# African Englishes: The Indigenization of English Vowels by Zimbabwean Native Shona Speakers

by

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## Abstract

This research is largely inspired by the increasing literature chronicling the worldwide emergence of "new Englishes" (Deyuan and David, 2009:70), particularly their subtype known as "African Englishes" (Mutonya, 2008:434). Although the variety of English that is spoken in Zimbabwe is clearly a distinct variation of African English, however it has not received significant attention from both theoretical and applied linguists. In this context, this study seeks to critically examine the vocalic characteristics of the variety of English that is predominantly spoken as a second language (L2) in Zimbabwe. In this regard, this exploratory research adopts a highly observational data collection method and qualitative data analysis approach in order to insightfully investigate the influence of native Shona phonology on the pronunciation of English vowels by Shona-English bilinguals. The main focus of this research is to analyze how native English simple monophthongs and complex vowels such as long monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs are pronounced by Shona-English bilinguals. This study shows that first language (L1) Shona speakers employ simplifying strategies such as monophthongization of diphthongs and glide epenthesis in order to reduce English diphthongs and triphthongs to five simple monophthongs corresponding to [i, e, a, o, u]. Furthermore, this investigation argues that these phonological processes are unconsciously employed by L1 Shona speakers in their spoken English in order to "build Africannes into the English language" (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997:10) and that this underpins its legitimate ownership by Zimbabweans.

## Introduction: Zimbabwe Socio-linguistically

In Zimbabwe, and perhaps the rest of Africa, English is a linguistic and cultural heritage left behind by the British at the end of the colonial administration. Furthermore, in Zimbabwe, as is the case with the majority of former British colonies, English is the official language which is spoken as a second language by the majority of Black Zimbabweans and as a first language by a few Zimbabwean whites, Indians and mixed races.

Furthermore, since the language situation in Zimbabwe is diaglosic (Fishman, 1967) English enjoys a higher status than any of the indigenous languages because is the only official language (Thondhlana and Chiwome, 1992; Mashiri, 2009; Kadenge and Mabugu, 2009). In this regard, in Zimbabwe, English is used as the sole medium of instruction from Grade three up to University level. Moreover, in Zimbabwe, English is used in predominantly formal contexts such as international and intra-national business transactions, government administration, legislation, religion, most advertisements, political manifestos and other important documents. In addition, in Zimbabwe, the majority of newspapers are published in English and radio and television programmes are mostly broadcast in this language. Also, in contrast to any of the indigenous languages that are spoken in Zimbabwe, English has a geographical spread throughout the country.

This study assumes that English acquired as a second language and spoken in language contact situations in Africa variably manifests characteristics of a speaker's "linguistic experience attained prior to the learning of the official language" (Mutonya, 2008:434). In this regard, this study assumes that L2 vowel systems such as the Zimbabwean English one have strong L1 influence. Furthermore, the mode of acquisition of English as a second language by first language Shona speakers either through reading textbooks or from teachers who are themselves non-native English speakers has made the development of a distinctive Zimbabwean variety of English a reality. Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that most Zimbabwean L1 Shona speaking teachers of English lack technical expertise on the teaching of English pronunciation (see Kadenge, 2009 et al.).

As mentioned earlier in this study, this research comes in the wake of the emergency of 'new Englishes' (Davies, 1986; Deyuan and David, 2009) the world over. 'New Englishes' is a modest term that is used to refer to recently emerging varieties of English, especially in the non-Western settings, such as India, Singapore, China and many parts of Africa. It is interesting to note that in all these contexts English is the official language, but not necessarily the first language of the inhabitants. In this regard, the term 'African Englishes' has been created and is being widely used to specifically refer to varieties of English that are evolving in Africa (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1996; Arua, 1999; Igboanusi, 2006; Mutonya, 2008). Once stigmatized as nonstandard (Mutonya, 2008), these African varieties of English have gained prestige and are becoming target forms for many new learners.

However, the existence of a single unified Zimbabwean English variety is debatable and disputable within the country, in which there is a wide spectrum of usage of local indigenous languages. Thus, we could have several varieties of English due to the influence from different local languages. Therefore, it is not yet possible for us to claim any distinct linguistic features that are common to all speakers of Zimbabwean English, but, for example, we cannot deny the fact that its speakers avoid complex vowels such as phonemically long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs in their speech.

It is also noteworthy that Kachru (1982) observes that the legitimacy of non-native varieties of English, such as Indian English, Singapore English, Nigerian English and many others in South Asia and Africa needs to be considered in terms of the social, cultural and personal factors operating in the contexts in which these varieties are used. In non-native contexts, not only has English acquired features which distinguish it from its original, ancestral form, but it also performs functions (e.g. elucidation, neutralization, self-identification etc.) which are different from those it performs in native contexts (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997).

In this regard, Kachru (1982, 1983) has consistently rejected the characterization of non-native Englishes such as Zimbabwean English in terms of acquisational inadequacy. This pragmatist position sharply contrasts with the purist school of thought which uses derogatory labels to describe non-native varieties of English as approximate systems, idiosyncratic language variations, transitional competence and inter-languages. Instead, the forms of English in non-native contexts help define a distinct, systematic, endo-normative variety of English, which cannot be judged by the norms of the older varieties of English such as British English or American English (Kamwangamalu and Chisanga, 1996; Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997). Hence, Kachru (1982) speaks of this process as 'indigenization', that is, changing the language to suit the communicative needs of non-native users in new, un-English settings such as Zimbabwe. This argument is based on the fact that the indigenization or nativisation of a language is the process through which it is accommodated and adapted to its speakers and their circumstances.

This article, hopefully, contributes, in a small but significant way, to the growing literature on the description and documentation of the linguistic features of the varieties of English that are spoken in African countries. Also, this article argues that the linguistic features that are discussed here have led to the localization and legitimate ownership of English by Zimbabweans. Having discussed the sociolinguistic status and the issue of ownership of English by non-native speakers the following section presents the major differences that exist between Shona and English vowel systems.

## Shona and English Vowel Systems: A Brief Descriptive Comparative Analysis

The brief structuralist description of vowels that is presented in this section is aimed at developing a neat and usable theoretical framework so that patterns of transfer from Shona to English can be observed systematically. This study is mainly concerned with the pronunciation of English vowels by L1 Shona speakers because there are more differences between Shona and English vowels than consonants. As a result, the influence of Shona phonology on the pronunciation of English by Shona-English bilinguals is more noticeable with reference to vowels than consonants. All Shona varieties share a simple, unmarked and symmetrical five vowel inventory. The vowels that are contrastive in Shona are: /i, e, a, o, u/. The phonemic status of these vowels is shown in the minimal set: /pírá/ 'worship', /pérá/ 'finished', /párá/ 'scratch', /pórá/ 'cool' and /púrá/ 'thrash'. In addition, all Shona vowels are monophthongs. However, in all Shona language vairations, complex vowels such as diphthongs and triphthongs do not exist (Mkanganwi, 1995; Kadenge 2003; Kadenge and Mabugu, 2009; Kadenge, et al. 2009). Furthermore, vowel length is never contrastive in Shona.

Contrary to the relatively simple Shona vowel system, the English one is fairly complex. All in all, there are twenty five vowels in English (see Roach, 1991; Gimson, 1980). In this regard, English, unlike all Shona variations, has monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs (Roach, 1991). According to Roach (1991), typical British Received Pronunciation (henceforth RP) has seven short phonemic monophthongs, namely, /ɪ, e, æ, ɒ, ʊ, ʌ, ə/ in words such as /hɪt/ 'hit', /pet/ 'pet', /bæd/ 'bad', /pɒt/ 'pot', /fʊl/ 'full', /kʌt/ 'cut' and /əbʌv/ 'above'. Also, in English, there are five contrastive relatively long vowels, namely, /i:, u:, a: ɔ: ə:/ in words such as /hi:t/ 'heat', /fu:l/ 'fool', /ka:t/ 'cart', /pɔ:t/ 'port' and /tə:n/ 'turn'. Unlike, Shona, English, has eight diphthongs, namely, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /eə/, /ɔɪ/, /ʊə/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/ and /ɔə/ in words such as /feɪk/ 'fake', /faɪn/ 'fine', /keə/ 'care', /bɔɪl/ 'boil', /hʊəm/ 'home', /raʊnd/ 'round', /bɪə/ 'beer', and /dɔə/ 'door'. The most complex vowels in English are triphthongs. These are vowels in which three components can be heard but which nonetheless count as a single vowel (Roach, 1991). Examples of English triphthongs are /eɪə/ in 'layer' and 'player', /aɪə/ in 'tyre' and 'fire', /ɔɪə/ in 'employer' and 'soya', /əʊə/ in 'power' and 'shower' and /aʊə/ in 'lower' and 'mower'. It is clear from this brief description that the English vowel system is more complex than the Shona vowel system. The following section outlines the data collection and analysis procedures that were employed in this study.

## Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In order to elicit as much natural data as possible, this study employed a data collection procedure which is primarily observational. In this regard, this study is expected to provide a "methodological framework" (Mutonya, 2008:434) that will address research concerns that have been raised in the literature over the years such as lack of "objective, systematic study" (Abdulaziz, 1991:393), "deficiency in methodology" (Adegbija, 1994:53) and "overgeneralization" (Simo Bobda 2000:264) in second language learning studies. Also, in order to collect "a linguistically accurate corpus of data" (Samarin, 1967:8) the data gathering process for this investigation involved 25 male and 25 female University of Zimbabwe students who were registered for Linguistics courses at 1st, 2nd and 3rd year levels in the year 2008. The use of multiple subjects was done so as to provide a control against individual idiosyncrasies, whether due to differences in the shape of organs of speech, different personal social histories or other factors. Also, the subjects' ages ranged from 21 to 35 years old. In carrying out this research, the University level was thought to be the ideal level to consider since it is the level at which the students are expected to have acquired an acceptable level of proficiency in their use of English.

Furthermore, the first language, which was a dominant determinant variable in the selection of informants, was Shona, which is a tonal Southern Bantu language that is spoken by the majority of Zimbabweans. The informants' sociolinguistic background was obtained through questionnaires that provided details of each informant in terms of residence, age and level of contact with L1 English speakers, linguistic history and other relevant demographic information. Although the informants came from diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds the sample chosen was ideal because it was representative of L1 Shona speakers. Also, the 1st year students had never been formally introduced to English phonetics and phonology in their pre-university education. This learning situation cuts across many pre-university Zimbabwean students who become introduced to English in primary school as the medium of instruction and a school subject.

The data were recorded using a high quality tape recorder and low noise tapes in order to capture all the sounds that were produced by the informants. This is in line with Crystal's (1987) observation that if one is to undertake a language investigation, it is imperative that he or she records each and every sound. This recording practice is essential because more insights can be gleaned from naturalistic data rather than data collected from controlled settings. The students were tape-recorded as they were reading a read aloud task and doing in-class oral presentations. Furthermore, the informants were asked to read a word list of 60 monosyllabic words which contained native English monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs relevant to the study. The subjects also read a passage specifically constructed to incorporate lexical items already presented in the word list. This procedure of data collection allows for "relatively casual and formal styles of production" (Mutonya, 2008:439) for each vowel under investigation. Soon after tape-recording, the tapes were numbered, dated and stored in a safe place.

I listened to the tapes and transcribed the data using the symbols of the IPA chart. The transcription was done in order to enable a comprehensive contrastive analysis (CA) of the recorded data and the corresponding RP pronunciation. The RP pronunciation was taken from the online Cambridge English Language Dictionary (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/) (CELD), which provides a detailed phonetic transcription for every English word. Also, the online CELD allows the researcher an opportunity to listen to the words as they are pronounced by native speakers. Hence, the overall data analysis for this investigation was couched within the framework of the contrastive analysis (CA) hypothesis (Odlin, 1989). Gass and Selinker (1994:3) note that the CA hypothesis is the starting point in order to understand all the probable range of transfers from one language to another. Further, the use of the CA approach in this study was meant to explain rather than predict the simplification strategies that are operative in the English speech of Shona-English bilinguals (S–E). In addition, the CA helped in clearly demonstrating the differences between the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers and that of native RP speakers. The following section critically examines the phonological processes that are active in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. By and large, this study argues that it is these linguistic processes (among others, such as lexical, semantic and syntactic transfers that are not examined in this study) that underpin the ownership of the English language by L1 Shona speakers.

## Phonological Processes in Indigenizing the English Language by L1 Shona Speakers Dealing with Diphthongs

This research observed that all English complex vowels such as diphthongs and triphthongs are simplified in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers through phonological processes such as glide epenthesis, monophthongization and substitution of diphthongs with monophthongs. All these phonological processes are counted for by the fact that, in Shona, there are no complex peaks (diphthongs and triphthongs). The examples given in Tables 1 and 2 below demonstrate the phonological environments in which glides are epenthesized in order to break up English diphthongs in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers. In addition, it is worth noting that the choice of epenthetic glides is systematic and depends on the nature of the phonological environment. Also, the epenthetic glides [j, w] are in complimentary distribution because each of them is restricted to a particular set of phonological environments.

## Glide [w, j] epenthesis

This research observed that glide epenthesis is one of the phonological processes that are used to simplify diphthongs in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. Epenthesis can be defined as "the opposite of loss, where loss deletes segments in a given environment, epenthesis inserts segments" (Hock, 1991: 117). In this regard, epenthetic glides, namely, [w] and [j] are used in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers (S-E) in order to break up diphthongs. The only plausible explanation for the occurrence of this process in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers is that, in Shona, there are no diphthongs. Let us see the examples in the table given below.

**Table 1: [j] epenthesis**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /bɔɪ/ | [bo**j**i] | boy |
| /eə/ | [e**j**a] | air |
| /waɪt/ | [wa**j**iti] | white |
| /pleɪ/ | [ple**j**i] | play |
| /deɪ/ | [de**j**i] | day |
| /peɪ/ | [pe**j**i] | pay |

Table 1 above shows that in the spoken English of Shona–English bilinguals the palatal glide is epenthesized in order to break up diphthongs. In this regard, as Table 1 shows, the palatal glide [j] is used to break up the following diphthongs: /ɔɪ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/ and /eə/ in the English words which are pronounced as [boji], [eja], [pleji], [wajiti] and [deji] by L1 Shona speakers. In this regard, the palatal glide [j] is epenthesized when either preceded or followed by an unrounded coronal vowel which can either be [e] or [i]. The epenthesis of [j] in this phonological environment can be accounted for by the fact that both the epenthetic palatal glide [j] and the coronal vowels [i, e] are produced at the same place of articulation, which is the hard palate. Table 2 below presents the examples that show the phonological environments in which the labio-velar glide [w] is epenthesized in order to break up English diphthongs in the spoken English of Shona–English bilinguals.

**Table 2: [w] epenthesis**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /ʃʊə/ | [ʃu**w**a] | sure |
| /ʃaʊt/ | [ʃa**w**uti] | shout |
| /daʊt/ | [da**w**uti] | doubt |
| /pʊə/ | [pu**w**a] | poor |
| /taʊn/ | [ta**w**uni] | town |
| /haʊ/ | [ha**w**u] | how |

Table 2 above shows that the phonological environments in which the labio-velar glide [w] is epenthesized are as specifiable as those for the palatal approximant [j]. In this regard, Table 2 above illustrates that the labio-velar glide [w] is epenthesized when it is either preceded or followed by the dorsal vowel [u]. In other words, [w] is used to break up diphthongs whose

elements are /a…ʊ/ and /ʊ…a/ or /ʊ…ɘ/ as in 'shout', 'town' and 'poor' respectively. As mentioned earlier in this study, the glide epenthesis process is used to break up diphthongs because native Shona phonology does not have them.

In addition, Tables 1 and 2 above show that the glide epenthesis processes result in the resyllabification of English words in the spoken English of Shona–English bilinguals. All the English words given in Tables 1 and 2 above are monosyllabic but they are realized as either disyllabic or trisyllabic words in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. This can be accounted for by the fact that the glide epenthesis processes create more syllables for the words. Consequently, the two components of the diphthong that are separated by the glide form two different syllable nuclei and hence the word is disyllabified. This is important considering the fact that in Shona variations (with the exception of Karanga) the canonical minimal size of a word is two syllables (also see Fortune, 1980; Myers, 1995).

**Monophthongization of Diphthongs**

One of the ways through which diphthongs are simplified in the English speech of Shona-English bilinguals is monophthongization. This process involves the loss of the second part of a diphthong in order to create a monophthong. As mentioned earlier in this study, this process can plausibly be accounted for by the fact that there are no diphthongs in Shona. This process is demonstrated in the examples given in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Monophthongization of diphthongs**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /leɪt/ | [leti] | late |
| /feɪs/ | [fesi] | face |
| /beɪk/ | [beki] | bake |
| /keɪk/ | [keki] | cake |
| /teɪst/ | [testi] | taste |
| /steɘ/ | [ste:] | stair |
| /ʧeɘ/ | [ʧe:] | chair |
| /reɘ/ | [re:] | rare |

Table 3 above shows that English diphthongs such as /eɪ/ in 'face', 'bake', 'cake' and /eɘ/ in 'stair', 'chair' and 'rare' are realized as either [e] or [e:] in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. Besides considering that the trigger for this process is the fact that Shona does not have phonemic diphthongs, the monophthongization process can also be accounted for by the

fact that the deleted components of the English diphthongs, that is, /ɪ/ and /ə/ are not found in the Shona vowel inventory. It is noteworthy that during the mophthongization of /eɪ/ and /eə/ only the initial component, which is equivalent to the Shona [e] is retained. It seems the [e] is retained because it has an equivalent value in Shona and is more salient than the /ɪ/ and /ə/ components of the diphthongs.

The lengthening of the remaining vowel after the monophthongization process is technically referred to as "compensatory lengthening" (Clements and Keyser, 1983:77) or "loss with compensation" (Hock, 1991:89). In this regard, Gussenhoven and Jacobs (1998:150) note that "the loss of a segment is incomplete in the sense that the time it took before it was deleted is preserved in the neighbouring segment." These observations suggest that the English speech of Shona–English bilinguals operates with some allophonic long vowels resulting from compensatory lengthening due to the loss of a member of the diphthong. The next section looks at the substitution of diphthongs by Shona monophthongs in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals.

## Substitution of Diphthongs with Monophthongs

This research also observed that in some instances English diphthongs such as /əʊ/ and /eɪ/ are realized as [o] and [a] respectively in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. It is worth noting that these Shona monophthongs are not similar to any of the two components of the English diphthongs that they substitute. This process is triggered by the desire to do away with diphthongs in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers.

**Table 4: Substitution of diphthongs with monophthongs**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /gəʊ/ | [go] | go |
| /səʊ/ | [so] | so |
| /nəʊ/ | [no] | no |
| /nəʊt/ | [noti] | note |
| /spəʊk/ | [spoku] | spoke |
| /həʊp/ | [hopu] | hope |
| /həʊm/ | [homu] | home |
| /deɪtə/ | [data] | data |

Table 4 above shows that English diphthongs such as /əʊ/ in ‘go’, ‘hope’, ‘so’, ‘home’ and /eɪ/ in ‘data’ are substituted with the Shona monophthongs [o] and [a] respectively in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. In this regard, these words are pronounced as [go], [hopu], [so] [homu] and [data] in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. The substitution of English diphthongs with Shona monophthongs, just like the glide epenthesis and monophthongization processes described and explained above, can be accounted for by the fact that diphthongs do not exist in the Shona vowel inventory. Hence, L1 Shona speakers prefer their native vowels to English diphthongs in their spoken English.

It also interesting to note that the substitution of /əʊ/ and /eɪ/ with ‘o’ and ‘a’ respectively in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals can partly be attributed to the influence of English orthography, specifically alphabetic letters ‘o’ and ‘a’ in the words ‘go’, ‘home’, ‘so’ and ‘data’ respectively. This process can be described as spelling pronunciation. Further, the spelling pronunciation process helps in removing diphthongs in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. All these observations are evidenced by how the English words in Table 4 above are pronounced by L1 Shona speakers. The following section examines the strategies that L1 Shona speakers employ in order to deal with English triphthongs in their spoken English.

## Dealing with Triphthongs

As mentioned earlier in this study, triphthongs are the most complex vowels in English. In this regard, this research observed that Shona native speakers consistently simplify triphthongs in their spoken English through the substitution of the middle elements /ɪ, ʊ/ with either the palatal glide [j] or the labio-velar glide [w]. The substitution of the English /ɪ/ with [j] is shown in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: Substitution of /ɪ/ with [j]**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /leɪə/ | [le**j**a] | layer |
| /faɪə/ | [fa**j**a] | fire |
| /lɔɪəl/ | [lo**j**al] | loyal |
| /laɪə/ | [la**j**a] | lair |
| /taɪəd/ | [ta**j**ad] | tired |

As shown in Table 5 above, the simplification process of English triphthongs in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers is achieved through the replacement of their middle element /ɪ/ with the palatal glide [j]. As a result, English words whose triphthongal vowels are /aɪə/ as in 'fire' and 'tired', /eɪə/ as in 'layer' and /ɔɪə/ as in 'loyal' and 'royal' are pronounced as [faja], [tajad], [leja], [lojal] and [rojal] in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers. As mentioned earlier in this study, the substitution of /ɪ/ with [j] is done in order to simplify the triphthongs into two separate monophthongs. This is because Shona does not have triphthongs. Furthermore, the choice of [j] to replace /ɪ/ can be accounted for by the fact that the two speech segments share similar articulatory features which are [+high], [-round] and [+coronal]. They differ in that the glide is [-syllabic] while the vowel is [+syllabic]. Also, Table 5 above shows that the replacement of /ɪ/ with [j] disyllabifies English monosyllabic words. This is because the epenthetic [j] creates an onset for the immediately following vowel. This is an important phonological process since in Shona phonology minimally disyllabic words are preferred. The table given below explores the phonological environments in which /ʊ/ is substituted with [w] in the spoken English of Shona–English bilinguals.

**Table 6: Substitution of /ʊ/ with [w]**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /a**ʊə**/ | [a**w**a] | our |
| /a**ʊə**z/ | [a**w**azi | ours |
| /da**ʊə**rɪ/ | [da**w**ari] | dowry |
| /l**əʊə**/ | [lo**w**a] | lower |

The phonological environments in which /ʊ/ is replaced with [w] in the English speech of Shona–English bilinguals are as specifiable as those in which /ɪ/ is replaced with [j]. As shown in Table 6 above, the back and rounded English vowel /ʊ/ which is the middle element of some English triphthongs is replaced with the labio-velar glide [w] in the English speech of Shona-English bilinguals. As mentioned earlier in this study, this process is accounted by the fact that in Shona there are no triphthongs. It is also noteworthy that the choice of [w] to replace /ʊ/ can be explained by the fact that both speech segments share similar articulatory features. In this regard, they are both produced at the velum also known as the soft palate. Also, both of them are rounded, back and high. They only differ in that the vowel is syllabic while the glide is nonsyllabic. So far, this research has shown that L1 Shona speakers of English deal with English diphthongs and triphthongs (complex peaks) through glide epenthesis, monophthongization of diphthongs and substitution. As mentioned earlier in this study, these phonological processes are triggered by the fact that in native Shona phonology there are no complex syllable peaks, that is, diphthongs and triphthongs. The following sections examine the phonological processes that are used to deal with native English monophthongs that do not have equivalent values in Shona in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers. These processes include vowel length reduction and monophthong substitution.

## Vowel Length Reduction

As mentioned earlier in this study, English utilizes vowel length phonemically while Shona does not. In this regard, the findings of this study show that English phonemically long vowels such as /i:/, /a:/ and /u:/ are realized as short vowels [i], [a], [u] respectively in the English speech of Shona-English bilinguals. The major explanation for the vowel length reduction is that in Shona there are no phonologically long vowels. Examples illustrating this process are given in Table 7 below:

**Table 7: Vowel length reduction**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /sɪk/ | [siki] | sick |
| /si:k/ | [siki] | seek |
| /bɪt/ | [biti] | bit |
| /bi:t/ | [biti] | beat |
| /pʊl/ | [pul] | pull |
| /pu:l/ | [pul] | pool |
| /a:k/ | [aki] | ark |
| /a:t/ | [ati] | art |

Table 7 above shows that English phonemically long vowels are reduced to short vowels in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. This is because, in Shona, vowel length is predictable or noncontrastive.

It is also noteworthy that the vowel length reduction process in the English speech of Shona–English bilinguals causes "under-differentiation of phonemes" (Weinreich, 1953:18). According to Weinreich (1953:18), under-differentiation of phonemes is when "two sounds in the secondary system [English] whose counterparts are not distinguished in the primary [Shona] system are confused." In this context, Table 7 above shows that the English phonemic distinction between /ɪ/ and /i:/, /ʊ/ and /u:/ and /a/ and /a:/ is non-operative or is completely lost in the English speech of Shona–English bilinguals. In this regard, due to the underdifferentiation of English long and short phonemic vowels the English speech of Shona–English bilinguals operates with fewer vowel contrasts than English. Also, it is noteworthy that the context of use helps in dealing with the lexical ambiguity of homophonous words that result from the under-differentiation of phonemes in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. The section below looks at how English monophthongs are substituted with Shona monophthongs in the English speech of Shona-English bilinguals.

## Substitution of Monophthongs

This research observed that the native English monophthongal vowels that do not have equivalent values in Shona are substituted with Shona monophthongs that are articulatorily close to them in the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. Vowel substitution is a process that involves the replacement of a vowel with another in a particular phonological structure. Also, Weinreich (1953:14) says that phoneme substitution is "when two phonemes are identified as identical across languages when in fact their production differs." Table 8 given below shows the various vowel substitutional patterns that occur in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers.

**Table 8: Substitution of English monophthongs**

| RP pronunciation | S-E pronunciation | meaning |
|---|---|---|
| /bʌt/ | [bat] | but |
| /mʌg/ | [mag] | mug |
| /ka:t/ | [kat] | cart |
| /hæt/ | [het] | hat |
| /kæt/ | [ket] | cat |
| /bɜ:d/ | [bed] | bird |
| /bæd/ | [bed] | bad |
| /lɪv/ | [livi] | live |
| /ha:f/ | [hafu] | half |
| /pɔt/ | [pot] | pot |
| /fʊl/ | [ful] | full |
| /əbeɪ/ | [obeji] | obey |
| /ətend/ | [atendi] | attend |
| /kɒlə/ | [kola] | collar |
| /rɪzən/ | [rizen] | reason |

Table 8 above shows that there are a number of English monophthongs that are substituted with Shona monophthongs in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers. In this regard, the English monophthongs such as /æ, ɜ:/ are replaced with [e], /ɔ, ɒ/ are replaced with [o], /ʌ, a:, ə/ are replaced with [a], /ʊ/ is replaced with [u] and /ɪ/ is replaced with [i] in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers. The main observation here is that Shona speakers substitute English monophthongs with Shona monophthongs in their English speech.

However, Table 8 above shows that the English schwa /ə/ has no constant substitute in the spoken English of L1 Shona speakers. In this regard, in RP words such as /əbeɪ/, /rɪzən/ and /ətend/ which are pronounced as [obeji], [rizen] and [atendi] in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers /ə/ is variously realized as [o], [e] and [a] respectively. Although Shona does not have /ə/, these substitutions can be attributed to the influence of English orthography in the learning of English by L1 Shona speakers. For example, in S-E pronunciation of [obeji] and [atendi] the substitution of /ə/ with [o] and [a] can be attributed to the influence of the alphabetic letters 'o' and 'a' respectively. Also, the substitution of /æ/ with [a] in words such as /æftə/ 'after' and, /æmen/ 'amen' which are pronounced as [afta] and [ameni] in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers is a clear case of the influence of the English writing system.

## Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This exploratory and explanatory research employed empirical tools of data collection and a qualitative theoretical framework in order to insightfully examine the influence of Shona phonology of the pronunciation of English vowels by L1 Shona speakers. The results of this investigation showed that the twenty five vowels of the RP English are reduced to five monophthongs in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers, namely, [a], [e], [i], [o] and [u]. Furthermore, the findings of this research demonstrated that this is achieved mainly through simplification strategies such as monophthongization of diphthongs, glide epenthesis, vowel length reduction and vowel substitution. All these English nativising phonological processes are accounted for by the fact that Shona does not have complex vowels. Also, English monophthongs that do not have equivalent values in the native Shona vowel inventory are substituted with Shona monophthongs that are closest to them in terms of articulatory features. Furthermore, this research has shown that the phonological processes that are operative in the English speech of L1 Shona speakers have subconsciously helped the Shona people in indigenizing or nativizing the English language. In other words, what has happened to the British English in Zimbabwe is that it has been Africanized and acculturated by L1 Shona speaking people "in order to suit the socio-cultural environment and realities of the new users" (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997:15). In this regard, I concur with the typical Pan African and renowned award winning Nigerian novelist Achebe (1975:62) when he says that the ownership of the English language in the African context is to make English "carry the weight of my African experience and make it become a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home and altered to suit its new African surroundings."

However, more empirical research is required on the transfer of consonantal and prosodic characteristics of Shona into the spoken English of Shona-English bilinguals. In a language contact situation such as exists in Zimbabwe, it is also to be expected that there will be extensive interaction between the local languages and English which leads to regional variations of the second language (English).

Therefore, it is hoped that this study will act as a spring board for more comprehensive contrastive studies on the influence of Zimbabwean indigenous languages on English, the results of which can be brought together and harmonized in order to eventually evolve a Zimbabwean Standard English. As mentioned earlier in this investigation, this observation is based on the fact that the multilingual nature of the Zimbabwean society inevitably leads to many regional variations of English because the different local languages have their structures directly or indirectly transferred to English. Also, many of the features of the Zimbabwean regional varieties of English are likely to become stable.

Finally, I wish to emphasize that it is high time the term 'Zimbabwean English' is officially recognized and accepted by Zimbabwean educationists and policy makers to refer to the legitimate subtype of English, which is peculiar to Zimbabwe since it is apparent that English has been firmly established as a second language and is likely to remain so for a long time.

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