghanaian speaker of English can easily be identified as such on local and international radio networks like the BBC or the VOA. The claim that there is a Ghanaian accent of English is genuine and legitimate and this is agreed by researchers as far as spoken English goes. It is this accent that is referred to as Ghanaian English. The view that the most effective test to identify a speaker is pronunciation (Görlach 1988) is valid because it is quite clear that Ghanaianness is expressed in spoken English more than any other area of English use (Huber 2008).

The term 'Ghanaian English' can be traced to Brown and Scragg's (1948) and Sey's (1973) publications (Ahulu 1994). The existence of this term in the past suggests that the concept with its inventories has been there for a long time.

There is a claim that speakers of English in the former British colonies modify the language in order for it to be adequate enough to serve local purposes (Widdowson 1994; Chisanga & Kamwangamalu 1997). To this end, British and American English norms are no longer relevant to the speakers in these nations (Higgins 2003). The existence of native norms of English pronunciation, to a large extent, is irrelevant to us if we can use the language comfortably to suit our culture and needs. To this end, we can therefore agree that it is inappropriate to refer to English in Ghana as a second language (ESL), the suitable term is a 'Ghanaian artifact' (Quarcoo 1994).

Some Ghanaian students make statements in casual speech that Ghanaians are the native speakers of Ghanaian English. This may be true when we look at how spoken English has been manipulated to suit local demands made on it.

Additionally, "the ownership of English rests with the people who use it, whoever they are, however multilingual they are, however monolingual they are" and that evidence from research show that to a large degree, languages are modified by their speakers (Brumfit 1995). It will therefore not be out of place for researchers like Quarcoo to refer to English in Ghana as the property of Ghanaians.

In effect, a statement such as "we should not, therefore, elevate bastardization into the status of legitimacy and call it 'Ghanaian English'" (Gyasi 1991) needs to be revised. It can conveniently be said that persistent unavoidable 'bastardization' has rather elevated itself into the status of legitimacy over the years and can be called Ghanaian English. It will not be out of place to refer to the English spoken in Ghana as Ghanaian English.

Others have discussed the problem of unintelligibility among varieties of English worldwide. For instance, if local standards are talked about, the issue of unintelligibility should not even be given any attention because modern means of transport and communications between these countries have improved over the years (Trudgill 1990).The existence of effective communication - modern means of transport and information technology defeats the argument of unintelligibility. What this means is that a Ghanaian standard of English pronunciation will survive without breaking away completely from the English used outside the country.

It is suggested that emphasis should be put on the need for intelligibility (Crystal 2003). The features that bring about intelligibility should always be given a priority like the syntax of the language and contextual use of words. For instance, if a Ghanaian pronounces *pull* and *pool* alike, the context of use will make the meaning clear to other speakers of English.

There is no better option than to agree with the assertion that "we are simply reduced to saying that there will always be some people who will object to anything that is new just because it is new" (Trudgill 1990). Some of these pronunciation features in Ghanaian English are the results of language growth, and innovation to make the language useful and relevant in the life of the Ghanaian speaker.

3. THE PROPOSED STANDARD

There is the view that "even though the Ghanaian does not aim at speaking with a British accent, the target taught in the school system is based on the sound system of what is perceived as RP" (Dako 2001). This, as a matter of concern, has led some researchers refer to Ghanaian features of spoken English that do not conform to RP as errors or deviations. The kind of effort learners of English in Ghana need to make is suspected to have

supported the concern for a different variety of English pronunciation that will be clear and intelligible to all speakers of the language.

A look is taken at the standard of Ghanaian English pronunciation that has been proposed by Koranteng in her PhD dissertation of 2006 and partly reviewed in Ofori (2012) with the purpose of moving for the acceptance of this local standard of Ghanaian English pronunciation for teaching and learning.

Accepting local standards in Ghana is necessary and timely since it is observed that ESL countries like Indian and Nigeria have advanced at accepting local Englishes (Görlach 1988). Therefore, the aim of Koranteng (2006) is to find the standard of English pronunciation in Ghana "which can serve as a reference point for teachers and examiners – a norm which will be distinctly Ghanaian and acceptable to the Ghanaian as well as to other users of English elsewhere".

It is argued, that the RP is not the model of English taught and used in Ghana. What is actually in use is a variety that can be described as Ghanaian English. The state of Ghanaian English is similar to what is said of Indian English as "the unacknowledged model in India" (Parasher 1981).

3.1. PROPOSED GHANAIAN ENGLISH (GE) VOWELS

There are phonemic representations of all twenty RP vowels in GE but their realizations are slightly different from the latter.

Accordingly, she remarks that there are seven distinct pure vowels with allophonic variations in GE, namely: / **i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u** / (Koranteng 2006).

Consequently the pure vowels in GE can be summarized as: / **i** /, / **ɪ** / as in tree, sit; / **e** / as in day; / **ɛ** / as in pen, nurse, care, problem; / **a** / as in cat, cart, about, one; / **ɔ** / as in lot, more, result; / **o** / as in go; and / **u** /, /**ʊ** / as in school, good, during.

3.2. DIPHTHONGS

Ghanaian English has six regular diphthongs though other realizations are heard from time to time, and often with some specific words. The six regular diphthongs are: /**aɪ ~ ai** / as in find; /**aʊ ~ au** / as in now; /**ɔɪ ~ ɔi** / as in joy; /**ɪɛ ~ iɛ** / as in year; / **uə ~ ua** / as in actual; / **ɪɔ** / as in sure.

TheRP / **eə** / is realized as a monophthong [ɛ] just as the central / ɜ /or /ə / are realized in GE.

It is concluded that these thirteen distinct sounds are kept apart and constitute the vowel inventory of Ghanaian English (Koranteng 2006).

3.3. PROPOSED GHANAIAN ENGLISH CONSONANTS

Ghanaian English has a total of twenty – two consonants. / **ŋ** / is just a pre-velar allophone of /**n**/. In words such as *sing*, it is highly possible to hear / **sɪng** / and not / **sɪŋ** /. / **ʒ** / is realized only as a variant of / **ʃ** / and does not have full phonemic status, as it does in RP.

There is a tendency of replacing / **z** / with / **s** / and / **t** / replaced with / **d** / in the inflectional endings of markers in the {- es } and {- ed } as in boys / **bɔis** / and worked / **wɛkd** /respectively

On the dental fricatives, / **θ** / and / **ð** / are phonemic in GE but there is an oscillation in their use as individuals switch to / **t**/ and / **d** / in their place, often unconsciously in rapid speech (Koranteng 2006).

It has been suggested that the vowels / **i** / and / **ɪ** / should be considered as two distinctive phonemes inGhanaian English since they were identified by Dako (2001), Adjaye (2005) and findings from Ofori (2012) also show the presence of these vowels.

Again, the vowels / **u** / and / **ʊ** / should also be seen as two distinctive phonemes and not as free variants since it is observed that there are some people who make a clear distinction between these sounds. At least the long central vowel should also be included in Ghanaian English pronunciation even though all research findings agree that the entire central vowels are absent in the spoken English of Ghanaians. The way forward is for speakers to be well educated on these vowel sounds.

It can be accepted that / **ŋ** / is not a consonant sound in Ghanaian English but not / **ʒ** /. / **ʒ** / may not be heard in words such as *television* or *confusion* but it exists in words like *treasure, measure* and *pleasure*(Ofori 2012).

On that basis, we can summarize Koranteng/ Ofori's model on Monophthongs (pure vowels) as:

/ **i** /, / **ɪ** / , / **e** / , / **ɛ** / , / **a** / , / **ɔ** / , / **o** / , / **u** /, / **ʊ** / , / **ɜ (:**) / **.** Koranteng's view on the Diphthongs holds valid without any modification. On consonants, we will only introduce the voiced Alveo Palatal Fricative / **ʒ** /.

4. METHODOLOGY

The basic level of education was selected for this study. In Ghana, basic level covers the first nine years of education. The basic level of education has been selected for the following reasons: It is the foundational level where English is acquired by Ghanaians in Ghana through the process of formal education. This study is therefore targeted at pupils in the final year of their first nine years of education.

Again, interestingly, there appears to be little work done on the phonology of the English spoken at the basic level of education in Ghana.

Two basic schools in the Greater Accra Region were selected for this study. Accra was chosen because it is a cosmopolitan city where most Ghanaian languages are spoken. A possible outcome is that the spoken English of

children living in such environments will show less traces of their first languages than one would have found in a less cosmopolitan environment.

There have always been two main stakeholders involved in the provision of basic education in Ghana: the government or the state and private entities. For one to represent the basic school, it is fundamentally important to include schools from both sections. Against this backdrop, a private school and a public or government-sponsored school were selected.

Twenty respondents were selected at random from the final year classes of both schools: five male and five female pupils from each school. The average age of the respondents is 15.15.

Each respondent read out a list of 231 English words that catered for each English vowel and consonant sound in the syllable initial, medial and final positions in different sound combination environments. Also, each respondent read out a list of 60 sentences in which the listed words were used. The sentence pronunciation was used mainly for verification. It must be made clear that, in instances where a word had identifiable different realizations, the sentence pronunciation was considered for the analysis.

Thus, priority was given to the sentence realization over the wordlist pronunciation because the use of sentences provided the right contexts for the words. For instance, the adjective *live* is pronounced /**laɪv**/ while its verb is pronounced / **lɪv** /, the sentence which included this word gave the context of the latter. Secondly, the sentence pronunciation is closer to free speech than the reading of the wordlist.

The pronunciation of the words and sentences was recorded using the digital recorder, Zoom H2, obtained from the Department of English, University of Ghana.

The transcription was impressionistic but accurately done to represent how the respondents pronounced the words. For objectivity, some other persons in the Department of English, University of Ghana were given copies of the recording and transcription for assessment.

The transcription was phonemic and the symbols were taken from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For each sound, no fewer than six words in different orthographies were selected for analysis. All twenty respondents' realizations of the vowel sounds were recorded.

It was thus interpreted that a realization was a preferred choice of the informants if it recorded 50% or more. In a situation where no sound's realization recorded up to 50%, the sounds with the highest realizations were selected as the respondents' realizations for that particular sound.

5.   FINDINGS

5.1. Pure Vowels

The respondents' realization of all the twelve English pure vowels has revealed six distinctive vowels in Ghanaian English.

There are no long vowels but it is possible to observe some length in some pure vowels made by some of the respondents. Nevertheless, their frequency is insignificant.

There are no central vowels; the English central vowels are realized in a number of ways either with a front or back vowel.

Interestingly, it must be said that the quality of 'backness' of the back vowels is quite suspicious. Sometimes these back vowels were actually fronted.

This study shows the distinctive pure vowels used by these selected pupils of the basic schools as:

/ **i** /, / **ɪ** /, / **ɛ** /, / **a** /, / **ɔ** /, and / **u** /.

It is clear that Koranteng/Ofori's model on Pure Vowels has ten vowels while the pupils' pronunciation has eight of them. It should be remembered that / **e** / and / **o** / exclusivelyare pure vowels because Koranteng (2006) claims speakers reduce two diphthongs to monophthongs. Again / **ɛ** / first exists as a pure vowel similar to RP's vowel 3 and secondly, it exists as a pure vowel from a reduced diphthong.

5.2. DIPHTHONGS

It is observed that the eight English diphthongs have phonemic realizations in the spoken English of the respondents. Four of the realizations are what this study labels as 'Autonomous' diphthongs. These are:

/ **ai** /, / **ɔi** /, / **au** /, and / **iɛ** /.

Unlike the 'Autonomous' diphthongs, / **ʊə** / was realized in a number of ways: [/ **ɪɔ** /, /**uɔ**/, / **ua**/]. Specifically /**ɪɔ**/ was most realized in *pure* and *sure*; / **uɔ** / was most realized in *poor* while / **ua** /was realized in *actual* by the respondents. Speculatively, these respondents are used to these realizations at their current level of English acquisition and use.

It is evident that the pupils prefer the extreme right realizations of Koranteng's model of diphthongs. Further, there has been an introduction of a new diphthong / **uɔ** / as part of the three ways of pronouncing the RP diphthong / **ʊə** /.

5.3. CONSONANTS

Plosive: The sounds identified are; / **p** /, / **b** /, / **t** /, / **d** /, / **k** /, and /**g** /.

The consonant / **t** / was realized as / **d** / in words with the past tense marker -*ed*. From the data, *flushed, shocked,*

stopped, and *locked* whose pronunciations end with / **t** / were realized by all respondents as / **d** /.

Fricative: The sounds identified are; / **f** /, / **v** /, / **s** /, / **z** /, / **ʃ** /, / **ʒ** / and / **h** /.

The dental fricatives / **θ** / and / **ð** / were realized by some Respondents but the number of occurrence was insignificant. They were instead replaced with / **t** / and / **d** / respectively.

The consonant /**ʒ** / was realized by the respondents more in –*sure* words than in –*sion* words.

Affricate: The sounds identified in the data are / **tʃ** / and / **dʒ** /.

Nasal: The sounds identified are / **n** / and / **m** /. The velar nasal sound / **ŋ** / did not occur in the data collected; it was replaced with the alveolar nasal / **n** /. In other instances / **ng** / was used to replace / **ŋ** /. It is clear at this point that the consonants of the respondents are almost what have been proposed as the standard.

6. CONCLUSION

From the present study these can be said of Ghanaian English: that, the Ghanaian English Pronunciation Standard proposed by Koranteng (2006), partly reviewed by Ofori (2012), to a large extent, is in practice at the very basic of our educational system; and that, the proposed GhEPS can be considered for the teaching and examining of Ghanaian students over RP which, for now, remains an 'albatross' around our necks.

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