



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **East African English**

*Linguistic Features and Background*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Hermann Ingi Ragnarsson**

**Maí 2011**

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**Enska**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to describe the most notable features and background of English in East Africa. That is: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. For this to be possible, English as a second language has to be discussed, since English is the second, third, or even fourth language of East Africa's inhabitants. The development and characteristics of English in Africa generally will thus be discussed before the discussion turns to East African English with a special emphasis on Kenya.

One of the most significant factors concerning the East African varieties of English is the speaker's mother tongue, since phonology, pronunciation, and grammatical processing is limited by it. History has also had a strong impact. English arrived in the region as the language of the colonists and was used only for administration at first. Gradually its usage increased, especially with the emergence of a robust educational system, and the desire of many to understand English, the most wide spread language on the globe. Language policy and sociolinguistic setting has also impacted the development and status of English heavily.

The most prominent distinctive feature of East African English is its limited number of vowels and syllable stressed pronunciation, but there are also other distinctive features related to vocabulary and grammar. It is often either the speaker's mother tongue or the intertribal lingua franca Swahili, also called Kiswahili, which plays a major role in creating and maintaining these features. Many of these features have appeared in studies performed with comparisons to Standard British English.

The East African variety of English is, like all other languages, constantly evolving. Its origin is rooted in the language of colonists and its has developed into being an official language that East Africa's inhabitants choose to utilize when

communicating with one another and to strengthen their ties to the English speaking world.

As access to English material becomes more readily available on the Internet and in the media, it is evident that the position of English will only strengthen in East Africa, while still maintaining its distinctive features.

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## **Abbreviations**

AfrE: African English

EAFE: East African English

ESL: English as a Second language

GenAm: General American English

L1: Primary language

L2: Second language

RP: Received Pronunciation

SBE: Standard British English

StE: Standard English

## 1. Introduction

The English language is used to an ever-increasing degree all over the world. It is the language used by most for international communication. But only a small part of those who utilize English to any degree regard it as their mother tongue. For the majority it is their second, third, or fourth language, although possibly the most utilized besides the mother tongue.

American, British, and Australian English are distinct from each other despite their common roots in British English. Language is constantly evolving and in certain areas and cultural environments, the individuals who utilize it affect the way in which English evolves. There are a number of elements that affect the shaping of English, for example: the languages spoken prior to the acquisition of English by those who have a mother tongue other than English, the sounds the speaker is used to forming, and how the teaching of the English language is performed in schools.

East African English is considered to belong to the varieties of English that are “typical ESL varieties, part of the New Englishes and of Kachru’s (1986) outer circle.” (Schmied, “EA Englishes” 188). I shall examine the East African variety of English in regard to these definitions, its distinctive features, and compare EAfE to other varieties of English especially those of other African nations. Furthermore I shall examine the root causes of, and the factors that have brought about these unique varieties of English in relation to both linguistics and history.

As the inhabitants of East Africa are not native speakers of English, linguistic factors relating to English being spoken as a second language are very relevant when examining this form of English. It is therefore necessary to examine the features that characterize ESL in general before examining the distinctive features of EAfE. The influencing factors may include word usage, grammar, the stressing of syllables, and

the pronunciation of consonants and vowels. East African English possesses some unique features for which there are numerous historical and linguistic reasons relating to phonology, syntax, lexis and morphology.

## **2. English as a Second Language**

The global spread of English has been regarded as occurring in two different diasporas. The first diaspora was a result of several English-speaking immigrants settling in places such as Australia, North America, and New Zealand and bringing the language along with them. The second diaspora was in the colonial contexts in Asia and Africa, where a few English speakers brought their language to the colonized people. The presence of the English language in East Africa today falls into the latter category (Michieka 175).

Linguists have shown that because of the great spread of English worldwide there are several different varieties of the language in the world. This is especially true in areas once colonized by native speakers of English. These varieties are both different from one another and different from the standard varieties found in native-English-speaking communities.

In these contexts English is used alongside the other local languages, often as an important second language with an official role. Of necessity, these language contact situations result in the exoglossic language being influenced by its linguistic and socio-cultural environment. (Kioko and Muthwii 204)

This process is often called nativisation and/or acculturation. English is used to



communicate the socio-cultural experiences of the people and is no longer seen as a foreign language but as one language of many that multilingual speakers can use.

“Consequently, the English language in these contexts acquires certain structural features that make it different from native English at all linguistic levels.” (Kioko and Muthwii 205)

It is reasonable to assume that an individual’s original language or mother tongue affects how he speaks another language acquired later. Mutonya assumed in his study that those who speak English, as a second language, in Africa would demonstrate unique characteristics based on their previous language experience. That is to say the speaker’s mother tongue or the language that he utilizes the most. Among large social groups or tribes a specific version of AfrE will be formed, a version that gradually receives recognition and exhibits certain features. These features can be associated with certain races, ethnic groups, nations, or areas. Gender may also be involved. Mutonya points out that speakers of English who possess the same mother tongue (L1) will not always speak the same variety of English. Other factors such as social standing and education influence the way that English is spoken to a great extent (Mutonya 434).

One possible factor in language performance is anxiety. Researchers have measured how anxiety affects fluent use in speaking ELS. Studies suggest that anxiety can affect oral communication amongst students speaking English. However anxiety is only one of many variables influencing communications. Anxiety may therefore influence oral communication, although “the negative correlation between oral performance and anxiety is not very strong” (Woodrow 321). Woodrow encourages teachers to be sensitive to this in classroom interactions and provide help to minimize second language anxiety (Woodrow 323). This however may not be a

significant issue in Africa generally or in East Africa more specifically as interaction with native English speakers is very limited and everybody is “in the same boat”, i.e. in a multilingual environment.

Dyson refers to what he calls The Processability Theory in a research on morphology and syntax development among learners of ELS. Morphology and syntax development play a part in the acquisition of new languages but individuals vary in how they acquire new knowledge and fluency in using it (Dyson 375).

### **3. African English**

Most states in Africa are multilingual with most of them having two or three main languages, some minor ones, and then many spoken by only some thousands of people. Some of the languages are spoken or used in more than one country. (Melchers and Shaw 146). For example Swahili, which is a Bantu language widely spoken on the east coast of Africa either as a mother tongue or a fluent second language (“Swahili language”). The indigenous languages are usually divided into three main streams: Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic/Sudanic and Nilotic, and Niger Congo-Wolof. Most of the languages of Southern and Eastern Africa are closely related and belong to the Bantu family within Niger-Congo. Many of these are tone languages that also contain numerous affixes (Melchers and Shaw 147).

The term “African English” has been used, according to Mutonya, as a theoretical abstraction by scholars who have done research relating to forms and functions of English in Africa (Mutonya, 434). He also claims that “the primary challenge facing a researcher interested in quantitative analysis of AfrE is the paucity of systematic studies presenting sampling techniques, methods of data collection, and analysis that are replicable.” (Mutonya 435) As a consequence it is difficult to verify

observations and findings in extant literature. Mutnoya refers to Simo Bobda's account of the similarities and peculiarities of AfrE's regional accents:

Of all the three English-speaking regions [...] East Africa surely has the most homogeneous accent, due partly to the common Bantu language substratum and the common lack of a creolized or pidginized variety of English. Southern Africa, excluding the Republic of South Africa, is also quite homogenous due to the same factors... West Africa is by far the most heterogeneous region with regard to English accents. This is mostly due to the extreme ethnic and linguistic diversity that prevails in the region. (Mutonya 436)

English remains the official language and medium of instruction in many African countries with a history of British colonial rule, where the English language has been institutionalized. However it competes for a position in the dense multilingual space that is dominated by indigenous African languages. Although English is used to a lesser extent than other languages it is used mainly where it is noticeable – in the system of governance, media and schools. For a long time educated individuals in numerous countries have held a positive attitude towards the use of English but there are signs among the younger people in Kenya that they are gradually becoming more negative towards English (Mutonya 434).

As there are different groups and reasons for people using English it is important to try to define the usage and the user better. Schmied refers to Angogo and Hancock's broad categorization of the variety of English used in Africa, which distinguish the following types according to speakers:

- A. Native English of whites and expatriates born in Africa.
- B. Native English of Africans born locally.
- C. Non-native English, as a second language, spoken fluently.
- D. Non-native English, as a foreign language, spoken imperfectly.

The first group, White African English, is not significant in East Africa anymore however the influence from this group has been quite remarkable before. The other groups have developed national varieties of English (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 921).

When it comes to analysing language forms which are actually used in Africa, intranational and intrapersonal variation, the individual speaker's sociolinguistic background and the actual speech-act situation must be taken into consideration. At the individual level, the type of English spoken by Africans depends largely (i.e. if we ignore special exposure to English either through personal acquaintances or the modern mass media) on two factors: (a) their education, i.e. the length and degree of formal education in English, and (b) their occupation, i.e. the necessity for and amount of English used in everyday life. (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 921)

The latter category reflects current international development and communication. However English that is labeled "broken", "school" or "bad" English is considered a sign of little education, especially in Kenya (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 921-922). Researchers mention that the new varieties of EAfE show the characteristic features,

background, genesis and function of New Englishes. “Usage is formed mainly through its use as media of instruction in school and reinforced outside school.”

(Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 922)

### *3.1 Phonological Features in African English*

The most notable feature of spoken English and other languages is the pronunciation. African English is no exception to this and the reasons for different pronunciations may be numerous. The mother tongue of individual African speakers affects their accents strongly. Furthermore the mother tongues that have a Bantu substratum on one hand and Afro-Asiatic or Nilotic substrate on the other seem to produce similar phonological characteristics in English pronunciation by their speakers. (Melchers and Shaw 155)

Schmied and Bobda have attempted overall summaries of the vowel systems of speakers with African-language substrata. They show interesting mergers and splits: the distinction of different e-sounds (DRESS and FACE) is lost in Eastern and Southern Africa compared to West Africa. The same applies to the o-sound (LOT/THOUGHT/CLOTH/NORTH), which is distinct from GOAT in the West. Bobda has investigated the regional differences in NURSE, being [a] in Kenya and Uganda and more towards [e] in the southern parts of Africa (Melchers and Shaw 156).

Given their origins in school British English and pidgin, it is not surprising that the varieties are nonrhotic, although rhoticity has been noted in Kenya, ascribed to the influence of American tourists, and in Malawi, ascribed to Scottish missionaries (Melchers and Shaw 157).

Melchers and Shaw state that African Englishes have some common features. This they explain by referring to a substratum in Bantu languages. AfrE normally has a smaller vowel set than inner-circle varieties and its speakers tend to speak with spelling pronunciations and non-reduction of vowels. Spelling pronunciations are normal and predominant. Word stress is often according to the rules of the mother tongue and figurative expressions as well (Melchers and Shaw 155).

### 3.2 *Syntax*

The syntax of written standard African English is usually close to that of other Standard varieties. There are examples of unsystematic use of articles. *Would* is often used as formal or polite version of will, rather than something required by the sequences of tenses. Schmied points out that there are non-standard patterns of verb agreement, avoidance of complex tenses, extension of progressive forms to stative verbs, different patterns of preposition use and compensation with verbs, non-marking of noun number, conflation of count and non-count, and of definiteness categories, invariant tags, pronoun copying and simplified word order conventions. Mesthrie, among others, pointed out inversion in indirect questions: “*I don’t know when’s the plane going to land*” (Melchers and Shaw 158).

### 3.3 *Lexis*

Where the English is a second language “code mixing” may occur. This entails that words from a local language can be used in English. In Kenya and Tanzania one can assume that one’s reader or interlocutor knows Swahili, and *andyu*, a local word meaning *indeed* and used to agree to a previous speaker can turn up in East African

English.

#### **4. East African English**

East African English is limited to three countries according to Josef Schmied, i.e. its “heartland” is in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania,

... since they share a common “anglophone” background, despite some interesting differences in colonial heritage. These three countries are also characterised by a complex pattern of African first languages (mainly from the Bantu and Nilosaharan language families), a common lingua franca (Kiswahili) and an equally complex mixture of Christian, Islamic and native African religious and cultural believes. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 918)

Many features can also be found in other parts of Africa, but EAfE can be distinguished from other varieties to such an extent that it allows for its own “coherent descriptive entity”. This description is based on data gathered from the following three sources; quotations from recorded utterances, patterns derived from a corpus of EAfE, and data on the Internet (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 918).

WAfrE	SBE	EAFrE
[i]	[i] bead [i]	[i]
	[ɪ] bid [ɪ]	
[e]	[e] bade [e]	[e]
[ɛ]	[ɛ] bed [ɛ]	
	[ɜ] bird [ɜ]	
[a]	[a] bad [a]	[a]
	[ɑ] bard [ɑ]	
	[ʌ] bud [ʌ]	
[ɒ]	[ɒ] bod [ɒ]	
	[ɔ] board [ɔ]	
[o]	[o] bode [o]	[o]
	[u] pull [u]	
[u]	[u] pool [u]	[u]

Fig. 1. Vowels in West African English, Standard British English, and East African English. Source: Mutonya, Mungai. "African Englishes: acoustic analysis of vowels". *World Englishes* 27.3 (2008): 437, Print, Figure 1.

Mutonya refers to Schmied's classic representation of SBE, WAfE and EAfE vowel systems. Mutonya presents a figure (see fig. 1) in which he has adapted Schmied's representation; therein it is evident how 5 main vowels dominate EAfE, seven WAfE of which 5 are the same as in EAfE as opposed to 13 in SBE (Mutonya 437).

#### 4.1 Historical background

Swahili developed along the East African Coast when Muslim African Trading cities



grew there from around the year 1000 AD and beyond. It is a Bantu language with extensive borrowing of vocabulary from Arabic and Persian. English has been given a status greater than a foreign language along the East African Coast through missionary activity and political intervention (Melchers and Shaw 148). In the later half of the nineteenth century, missionaries started to spread Christianity, English, and Swahili inland from the coast. Due to the existence of Swahili as a lingua franca no pidgin developed. At the Congress of Berlin in 1884-5 the European powers partitioned the country into European-style states and the new rulers appointed clerks and policemen who often spoke some English. However, in the Eastern and Southern part English was used in the higher administration. Even from the first years of education English often played a significant role due to parental demands and lack of material in other languages (Melchers and Shaw 149).

There are political and historical reasons for the English spoken in Kenya. The area was declared a British protectorate in 1895. At that time Swahili had already established itself in most parts of the East African coast as a result of trade between the Bantu-speaking groups and the immigrant races, especially the Arabs. The coastal town of Mombasa was the original capital of the British colony, but in 1907 the administration was moved to Nairobi. This affected the language situation in Kenya because Nairobi is further interior and contained little Swahili influence. With the removal of administration to Nairobi, the focus was no longer on Mombasa and Swahili. The British administration struggled with the issue of language and for a long time both English and Swahili were used as languages of administration (Michieka 176).

The missionaries' emphasis was often applied to the mother tongue, as there was a need for a language that was understandable to all. They put their faith in

Swahili as it offered more opportunities than English, but with time the importance of English grew considerably. At first Kenyans came in contact with English due to work and the presence of missionaries who built schools, taught students, and trained teachers. However instead of teaching their workers English, the settlers learned enough Swahili themselves to be able to communicate with their workers in the fields. It was in the settler's interest to keep the workers ignorant. In Rhodesia (Zimbabwe today) settlers received self-governance. But in East Africa there was a system of "indirect rule" through African leaders. As time passed British authorities worked increasingly towards providing as many as possible with the opportunity to be able to learn and speak English. The role of English increased in the school system and the government and the role of Swahili decreased. In Tanzania, however, the time in which Germany ruled the country paved the way for Swahili as its true national language. Since the Germans did not speak English to any significant degree themselves and did not force German upon Tanzania's inhabitants neither language became widespread within the country (Micieka 176-177, Kioko and Muthwii 202-203, Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 919).

#### *4.2 Language policies and sociolinguistic setting*

Through the rule of the British Empire in East Africa a class system containing three classes was introduced. Settlers and white colonial officers were at the top, Black Africans at the bottom, and Indians in between. The Indians became a kind of "middlemen", first while working on the railway and later in trade and business (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 919).

Even though the British ruled the area there was no clear and simple pro-

English language policy. The situation was very complex despite the efforts of the British to regulate an official language. There were three types of languages: the local tribal language used for communication within each tribe, Swahili the African lingua franca that was used for intertribal or regional purposes, and finally English for international communication. The mission organizations, present in the region, did not use English for evangelization. Protestant missionaries prioritized the ethnic languages and Swahili. Even in Tanzania English was not enforced after the British seized control. The administration became more efficient with Swahili and English was established only in elitist groups (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 920). English was the language of instruction mainly in the few prestigious secondary schools.

Michieka refers to Crystal who uses Kenya as an example of a nation of which the citizens have been opposed to or unconcerned with English. Michieka maintains that this gives the impression that Kenyans are hostile to the English language; however, a close investigation into the role English plays, shows that the attitude of Kenyans may not necessarily be the attitude reflected by Crystal (Michieka, 183).

The main reason for the negative perception of English was its connection with the current, and later, former colonizers. Despite this the English language has flourished. Kenyatta, the first president of the democracy, and Ngugi, one of the better-known authors of the country, both relied on English along with Swahili and Kikuyu. Using one of the tribal languages as a replacement for English would have proven difficult, it would have had to be Swahili. However English is symbolic for a good education and the nation's desire to be modern (Michieka 183-184).

Kioko and Muthwii refer to AsMazuri who states that:

English was 'the language of the rulers before it could gradually

develop into the language of the people'. As the colonial government became more involved in education, the question as to whether English should be taught or used as a medium of education in the African schools became a big challenge to the then educators. (Kioko and Muthwii 202)

Melchers and Shaw point out that in all the ex-British colonies throughout Africa English remains the main language of education, administration, and business, although it is not always the link language for informal communication between ethnic groups (Melchers and Shaw 149-150).

Melchers and Shaw also mention that the languages used in the African countries can be placed in a hierarchy with English at the top and unwritten languages at the bottom. "In between there are languages with some of literatures and having some role in society. English is usually in practice the sole language used for official and public purposes" (Melchers and Shaw 150).

The roots of this significant function of English can be traced back to Kenya's colonial period when it was instrumental to an individual's access to white collar jobs, European thought, and other privileges. With English came prestige and power and the British model was used in Kenya. Kenyans learnt it from the native speakers and unlike Kiswahili, English in Kenya, as in all non-native contexts, was and is largely a taught language, conveyed through formal education. (Kioko and Muthwii 201)

Kioko and Muthwii claim that English, introduced early in Kenya's colonial history, played a large part in the introduction and expansion of nationalism, a role that it no longer maintains. After Kenya's independence in 1963 numerous British citizens departed from the country. Demands and situations were different than before, there was less tolerance towards using the mother tongue where as the goal was to fuse together different tribes into one nation. For this purpose Swahili and English were used. It also played, and still plays, a significant part in the legal, economic and educational systems of Kenya. It is not merely one of the most significant subjects taught in schools but is the medium through which other subjects are taught (Kioko and Muthwii 201, 203).

Hudson-Ette and Nilsson compared the usage of words, phrases, nouns, adjectives, and prepositions in SBE and Kenyan English in a study. The hypothesis of the study was that

[s]ince Kenyan English is an ELS variety used as a lingua franca, the Kenyan feature articles should contain more oral features and, consequently, fewer noun phrases with adjectival premodification, compared to feature articles written in British English. (Hudson-Ettle and Nilsson 59)

The result was that in Kenya written English showed numerous characteristics of spoken language (Hudson-Ettle and Nilsson 56-59).

Today EAF is Black African English. It is used only as the primary language in the households of highly educated people in mixed marriages" (Schmed "EA Eghlishes" 191) It has been described as a socio-educational continuum. This is due to

the fact that the English spoken there depends on their education, both length and degree, and their social position which decides for how much English is used in everyday life. One important factor is the use of media (Schmied “EA Englishes” 191).

### *4.3 Research on EAfE*

In order to discover which features are similar in certain areas, for example in East Africa, Mutonya performed a study comparing the specific features of EAfE with those of SBE and WafE. He compared his own data to Schmied’s in order to discover whether the two sets of data were compatible. Participants were selected with regard to where they lived in their respective countries, that had a long legacy of English usage, and were divided into groups depending on their mother tongue, whether it was a Kwa or a Bantu language. Students from three universities were selected with emphasis on as similar backgrounds to each other as possible. This was done with the assistance of questionnaires that provided information on origin, education, connection with L1 speakers of English, linguistic history, and demographics. In this way groups of 20 individuals from each university were formed (Mutonya 438).

In Kenya people from the following tribes were selected: Kikuyu, Kamba, Bukusu, and Kisii. Similar groups were formed in Zimbabwe and Ghana since the history of British colonial rule was similar there and English usage was important in interpersonal communication (Mutonya 438-439).

Bantu languages are spoken by millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa below a line roughly demarcated by the southern boundaries of Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Fifteen of the 37 languages of Africa

that have a million or more speakers are Bantu languages (Hinnebusch 1989: 451). The Kenyan respondents spoke the following Bantu languages: Gikuyu, Kikamba, Kitaita, and Ekegusii (Mutonya 439).

The participants were asked to read a randomized list of 22 monosyllabic words that contained vowels and diphthongs relevant to the study. This is the list of the words used; not all the lists were identical, the words separated by a slash being in some instances substituted for each other: *bead, here/hair, hid, caught, bout, good, hard, sod/nod, boat/goat, tour, buy/pride, sure, board/saw, boy, mud, bad, bird, mood, bet/bed, hue, and made/ name*. The wordlist was adapted from the lexical items used in previous studies of AfrE. Subjects also read a reading passage specifically created to include lexical items already presented in the wordlist. “The procedure allowed for relatively casual and formal styles of production for each vowel under investigation.” (Mutonya 439)

#### **4.3.1 Kenyan respondents**

Mutonya used the data gathered in the study on African English to portray the vowel production of 20 university students, male and female, from Kenya. It clearly displays a five-vowel system. The five vowel clusters are even more evident when Mutonya has plotted them as “the standard deviations of these vowel means”. This demonstrates quite clearly that there are only very minor deviations in the F1 realization of the vowels. Schmied’s claim about EAfE being a five-vowel system is supported by the study (Mutonya 441-442).

Kenyan produce [ɜ] as [a]; it is a variation that differs significantly from that of Zimbabweans and Ghanaians. [ɜ] in the Kenyan English sounds like an allophone of /a/ not /e/, which is also the case among Zimbabweans and Ghanaians (Mutonya

446).

#### 4.4 Phonology

The phonology of EAfE is regarded to be particularly important because it contains the most persistent pronunciation features of all African varieties of English. Despite having received a considerable amount of education a speaker will often retain these features. The reason for this may be due to the fact that in many languages it is pronunciation that is the most flexible element since it can be utilized to convey sociolinguistic messages. The English language seems to be very fluid in this regard. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 929) However the problem of “correct” pronunciation is not limited to EAfE. The British SBE pronunciation is far from being simple or easy to know from writing only. Mistakes in the form of phonetic spellings do however allow conclusions on the pronunciation even from written texts. Differences are important because of the difference of lexical meaning. These word pairs may be pronounced in the same way: *ram* and *lamb*, *beat* and *bit*, *show* and *so*. Many speakers of EAfE would not make a clear distinction in pronunciation between these pairs. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 926)

##### 4.4.1 Consonants

Many Bantu speakers have problems distinguishing between /r/ and /l/ and may pronounce the word *lorry* as /lɔɫɪ/ or /rɔɫɪ/ instead of /lɔrɪ/. In Kenya the Gikuyu tend towards /r/ and the Embu towards /l/. In many tribes, like Luyia (Kenya) and Hausa (Nigeria) there is no b-sound or p-sound. Most English spoken in Africa is generally syllable-timed and stress is mainly marked with high pitch. (Melcher and



Shaw 157)

Most East Africans look at this as sub national peculiarities that do not threaten the consonant system as a whole. Schmied lists examples that show three general tendencies for consonants:

- (a) The merger of /r/ and /l/ is wide-spread, but still stigmatized.
- (b) Intrusive or deleted (as a hypercorrect tendency) nasals, especially /n/ in front of plosives, are common, since some languages like Kikuyu have homorganic nasal consonants.
- (c) English fricatives are generally difficult but particular deviations are often restricted to certain ethnic groups

(Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 926)

Schmied points out interesting characteristics of the consonant /r/. In non-rhotic English varieties it is usually only articulated in pre-vocalic positions and its pronunciation varies considerably, whether it is rolled or flapped (Schmied, "EAfE Phonology" 926-927).

#### 4.4.2 Vowels

The major difference between African English and EAfE does not revolve around the consonants but the vowels. EAfE has few vowels compared to the extensive English vowel system. Vowels tend to merge, as the underlying African languages do not cover the English vowel continuum. Schmied makes three generalisations for English vowels:

- a) Length differences in vowels are leveled. "Short vowels in EAfE are longer and

more peripheral than in RP, specially /ɪ/ tends towards /iː/, /ʊ / towards /uː>/, /ɔ/ towards /oː/ and /ʌ/ and /æ / towards /aː>/.” (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 927)

b) The central vowels STRUT, NURSE and lettER are avoided and are pronounced as half-open or open positions of BATH and, sometimes, DRESS. There is a tendency towards more articulatory positions of the tongue in general. Vowels in full syllables are commonly under-differentiated but vowels in unstressed syllables may be over-differentiated. This gives clear difference, as opposed to Standard English where there is no distinction to sounds and words such as policeman/policemen, and the suffixes -ance/-ence (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 927).

c) Diphthongs tend to have only marginal status and to be monophthongized. In MOUTH and FACE the second element is hardly heard in many African varieties.

Diphthongs with a longer glide are preserved, but they are not really pronounced as falling diphthongs, i.e. with less emphasis on the second element than on the first, but rather as double monophthongs (e.g. [oɪ], [aʊ]). All the centring diphthongs (NEAR, SQUARE, CURE) tend to be pronounced as opening diphthongs or double monophthongs ([ɪa, e a, u a]; cf. tendency (b) above). (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 927)

Schmied considers this to apply to many African varieties to such an extent that it cannot be interpreted only as a product of mother-tongue interference. One reason is the complicated structure of the English vowel system. He quotes Gimson:

The full systems [20 vowels and 24 consonants] must be regarded as complex compared with the systems of many other languages. In

particular, the opposition of the close vowels /i:/-/i/, /u:/-/u/, the existence of a central long vowel /ɜ:/ and the delicately differentiated front vowel set of /i:/-/i /-/e /-/æ / + /ʌ/, together with the significant or conditioned variations of vowel length, will pose problems to many foreign learners. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 928).

West African varieties tend towards a basic seven-vowel system, but East African varieties tend towards a basic five-vowel system.

An interesting single parameter in this respect is the deviation of the RP long central NURSE vowel: it tends toward a back vowel /ɔ/ in West African varieties, towards a front vowel /a/ in Eastern and towards /e/ Southern African varieties, but these tendencies are not uniform in a region, neither across all ethnic groups, nor across the lexicon, as in Tanzania *girl* tends towards front (DRESS) and *turn* towards back pronunciation (START) because of spelling pronunciation. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 928)

#### 4.4.3 Other phonetic patterns

Other significant features of EAfE relate to phoneme sequences, word stress, intonation, and general rhythmic patterns. Many of them are difficult to describe. The following are three unique and striking examples: the avoidance of consonant clusters, the more regular word stress, and the special rhythm.

In EAfE consonant clusters are a major problem. This can be explained by the fact that many of the African languages have a rather strict consonant-vowel syllable

structure. Consonant clusters tend to be dissolved, either by dropping one or some of the consonants or by splitting them with the insertion of vowels. This occurs to final consonants when there are two or more of them in a sequence (/hʌn/ for hand). But this can also be found in the speech of native English speakers. Generally if fricatives precede plosives, the plosives are dropped in the word final position. If other plosives precede them or they occur in non-final positions then the plosives are split by vowels inserted in-between the consonants. This is also the case when vowels are added to syllables ending in consonants. This phenomenon is referred to as insertion (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 929). The most frequently used vowels in insertion are /ɪ/ and /u/, depending on the occurrence of palatal or velar consonants in the environment. The pronunciation of /hɒsɪpɪtəlɪ/ for ‘hospital’ is a widespread example of this. Schmied also highlights the rhythms as a striking feature in African English: “The problem lies often within the English tendencies to maintain partly the Romance principle of word stress on the penultimate syllable in contrast to the general Germanic principle of stressing the stem.” (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 929). Standard English uses stress to indicate word class i.e. 'protest (noun) and pro'test (verb) but that is not always maintained in EAFē. One of the most notable features of EAFē is the prevalent use of syllable-timed instead of a stress-timed rhythm. Syllable timed rhythm implies that a speaker will apply equal stress to all syllables and will therefore not create “weak” forms by putting two or three unstressed syllables into one stress unit like inner-circle speakers do. This explains the tendency to give too much weight to unstressed syllables, which often ends in unfamiliar rhythm. It can also lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication, as the EAFē speaker may be experienced as unfriendly or childish (Schmied, “EAFē Phonology” 930).

#### 4.5 Lexicon

There are different common lexicon features in EAfE. The most obvious is the use of Swahili loans, the semantic extension of StE lexemes and idiomatic flexibility. Some very old borrowings such as *askari* meaning ‘guard’, *bwana* meaning ‘mister’ and *safari* meaning ‘journey’ were incorporated into general English and can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary. Normally they have a more specific meaning in general English than in East Africa. Then there are specific words, borrowed and used only as they do not apply in other contexts and StE contains no specific words for them, like *ugali*, the maize dish. One important domain can be seen in politics. The masses were mobilized using the African languages and that is how *uhuru* (independence) *harambee* (pulling together) became national slogans in Kenya. (Schmied “EA Englishes” 195)

There seems to be a higher level of semantic redundancy in EAfE than in StE. One example is *the reason why he came is because*, with the same meaning in the noun and the conjunct. Idiomatic expressions are sometimes used in slightly different morphological forms. For example: *with regards to*, where *with regard to* and *as regards* are combined. Words are used in new and often expanded reference, like “brothers”, Sisters or “fathers”. All the brothers of a speaker’s father become his “fathers”. Word forms are confused with similar ones and meanings expand because of that. Examples are: When *to book* is used for ‘to hire’, *to forget* for ‘to lose’, *to reach* instead of ‘to arrive’ *arm* for ‘hand’, and *guest* instead of ‘stranger’. There are also occasional word forms used in other contexts, and will therefore have other collocations and connotations. Fairly general terms are used instead of more specific

ones, for example: *an election is done* (held) or *to commit an action* (crime).

(Schmied “EA Englishes” 196).

#### 4.6 Grammar

Schmied lists 12 grammatical tendencies, derived from *The East African Component* of the *International Corpus of English*, which are the most common in EAfE:

Speakers of EAfE will not always add inflectional endings to verbs, instead they will use the regular, general, and unmarked forms. They also tend to avoid complex tenses – particularly conditionals and the past perfect participle. Continuous forms tend to be used excessively. The use of phrasal and/or prepositional verbs is arbitrary and verb complementation varies greatly with regards to infinitives and gerunds in particular. The use of –s plural markers tends to be generalized excessively (Schmied, “EA Englishes” 198).

The EAfE speaker will tend to omit articles and other determiners in front of nouns. Pronouns may be left out, presumptive pronouns especially and gender distinction is lacking for pronouns. Prepositions lack differentiation and therefore the prepositions *of* and *in* are used to a significantly greater extent than in other varieties of English and adjective forms are sometimes used as adverbs. Finally the question tags will occur frequently in a consistent form (Schmied, “EA Englishes” 199).

### 5. The Current Status of English in East Africa

The common cultural background of the three countries, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, makes the sociolinguistic situation rather similar in all of them. The major difference is the status of Swahili: which is a true national language in Tanzania, learnt and taught in most schools unto university level, but both in Kenya and

especially Uganda there is more room for English as it is not associated with white settlers anymore. The multilingual educated African elite invests large sums of money on “good education”, which is usually based on “good English” (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 922).

Many seem to realize that English performance could or perhaps should be better, both within the schools and media.

The key problem is that English is used as the language of instruction from upper primary school onward (in Uganda) and is thus the basis for all further education. The discussion is less about teaching English properly than teaching (other subjects) in English properly. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 923)

### *5.1 Contemporary Language Attitudes*

Schmied refers to three main types of attitudes that can be distinguished in relation to EAfE. There are the stereotyped notions, usually very positive. English is considered “sophisticated” and “superior”. It is evident that English is the international language of science and technology and global communication. Thus international arguments in favor of English are also uncontroversial. In Uganda the schools turn to English usually after lower primary (Standard 4) but in Kenya after upper primary (Standard 8) and in Tanzania after secondary school (12 years of schooling). There is a lack of discussion on African varieties of English outside scholarly circles. African forms are mainly accepted for pronunciation but grammar and syntax in particular are thought to be what holds the separate varieties of English together (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology”

924). Because of the international use of English the Standard English with African pronunciation may be accepted as a norm. The theoretical British norm is only present in books and seldom used in Africa today (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 924).

## **6. The Main Reasons for EAfE as a distinct variety**

According to Schmied there are three main factors for EAfE’s distinction from other English variants. The first is the influence of the speaker’s mother tongue and other East African languages. He states:

Since English is learnt as a second language in East Africa, it is likely that features and strategies from first language acquisition are transferred [...] This has long been seen as the basic cause for African variation of English, because it obviously influences the pronunciation, often distinctly. Since non-African mother-tongue speakers as role-models are rare nowadays, common deviations become institutionalised and give a specific stamp to African English in its various forms. (Schmied, “EAfE Phonology” 924)

The second factor is what Schmied entitles “General language learning strategies” He cites a few examples of how it works in practice:

Language learners in general use simplification strategies at an early stage (*it seem that ...*, where morphological simplification may be supported by pronunciation simplification of an alveolar in front of a dental fricative). Later they try to reproduce memorised phrases from



the target language, irrespective of the linguistic and pragmatic context (his/her level best seems to occur more often in African than in European English). From a certain stage onwards learners enjoy complicating their language and even tend to exaggerate typically English features (*he is living in Eldoret* is an overgeneralization when temporary meaning is not implied; *she ran fastly* is a hypercorrect form, as unmarked adverbs are associated with broken English). (Schmied, “EAFÉ Phonology” 925)

The effect that a flawed learning process can have on a speaker’s language performance can be quite significant:

When the learning process does not progress normally, certain developmental errors, which occur regularly in first and second language acquisition, become fossilised, i.e. they become permanent features (like the plural of non-count nouns like *informations* or *discontents*). This includes overgeneralisations like neglecting restrictions or differences between gerunds and infinitives in complementation (such as *I wouldn’t mind to give* instead of *giving*). All these creative strategies of language learners must have played a certain role in the development of African varieties of English. (Schmied, “EAFÉ Phonology” 925)

Schmied’s third and final factor is titled “Exposure to the written language”.

The written word possesses authority that is superior to that of the spoken word in

Africa and other societies. This has a considerable impact on learners of the English language especially where English is not the dominant language in oral communication. An African speaker will therefore try to duplicate features of the written form of English when speaking the language. Schmieid states a few examples of how this may occur, one of which is the following:

Grammatical constructions and lexical items from relatively formal registers, or spelling pronunciations, like [sɑɪd] or [dʒuɪs] for *said* and *juice*, will often be used. This explains the articulations of /h/ in *heir* or of /b/ in *debt* and generally the tendency of the central NURSE vowel to assume the sound value “suggested” by the orthographic symbol that represents it (e.g. [aɔʒ] for *urge* vs. [hɛɪd] for *heard*).  
(Schmieid, “EAfE Phonology” 925)

Another example given is how the frequent use of Shakespeare and the Bible for teaching has contributed to the African forms of English becoming overly archaic (Schmeid “EAfE Phonology” 925).

The aspiration to speak like the British in Kenya was for some time linked with a colonial hangover and was, because of that stigmatized.

However, the internal norms of correctness and appropriateness with regard to pronunciation, grammar, or semantics, theoretically remained the British norm. It is partly this lack of concordance between practice and attitudes towards English on the one hand, and the British norm and its demands on the other hand, that has had undesirable

consequences for the use of the English language in education in Kenya today. (Kioko and Muthwii 204)

On this basis Kioko and Muthwii discuss the relationship between native English and the varieties that have developed in Kenya and how this affects current concerns of language in education. They state that linguists and educators have hardly considered this critically in regards to the Kenyan situation (Kioko and Muthwii 204).

When English was first introduced to Kenya most of the teachers were either native speakers themselves or well trained by them and the learners had direct access to native English and its norms. It was rather simple to impose the standards as the students were few and the motivation for learning was to know “ the English of the English” as good as possible (Kioko and Muthwii 204).

Kioko and Muthwii refer to Zuengler’s statement that there are certain formal aspects of English that distinguish the Kenyan English from standard native speaker varieties of English (Kioko and Muthwii 205). The features cannot only be explained with reference to first-language backgrounds of its users. Some of the innovations, adaptations, or deviations in these varieties are not random. This is possibly because of the interaction of English and other languages in other contexts and situations or cultures. These features may be observed in the language of teachers, in the media, and in certain literary texts that are part of the school curriculum. (Kioko and Muthwii 205)

Sociolinguistic research shows that the model speakers of English used in non-native contexts are not the American or British ones. Kioko and Muthwii explain it with regard to the Kenyan situation with few native models of English being available in the school system, most Kenyans are exposed to English used in Kenya by

Kenyans and the English used in media provides a mixture of English varieties. Some of them are very different from one another. If this is ignored it can lead to educational and psychological results that are underwhelming. Most likely the Kenyans see the deviations in their variety of English as errors or as symbols of sociolinguistic messages where they identify with the English culture and language (Kioko and Muthwii 205).

Teachers have their work cut out for them as they are, according to a teachers' handbook from 1987, expected to be able to distinguish between 20 different vowels and then teach that to their students. However they are not capable of performing this task and it is therefore left undone (Kioko and Muthwii 206).

If a local norm is recognized and reaffirmed in education, that variety and its structure will be adopted and taught. But the problem is that the English schoolbooks used for instruction in Kenya have not been adapted to this sociolinguistic environment. The Standard British form is being presented and this burdens the teachers with problems as they have to combine two language worlds and do not have the skills required for doing so (Kioko and Muthwii 207).

Another challenge is the fact that many features of East African English have been identified as errors. Some want to correct the variety but others claim that it is nearly impossible to drill a speech community out of its established language habits. This attitude is based on the belief that the speaker desires to achieve natural L1 proficiency. To force someone to consider their own variety of language as inferior to others can build up a psychological crisis and rob the individual of self-worth and identity (Kioko and Muthwii 209). "Some of the features include direct lexical transfer, semantic shifts, syntactic shifts and a wide use of contextual units, such as riddles, proverbs, songs and so on, which embed the language in the sociocultural

situations.” (Kioko and Muthwii 209)

Mazuri and Mazuri regard English as an imperial language: “There is an historic dialectic between English as the imperial language and Swahili as the preponderant language of East Africa.” (Mazuri and Mazuri 283). It was brought from the outside by the authorities and then to the people, normally in a formal way through the school system. The English spoken in Kenya became important for the elite in the country, among the so-called “educated” (Mazuri and Mazuri 283-284). The importance of the English language cannot be denied. The constitution, for example, is written in English. The practical politics are mainly in Swahili while the official language of the judiciary is English. The Parliament uses both languages. The importance of the English language can be seen in the fact that Kenyan politicians need to be trilingual, having to know their tribal language, Swahili and English (Mazuri and Mazuri 284).

Mazuri and Mazuri refer to four stages of the development of English as a language. First as the language of immigrant European traders, secondly as language of imperial control, thirdly as a language of post-colonial governance and fourthly as a *Eurafrical language* when the language becomes indigenized (Mazuri and Mazuri 285). They consider the English in East Africa to be historically in the third stage. The question is therefore when it will reach the fourth stage. A crucial factor is the globalization of English and how it affects East Africa. English is being used more and more, especially in the homes of the educated. The group of people using English the most is growing and children are exposed to English earlier in their life than before, especially in urban areas. But in spite of this it is still a foreign language. Because of this English is seen as less foreign than before and many consider it as a great asset to know English well but the situation seems to favor a poly-lingual

configuration. (Mazuri and Mazuri 285-287)

Mazuri and Mazuri discuss the weak linguistic nationalism in East Africa compared to Asia and other places. The problem in East Africa is a flora of 200 tribal languages that makes it difficult to unite behind one common language. On top of that there is the triple heritage, the indigenous, the Islamic, and the Western (Mazuri and Mazuri 289-290).

### *6.1 The Influence of the Media*

In East Africa, English is considerably more prevalent in the media than Swahili. Most newspapers and magazines are published in English and a great amount of televised media is in English, especially on the privately owned television networks and it is the main language of the Internet. English maintains a stronger presence in cities and among educated people while Swahili is more prominent in the countryside. Advertising billboards in English are more common especially in the vicinity of cities and towns. Most of those who speak English are individuals who have received at least some education. English is more widespread among men than women since boys often receive better and longer opportunities to study than girls (Michieka 177-179).

Average Kenyans hardly have any contact with Westerners in their lifetime. Britons and Americans living in Kenya reside mostly in urban areas and socialize with people of their own living standards. Kenyans do not only learn English in order to participate in international discussions but because the language has different other functions and maintains wider usage than Swahili. “English is used for interpersonal, instrumental, regulative and creative functions.” (Michieka 179)

Swahili serves the function to be a link between speakers of various languages

and dialects in linguistically and culturally pluralistic settings. English also takes this function when speakers feel more comfortable to do so such as among university students. The usage of English becomes a symbol of modernization, elitism, and is a mark of class (Michieka 180).

The large number of tourists traveling to Kenya each year is a strong motivation for its inhabitants to learn English and use it. The same applies to individuals planning to extend their studies abroad, especially in The United States and in Britain. Since English is one of only two official languages of the Kenyan nation, political candidates will have to be able to speak the language (Michieka 181-182).

## 7. Conclusion

East African English possesses some unique features for which there are numerous historical and linguistic reasons relating to phonology, syntax, lexis and morphology. Numerous studies have been performed that demonstrate EAfE's distinct features. Although the studies may have been limited they demonstrate that EAfE differs significantly from other AfrE varieties, especially SBE and GenAM. There are numerous phonological, lexical and grammatical features that come together in EAfE and contribute to its distinction from other varieties of English. The most notable phonological feature of EAfE is its syllable-timed nature. The fact that its speakers will only utilize a set of five different vowels when speaking and tend to ungrammatically split up consonant clusters with vowel insertion is also very striking. Code switching with the use of Swahili loan words is the most prominent lexical feature of EAfE. Word meanings also often tend to be expanded both in regard to reference and meaning: *uncle* becomes *father* and *to lose* an object becomes *to forget*

it. The grammar of an EAfE speaker tends to be oversimplified and he or she will often avoid using complex tenses and adding inflectional endings. The use of noun phrases is over generalized; the speaker may omit pronouns and their gender distinction.

The reasons for distinguishing EAfE from other forms of English are grounded in East Africa's history and linguistic background. The speakers' L1 has affected the way in which they utilize the English language significantly regarding pronunciation, lexis, syntax and grammar. Education has a great impact on the English language in East Africa and the recently increased access to television programs and the Internet has become noticeable. It is evident that EAfE has been evolving and will continue to evolve to some extent but the variation that has been formed is here to stay and will maintain its main features for years to come.



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