[ðe: 'a:griment bi'twi:n 'pi:za:nts endi 'we:ka:z ɒf 'efrika]

# ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND STRESS DEVIATIONS IN TANZANIA[1]

### J. B. Maghway[*1]

## Abstract

*Difficulties in spoken English teaching/learning in Tanzania and the rest of Eastern Africa is one of the most neglected pedagogic areas. Difficulties in pronunciation, principally involving consonant and vowel articulation on one hand and stress on the other, are here identified and focused upon. The principal causes of vowel pronunciation difficulties are: failure to recognise and produce contrasts critical for making an adequate number of vowel contrasts that would enable learners and speakers to communicate effectively in English (e.g. between the 20 RP vowel phonemes - the implicit pronunciation teaching target model), viz. (a) distinctions between monophthong and diphthong, (b) tongue part and height contrasts: i) close-mid-open, ii) front-central-back and (c) long-short contrasts, and (d) presence/absence of lip-rounding. It is proposed that the target model should be made explicit and that both ELT' teacher training and the teaching of spoken English need to be clearly and overtly based on it. The word stress difficulties faced are chiefly caused by: i) false generalizations, ii) 'penultimitis' and iii) ignorance: not knowing that, unlike in Swahili, there is no general rule for word stress in. However, it appears that all these are ultimately traceable to the teacher, who has in many cases had no formal preparation to teach spoken English.*

## 1    Introduction

Papers and other scholarly writings on the much discussed falling standards[1] of English in this country have tended to concentrate far too much on the written medium of the language (e.g. Criper & Dodd, I 984; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1987; Rubagumya (ed.), 1990). Works that focus on the situation in the spoken medium have been few and far between (e.g. Kassulamemba, 1976; Maghway, 1981).

Our objective here is to focus on a segment of spoken English problems faced in this country - by both learners and speakers.[2] The problems will not only be highlighted and described; their causes will also be identified and discussed, and certain directions towards their solutions proposed. It is assumed, for the purposes of this paper, that only after such problems and their respective causes have been correctly identified, appreciated and clearly described will it be possible to suggest appropriate and effective solutions for them It is hoped that the paper will also contribute in some small way to a clearer definition of the infamous 'falling standards' of English and, consequently, also to finding the correct way out of them – for then and only then shall we see the light at the end of our vicious educational tunnel.

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[1] * Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics

It would, of course, be overly ambitious to attempt in the space of this brief paper to cover the entire spectrum of problems faced at all the levels of spoken English. We shall here, instead, limit our present task only to the consideration of difficulties in the realm of the pronunciation of English words: that, principally, includes vowel and consonant articulation on one hand, and syllable and word stress – including rhythm - on the other. For the presentation, a deliberately simple and straightforward approach has been adopted here in order to render the paper accessible not only to hardcore academics and other armchair theorists but also and, especially, to practising teachers of English in the field at all levels, for whom the problems dealt with here are not merely in the realm of the theoretical; for them they are very real indeed.[3]

## 2    Consonants

The articulation of the consonant sounds found in English words is probably the least problematic area in the entire language. Most of the 24 consonant phonemes of English (RP and other accents) have very similar counterparts in the phonological systems of Swahili, other Bantu and non-Bantu languages of Tanzania and Eastern Africa. The consonants therefore offer little difficulty to most learners of English with that particular linguistic background. The only consonant phonemes that do often cause some difficulty in recognition, and therefore production, are /ʒ/ in *measure*, and the contrasts /ð/ - /z/ and /r/ - /l/. However, the first of these five segments, /ʒ/, usually results in few really insurmountable pronunciation and, consequently, communication problems. In any case, that phoneme is itself an extremely unproductive French loan in English: apart from 'measure' it occurs in only a small number of other words, like *usual, leisure, pleasure, treasurer, casual.* Occasionally, however, there may also be some difficulties of recognition and production of the contrast between /ʒ/ and /dʒ/, as in the words *pleasure* and *pressure*, respectively. Yet this is of negligible consequence as the two phonemes rarely account for straight minimal pair contrasts between them.[4]

Most significant perhaps are problems associated with /ð/ as in *brother*. The real problem with the segment /ð/ is that, because it is not usually a phoneme in any significant number of the local vernaculars – Bantu or otherwise, its phonetic features (*voiced, fricative, dental*) are usually merged with those of the more easily recognised /z/ (*voiced, fricative, alveolar*) in the average learner's perception.[5] Consequently, pronunciations such as ['braza], ['faza], ['zat], ['zis] - [ziz] for *brother, father, that, this*, respectively, are not infrequently heard.

Even more significant problems may result, though, from the loss of contrast between /r/ and /l/ in the pronunciation of English words. The two phonemes account between them for a substantial number of minimal pairs; one only need cite examples such as those in (1) and others like them.[6]

| (1) | raw | law |
| | rip | lip |
| | grass | glass |
| | prayers | players |
| | broom | bloom |
| | frying | flying |

This is an area fraught with difficulties principally arising from the fact that there is generally no /r/ - [l/ contrast in a bulk of the Bantu languages in the region. That therefore means that greater attention is required here of both the teacher and the learner. It is important for us to be stricter and more rigorous in demanding the application of this contrast.[7]

Another consonant worthy of mention here is [ɲ], which is a typical phoneme in most of the vernaculars, especially the Bantu languages, as in the Swahili word [ɲaɲa], *nyanya* ('tomato' or 'grand mother'). Since [ɲ] is not phonemic in English, its transfer usually produces such forms as those in (2b) for the RP forms in (2a) in the English pronunciation of local learners and speakers.

(2)    new   manure   annual   menu   newspaper
   a.  /nju   mənjʊə   ænjʊəl   menju   njuzpeɪpə/
   b.  [ɲu:   me:ɲuʔa   eɲuʔɔ:   meɲu   ɲu:zpe:pa]

It is important to stress at this juncture that, while the forms in (b) are almost always the only ones used for the pronunciation of the words in (2) and similar ones by Tanzanian learners and speakers (and their counterparts elsewhere in Eastern Africa), the forms in (a) are only phonemic for the native speaker of English; but they are by no means the only ones in his repertoire. For, while he will use [nju] in the pronunciation of words like those in (2) in careful (as when pronouncing their citation forms) or formal speech, the native speaker would revert to palatal nasal forms in rapid colloquial speech. There lies the significant difference between the native speaker and the Tanzanian learner or the average Tanzanian speaker of English.[8] The important point here, really, is that the palatal nasal is, indeed, also very much present in the phonetic inventory of the native speaker of English, albeit only as an allophone of the /n/ phoneme.[9] It is the lack of similar variability in the learner's or non-proficient speaker's usage in (2b) that underlies the problem here. In classic Chomskyan parlance, it is an obvious reflection in their linguistic performance of an inadequate phonetic and/or phonological repertoire – hence of the level of their linguistic competence.

Finally, another consonant phoneme, where rather a similar but more serious problem occurs, is /l/ - not in any way closely related to the /r/ - /l/ contrast merger already discussed. The failure to manipulate this variation is usually at the base of such commonplace mispronunciations as those in (3).

(3)   a.   *[milik]      'milk'
      b.   *[bili]       'bill'

The manifestation of the problem (i.e. the symptom) here is elementary and explicit enough: an extra vowel has been inserted (illicitly smuggled in, as it were) in both items of data in (3), where there should not have been any. What is not so elementary or explicit is, however, why that happened. The answer is, in simple terms, that an attempt is being made here to overcome a two-pronged difficulty; both 'prongs' associated with the pronunciation of the /l/ phoneme. In (a) /l/ occurs before [k] (in fact, before a consonant sound generally) and (b) before nothing (i.e. in final position). The lateral is problematic to pronounce in such environments; unless, that is, the speaker or learner possesses the requisite linguistic competence. Briefly, this

concerns the deployment of the appropriate allophone of /l/ in each of the two environments. That phoneme has two different allophones. The problem with both items in (3) is the use of the clear allophone where the dark one was expected: 'dark-l' before another consonant sound or at word-final position; 'clear-l elsewhere – i.e. in word initial and intervocalic environments. In summary, failure to recognise and produce the two /l/ allophones and deploy them appropriately is behind the 'symptom' in (3) - granted, rather an unhappy analogue.

Let us now turn to the vowels. It is there that much more serious and more recurrent difficulties are encountered – both between the four walls of the classroom and beyond. Let us begin with a brief phonological survey.

## 3    RP vowels: their distinguishing features

In this section we shall give a brief outline of the most crucial and distinguishing features of the vowels of RP. In Section 4, we shall then turn our attention to the principal areas of difficulty in vowel pronunciation, especially for the Tanzanian learner or speaker of English (and learners and speakers in other parts of Eastern Africa). Let us begin by looking at the phonemic inventory of the RP vowels. For convenience and easy reference later on in the discussion, we shall refer to the RP vowel phonemes by their traditional reference numbers (1 - 20), RP 1 - RP 12 being *monophthongs* and the rest (i.e. 13 - 20) *diphthongs* as follows: 1 /i/, 2 /ɪ/, 3 /e/, 4 /æ/, 5 /ɑ/, 6 /ɒ/, 7 /ɔ/, 8 /ʊ/, 9 /u/, 10 /ʌ/, 11 /ɜ/, 12 /ə/, 13 /eɪ/, 14 /əʊ/, 15 /aɪ/, 16 /aʊ/, 17 /ɔɪ/, 18 /ɪə/, 19 /ɛ/, 20 /ʊə/.

*Monophthong-diphthong* is, of course, the first of the important and distinguishing features of *RP* vowels. A monophthong is, by definition, a vowel sound during the production of which the approximative tongue position remains relatively static from the beginning to the end of its articulation. By contrast, the production of a diphthong involves glides or uninterrupted tongue shifts from one to another approximative position in the *vowel space* within the oral cavity. It is the contrastive opposition monophthong-diphthong that critically accounts for the distinction in meaning between, for example, each of the minimal pairs in (4).

(4)  a.  /ɒ/ and /əʊ/  as in /gɒt/ and /gəʊt/ i.e. 'got' and 'goat'

b.  /ɔ/ and /əʊ/  as in /kɔt/ and /kəʊt/ i.e. 'court/caught' and 'coat'

The second major feature which is critical for the contrast between vowel phonemes in RP is whether a vowel phoneme is pronounced *long* and *short*. The long-short opposition, based on the duration of articulation of the vowel sound, first of all involves the diphthongs. This is, of course, due to the fact already stated about their articulation: since their production involves a glide from one approximative articulatory position to another, the resulting sound will therefore unarguably be a long one. Consequently, all the eight RP diphthongs, 13 - 20, must be classified as long vowel sounds.

However, the long-short distinction is not limited to the eight diphthongs. The twelve monophthongs must themselves be categorised into five long (all the odd numbered monophthongs, with the exception of /e/, viz. /i/, /ɑ/, /ɔ/, /u/, /ɜ/) and seven short (i.e.

the remainder: all the even numbered monophthongs - /ɪ/, /æ/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ʌ/, /ə/- plus /e/). The long-short opposition in RP, even considering just the monophthongs, is critically important since it accounts for such contrasts as those between the minimal pairs in (5).

(5)  a.   /i/ and /ɪ/  as in /rid/ and /rɪd/ - i.e. 'read' and 'rid'

      b.   /u/ and /ʊ/  as in /ful/  and /fʊl/ - i.e. 'fool' and 'full'

We have seen that the first two contrastive or distinguishing features of the RP vowels concern both the monophthongs and diphthongs. The remaining features concern only the 12 RP monophthongs; they have little to do with the eight diphthongs. The production of any vowel sound principally involves the manipulation of different parts of the tongue within the vowel space in the oral cavity. The third and fourth features, therefore, relate to the manner in which the tongue is used in the pronunciation of a given monophthong. Thus the third feature is concerned with the particular part of the tongue which reaches highest within the vowel space in the oral cavity during its articulation - that is, which part is raised to a location nearest to the palate or roof of the mouth. For that purpose, phoneticians usually notionally divide the tongue into three non-discrete parts: *front, middle and back*. Accordingly, the vowel sound produced will be referred to as a 'front' central[1] or 'back', respectively. We can illustrate those conveniently in a vowel trapezium such as (6).

(6)   Parts of the tongue used in RP vowel articulation
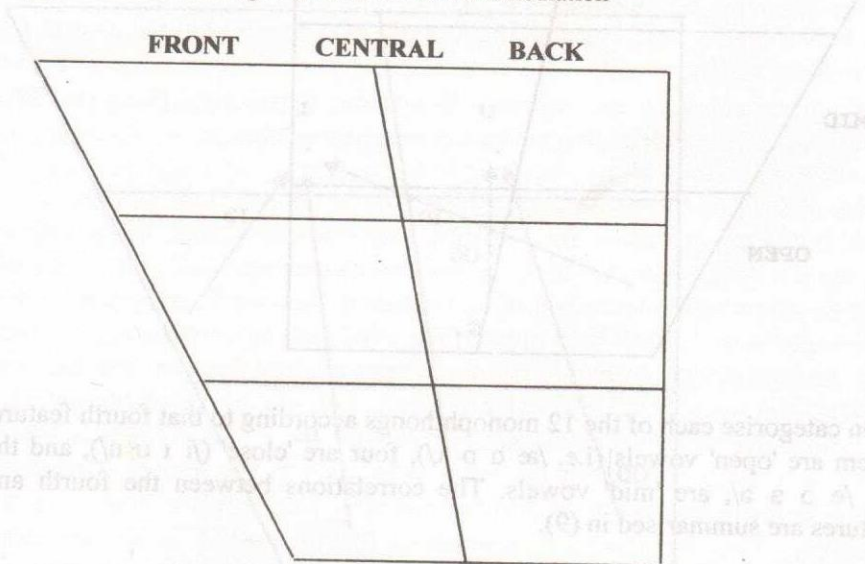


According to the third type of feature, therefore, we need to know whether the highest part is Front, Centre or Back of the tongue during the production of any one of the 12 monophthongs. Now, looking again at the 12 monophthongs in the RP vowel inventory, four (1 2, 3 and 4) are 'front'; five (5.6. 7, 8 and 9) are 'back', and the remaining three (10, II and 12) are central'. It should be recalled that we earlier categorised the same vowel phonemes according to the length feature. We can now

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combine the two features in order to show: (a) which of the six 'long' vowels are 'front', central' and which are 'back'; which of the seven short ones are 'front', 'central' and which are 'back'. The illustration in (7) summarises this quite succinctly.

(7)    RP monophthongs with Parts of the tongue and Length

|       | FRONT | CENTRAL | BACK |
|-------|-------|---------|------|
| **Long** | i | ɜ | ɑ ɔ u |
| **Short** | ɪ e æ | ʌ ə | ɒ ʊ |

The fourth feature essential for the distinction of one RP monophthong from another has to do with how high the front, middle or back of the tongue is raised in the vowel space within the oral cavity (i.e. how near to the palate is the part raised). Once again we are here concerned only with relative, not absolute, height. It is for precisely this purpose that phoneticians do also divide the vowel space in the oral cavity notionally into three parts: Open, Mid and Close (8).

(8)    Tongue Part and Tongue Height combined[10]
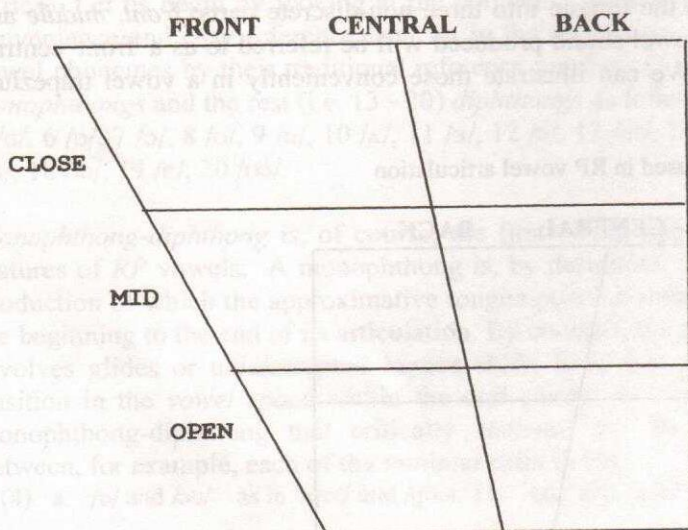


We can then categorise each of the 12 monophthongs according to that fourth feature. Four of them are 'open' vowels (i.e. /æ ɑ ɒ ʌ/), four are 'close' (/i ɪ ʊ u/), and the remainder, /e ɔ ɜ ə/, are 'mid' vowels. The correlations between the fourth and second features are summarised in (9).

(9)    According to the height of the part of the tongue raised

|       | CLOSE | MID | OPEN |
|-------|-------|-----|------|
| **Long** | i | ɔ | ɑ |
|       | u | ɜ |  |
| **Short** | ɪ | e | æ ɒ |
|       | ʊ | ə | ʌ |

We can also correlate the third feature (the part of the tongue raised) with the fourth (to what height is that part which is raised). That will give us (10).

(10)   Combining Tongue Height and Part of the Tongue Raised

|  | FRONT | CENTRAL | BACK |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CLOSE** | i |  | ʊ |
|  | ɪ |  | u |
| **MID** | e | ɜ | ɔ |
|  |  | ə |  |
| **OPEN** | æ | ʌ | ɑ |
|  |  |  | ɒ |

Clearly, most prominent here is the fact that RP does not have any central vowels which are close. But both FRONT and BACK vowels can, of course, be OPEN, MID or CLOSE.

Let us briefly turn to the eight RP diphthongs. We have seen that all the diphthongs are long vowel sounds. However, they can also be further sub-classified. We can classify them into three types: (a) those diphthongs that end at /ɪ/; those that end at /ʊ/, and those that end at /ə/. We illustrate these below in (11).

(11)   Closing and Centring Diphthongs
    i)        closing diphthongs



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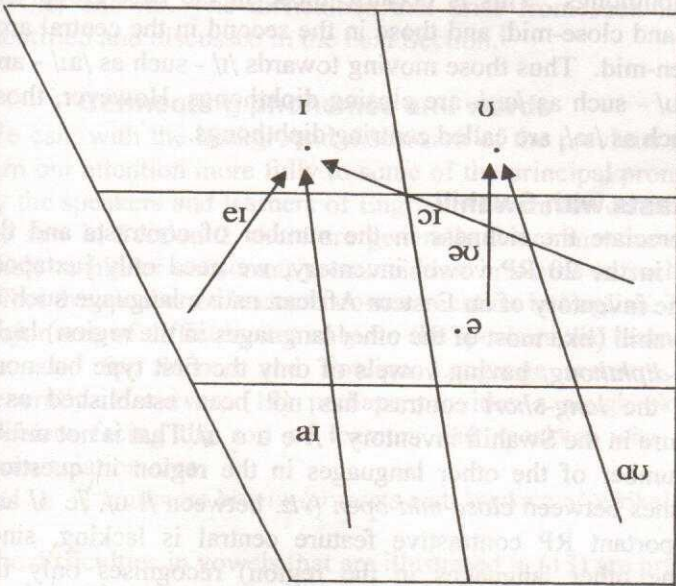
ii)    centring diphthongs
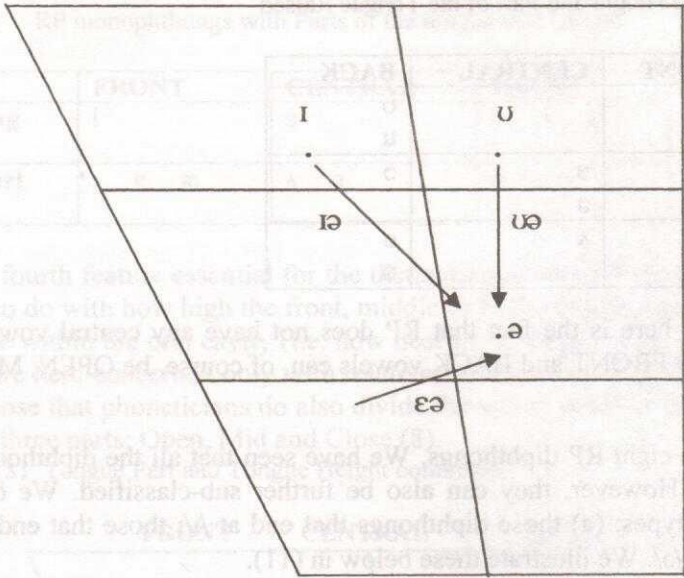


The first two groups together constitute the 'closing diphthongs' while in the third group are the 'centring diphthongs'. This is because those in the first group end somewhere between close and close-mid, and those in the second in the central area between close-mid and open-mid. Thus those moving towards /ɪ/ - such as /aɪ/ - and those that move towards /ʊ/ - such as /aʊ/- are closing diphthongs. However, those which move towards /ə/, such as /ɪə/, are called centring diphthongs.

## 4    Phonemic contrasts with Swahili

In order the better to appreciate the richness in the number of contrasts and the accompanying complexity in the 20 RP vowel inventory, we need only juxtapose them with a vowel phoneme inventory of an Eastern African native language such as Swahili. To begin with, Swahili (like most of the other languages in the region) lacks the contrast *monophthong-diphthong;* having vowels of only the first type but none of the second. Secondly, the *long-short* contrast has not been established as a significant contrastive feature in the Swahili inventory - /i e a ɔ u/. That is not unlike the situation in a large number of the other languages in the region in question. Thirdly, Swahili distinguishes between *close-mid-open (viz.* between /i u/, /e ɔ/ and /a/, respectively. The important RP contrastive feature central is lacking, since Swahili (and generally the other languages in the region) recognises only the contrastive part-of-the-tongue opposition front-back. The contrastive oppositions relevant for the Swahili (and a large number of tile region's other native languages) can be summed up by (12). The open Swahili vowel can, phonetically, be pronounced further back or front without any phonemic consequences to the essential contrasts in the inventory.

(12)    Contrastive Features of Swahili Vowel Phonemes

|         | **FRONT** | **BACK** |
|---------|-----------|----------|
| **CLOSE** | i       | u        |
| **MID**   | e       | ɔ        |
| **OPEN**  | a       |          |

A simple comparison between the Swahili vowel inventory in (12) with the RP inventory discussed in the earlier pages will indicate that only three of the RP vowels (i.e. the rnonophthongs /i/, /e/ and /u/) share close similarities with corresponding ones in the Swahili inventory.

The Mid, Back and Open Swahili vowels do not correspond in a one-to-one relationship with any corresponding RP phonemes. In stead, those Swahili vowels (and, of course, similar ones in the Bantu and other languages in the region) have each a 'dual correspondence' with certain RP vowels. Comparing (12) with (10), for example, it can be seen that the Swahili Mid-Back opposition has RP /ɒ/ and /ɔ/ as its nearest correspondents. The Swahili Open, on the other hand, is closely relatable to RP /æ/ and /ɑ/. The difficulties that arise from such lack of correspondence are identified and discussed in the next Section.[11]

## 5    Connecting phonemes and words

We can, with the background discussion of the previous sections of this study, now turn our attention more fully to some of the principal pronunciation difficulties faced by the speakers and learners of English who are the central concern of this study. As we saw in Section 2, there are generally fewer insurmountable difficulties that are likely to hinder consonant pronunciation in words to such a degree as to drastically affect the speaker or learner's communication in English. The vowels, however, are a major area of difficulty not only for the speakers and learners of the area of our focus but also for Second and Foreign Language learners and speakers of English generally. However, (13) perhaps provides a rough sketch of the scope of the problem facing the sort of learners and speakers who provided our data in this pronunciation area.

(13)    *[ 'a:griment bi'twi:n 'pi:za:nts endi 'we:ka:z ɔf 'efrika]

The difficulties in vowels that are illustrated in (13) are principally those that relate to the loss of an important contrasting feature: thus long /i/ is shortened in the second syllable of the first word and second syllable of the second word; the central /ə/ and /ɜ/ become fronted in the second, third, sixth and the final words; /e/ becomes /i/ in the fourth word and /æ/ becomes /e/ in the fifth, seventh and final words. Consequently we have the starred *['a:griment bi'twi:n 'pi:za:nts endi 'we:ka:z ɔf 'efrika] instead of the expected phonemic form /ə'grimənt bɪ'twi:n 'pezənts ænd 'wɜkəz ɒv 'æfrɪkə/.

Let us open this part of the discussion by presenting and describing certain sets of data that help to highlight the specific types of problems or problem areas that recur in the realm of vowel pronunciation in particular in English words. First we have data such as (14) - (17)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (14) *[get] | "get" or "gate" | /get | geɪt/ |
| (15) *[bɔt] | "bought" or "boat" | /bɔt | bəʊt/ |
| (16) *[nɔt] | "not" or "note" | /nɒt | nəʊt/ |
| (17) *[bel] | "bell" or "bale" | /bel | beɪl/ |

The four sets above are merely sample data - the tip of the iceberg, as it were - of data reflecting the same sort of problem. Clearly, here the asterisked forms indicate anomalous pronunciations which reflect a neutralisation of the contrastive opposition *diphthong-monophthong;* which we discussed earlier. The data consists of nothing but minimal pairs similar in all respects except for the monophthong in the first word and diphthong in the second in each pair (see their RP forms at rightmost). The asterisk indicates this 'neutral' form heard and recorded for such pairs as in (14) - (17): the loss of contrast generally produces a monophthong for both. The diphthong-monophthong contrasts in the above pairs occur in the data most frequently. The spelling of the vowel very often also affects its pronunciation - be it a monophthong or diphthong. Thus, for example, "bet" and "bait" are pronounced with the opposition clearly maintained, /bet/ - /beɪt/, it would appear due to the digraphic spelling of the diphthong in "bait" - but not, for example, in (14) or (17) above (for detailed treatment and discussion of this see Maghway, 1981).

Now there is nothing so sacrosanct about the diphthong-monophthong opposition. There are many accents - even in British English (Scouse or Liverpudlian and Scottish to name but two) where it is not always recognised (e.g. in get-gate, got-goat).[12] The point here, however, is that those accents have another strategy' for ensuring the contrast between such words is maintained even without the deployment of the diphthong-monophthong opposition as RP does. In accents such as the two named, the contrast between the minimal pairs in (14) (17) is usually achieved by resorting to the short - long contrast, which we have also already discussed at the theoretical level above, and to which we now return in view of the data below (18) - (20).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (18) *[fiːl] | "fill" or "feel" | |
| (19) *[ʃɔːt] | "shot" or "short" | |
| (20) *[beːd] | "bed" or "bird" | |

The asterisk again indicates the 'neutral' forms produced for the words in each pair. Here generally what is produced is the long member of the contrasting pair. Even native speakers of certain accents of English here maintain only the long-short contrast. However, that is not all that is involved in the RP phonemes contrasted in the three sets above. For RP, apart from long - short in those vowels, there is also a difference of tongue position between each of the pairs in (18) - (20). In 'fill', for example, we also have the fact that the front of the tongue is raised to about only halfway in the space we have named CLOSE and slightly retracted, while it is near 'close' and almost fully front in 'feel'. In 'shot' and short', on top of the long-short difference, there is also the back open and back mid contrast, respectively. The

principal problem in (20) is not just a long-short contrast, but also – and especially - that the second word has a central vowel while the first has a front one. A central vowel is, of course, not only totally exotic but also an insignificant phonological feature to a large majority of Tanzanian (and other Eastern African) speakers and learners of English. It is hardly a wonder that this frequently produces such absurdities as (21) (a) for the utterance in (b).

(21) a. [ɔl ðe: 'be:dz 'flu: "e:we:]
      "all the beds flew away"

      b. /'ɔl ðə 'bɜdz 'flu ə'weɪ/
      "all the birds flew away"

A similar problem involving a central vowel is in the frequently heard pronunciation of words such as "journal" or" journalist", which are pronounced respectively as *['dʒɔ:n:] and *[dʒɔ:nɔ:'list]. Other problem areas are reflected in the data in (22) below.

  (22) a. *[men]     "man - men"    /mæn   men/
      b. *['efrika]   "Africa" /æfrɪkə/

(23) *[ha:t]  "hat - hut - heart - hurt"   /hæt hʌt hɑt hɜt/

As in (18) - (20), the loss of contrast in (22) and (23) involves only the twelve monophthongs of RP discussed earlier.

The spelling factor, to which we have already made reference, usually compounds the difficulties in vowel pronunciation in such data as (24) - (32), for example.

  (24) *['wanted]     "wanted"    /wɒntɪd/
  (25) *[dʒa:ne:]     "journey"   /dʒɜnɪ/
  (26) *[dʒɔ:nɔ:list]   "journalist"  /dʒɜnəlɪst/
  (27) *[ge:l]       "girl"     /gɜl/
  (28) *['we:d]      "word"    /wɜd/
  (29) *[ba:n]      "burn"    /bɜn/
  (30) *['pi:za:nts]   "peasants"  /pezənts/
  (31) *['pli:za:nts]   "pleasant"  /plezənts/
  (32) *[se:'kamstanses] "circumstances"  /sɜkəmstənsɪz/

What we have in the data above are words for which the pronunciations heard clearly suggest a correlation with the spelling of the vowel in each. The particular focus of that section of the data is, of course, on /ɜ/ (items (25) - (29) and again (32)), with two other items for /i/ and one each for /ɪ/ and /e/. Let us consider first of all the examples in which /ɜ/ was expected. In the six words, /ɜ/ is spelt in one way - 'our' - in the first two, and three different ways in the remaining four items - 'ir' in two, and 'or' and 'ur', respectively, in two others.

It is clear that different ways in which the vowel is spelt trigger different pronunciations for the same vowel. Its 'our' spelling even produces two different pronunciation. That means that we therefore get three different phonetic tokens for the same vowel from the six data items for it: [a] for the 'ur' and one of its 'our' (in 25) spelling; [o] for its second 'our' spelling (in *(26))* as in journalist', 'journal', etc.),

and its most typical phonetic token - [e], especially for its 'ir' (as in the two data items and others like in 'bird', 'third', 'skirt'. etc.), and even 'or' (in 'word', 'world', etc.). This spelling-triggered anomalous pronunciation is particularly typical for all words containing the RP central vowels, and especially /ɜ/.

In (24) and (32), /ɪ/ is spelt 'e', its usual spelling in the suffixes for past tense (in the former) and plural (in the latter). That spelling of /ɪ/ typically results in the phonetic token [e]. In contrast, its 'i' spelling, as in 'pit', invariably results in an [i] phonetic token (see Maghway, (1981) for more on the effects of spelling on pronunciation for that and all the other vowels). The first syllable in (24) contains /ɒ/, here eliciting the phonetic token [a], clearly triggered by the 'a' spelling. However, (13) perhaps most clearly illustrates the overriding influence of spelling on the pronunciation of English for the learners and speakers of English in our sample. If we juxtapose the spelling and pronunciation of each of the eight words with the corresponding spelling, this becomes virtually self-explanatory (13a).

    (13a) *['a:griment bi'twi:n ðe: 'pi:za:nts endi 'we:k:z ɒf 'efrika]
          agreement between the peasants and workers of Africa

We are left with items (30) and (31) of our data: here we have, in the first syllable, /e/ pronounced [i] - again clearly because it is spelt 'ea' (an obvious illicit generalisation from 'ea' in 'bean', 'sea'. 'beat', 'season', etc.); obvious oblivious of the similar 'ea' in 'head' and 'bread', but which represents /e/. Clearly, therefore, the problem of the pronunciation of the English vowel system per se is compounded by the influence of the corresponding spelling of the vowel in a given word.

But we must dispel the impression that the difficulties so far discussed only occur in the pronunciation of phonemes in words in isolation (in fact all the data was obtained from ordinary speech contexts). We provide below other authentic sentential data items (as opposed to reconstructed ones as in (21) above) to illustrate what we mean.

    (33)    *[ðe: 'pi:za:nts endi 'we:ka:z of 'efrika]
           "the peasants and workers of Africa "

    (33a) /ðə 'pezənts ən 'wɜkəz əv 'æfrikə/

    (34)    *[ðe: dʒɔ:nɔ:'lists dis'ka:st ðe: 'i:fekts ɔf 'sam 'we:ld 'iʃu:z]
           "the journalists discussed some world issues"

    (34a) /ðə 'dʒɜnəlɪts dɪs'kʌst ðɪ rɪ'fekts əv səm 'wɜld ə'feəz/

In all the preceding discussion we have omitted dealing with one of the vowel phonemes, *viz.*, /ə/ or schwa. Its omission is motivated by a special reason: since in RP the vowel is associated with unstressed syllables₅ its consideration would not make much sense before we have dealt with stress in English words. We have therefore reserved its consideration for the following Section, where we turn to the pronunciation of English words, and with a particular focus on stress.

## 5    Stress

Stress is a crucial element of spoken English. Stress is important not only at the word level; it has a pervasive influence even at all the other levels of English speech. We shall limit consideration to only the word level: we shall use the linguistic concept stress to mean the relative, greater prominence of a given syllable in a sequence of two or more syllables in the pronunciation of an English word. This greater prominence is, in turn, due to the combined effect of some or all of the following characteristics associated with the articulation of the stressed syllable.

- A stressed syllable is more prominent than an unstressed one because it is pronounced with a greater amount of effort and is, consequently, heard as stronger than the weaker syllable(s) in its neighbourhood. A stressed syllable is therefore pronounced with greater energy, effort and force.
- A stressed syllable is articulated more clearly than any unstressed syllable(s) in its neighbourhood; therefore, a stressed syllable must be pronounced with a full (as opposed to a reduced) vowel.
- A stressed syllable is pronounced louder and is, consequently, more audible than any unstressed syllable(s) in its neighbourhood.
- A stressed syllable is pronounced longer and can, therefore, be heard as taking more time to articulate than its unstressed neighbour(s).
- A stressed syllable is pronounced with, at least, a higher pitch than any unstressed neighbouring syllable(s); one of the stressed syllables in a sequence will be pronounced with a pitch that is falling, rising, etc. (and that will be the most prominent syllable in that sequence of stressed syllables – usually called the nucleus).

English word stress assignment is not accomplished through the use of any simple rule of thumb. This has serious consequences for learners of English who speak languages in which syllable prominence in words is allocated by a simple rule: this is particularly acute for learners and speakers of English with a Swahili background. A genuine Swahili word has a predictable pitch accent on its penultimate syllable. This location of prominence is phonetically realised by a higher pitch on the relevant syllable. The pitch protrusion may be accompanied by an increase in length. Therefore Swahili words like *mama, safari, malalamiko* – 'mother', 'journey' and 'complaints', respectively - have greater prominence on the last but one syllable. That syllable is usually referred to as the stressed syllable in Swahili pronunciation.

- 'ma-ma
- sa-'fa-ri
- ma-la-la-'mi-ko.

A similar rule cannot, however, be generalised for English words. True, there are English words that are stressed on the penultimate syllable. Examples of these include: se-'mes-ter, ˌcit-y, to-'geth-er (/sə-'mes-tə/, /ˈsɪ-tɪ/, /tə-'geð-ə/). We cannot make a generalisation, however, so that all the words in English are pronounced with a last-but-one syllable stress. When such a faulty generalisation made, the result is errors like those in (35) – (39).

| (35) | *me-ne-dʒi-ment | - management | 'mæn-ɪdʒ-mənt |
| (36) | *se-'te-ni-ti | - certainty | 'sɜ-tən-tɪ |
| (37) | *prɔ-'gra-miŋ | - programming | 'prəʊ-græm-ɪŋ |
| (38) | *dʒa-sti-fa-jiŋ | - justifying | 'dʒʌs-tɪ-faɪ-ɪŋ |
| (39) | *re-kɔg-'nai-ziŋ | - recognising | 're-kəg-naɪ-zɪŋ |

Such utterances as (35) – (39) are heard daily in English speech that comes out of the mouths of many (if not most) of the speakers and learners of the language covered by our sample. This is clearly an error that grows out of the fact that, for Tanzanian learners and speakers of English, Swahili is the fundamental language (and, consequently, a fundamental influence - even where, as it is for a majority of Tanzanians, Swahili is not the first language)[13].

There is, however, another type of faulty generalisation that accounts for stress location errors in English as it is spoken by many Tanzanian learners, and speakers of it who have an inadequate proficiency in the language. This is the generalisation of the English stress rule that involves between 70 and 80 or so two-syllable words in English, which are stressed on the first syllable when such words are used as nouns or adjectives and on the second syllable when the words are used as verbs. This illicit generalisation results in the mispronunciations tabulated in (40) – (45).

| Serial No. | Error | Target | Spelling |
|------------|-------|--------|----------|
| 40 | * 'eks-tent | ɪks-'tent | ex'tent |
| 41 | * 'ad-vais | əd-'vaɪs, | ad'vice, ad'vise |
| | | əd-'vaɪz | |
| 42 | * 'ad-vans | əd-'vɑns | ad'vance |
| 43 | * 'i:-fekt | ɪ-'fekts | effect |
| 44 | * 'kɔ:-rekt | kə-'rekt | cor'rect |
| 45 | * 'a:-gri-ment | ə-'gri-mənt | a'greement |

The words in (40) – (45) do not respond to the rule that operates in the data in the finite list of between 70 and 80 English words in which the location of stress alternates between the first and second syllable, depending on the word class in which the word is used in a given contest. Unlike those covered by the rule, all the first five words in the above list, and others like them, permit stress only on the second syllable irrespective of the word class (hence always /ɪks-'tent/, /əd-'vaɪs/ or /əd-'vaɪz/, /əd-'vɑns/, /ɪ-'fekts/, /kə-'rekt/, and /ə-'gri-mənt/, but never any of the starred forms in (40) – (44)). In some cases, this illicit generalisation appears to be extended to even three syllable words construed as belonging together with the 70 – 80 two syllable words: here we have the example in (45). Learners and speakers of English in Tanzania, for some as yet unclear reason, tend to make a false generalisation so that two or three syllable words that have noun and verb forms spelt in an identical way are pronounced with first syllable stress.

Tanzanian speakers and learners of English make another type of error in word stress. This error type, though related to the one portrayed by (35) – (39), involves an extension of the above generalisation. As a result of this illicit extension, certain two or three syllable words get their stresses fixed on the second syllable whether they are

used as nouns or adjectives, or as verbs (see examples (46) – (48) below). All these words are, of course, normally pronounced with stress on the first syllable as shown in the rightmost column.

(46) *kɔ:-'ments   - 'comments (n. or v.)   'kɒm-ənts
(47) *prɔ-'gra-miŋ   - 'pro,gramming   'prəʊ-,græm-ɪŋ
(48) *kɔ:'meːs   - 'commerce   'kɒm-əs

It is not entirely clear why stress is erroneously shifted from the canonical initial syllable to the second syllable. One would have thought that, if the motivation were the Swahili penultimate syllable stress, a Swahili speaker or learner of English would intuitively place stress correctly on the initial (i.e. penultimate) syllable in such examples as those in (46) – (48).

Another stress deviation, and which does appear to be based on the Swahili penultimate syllable rule is manifested by the data in (49) – (52) below.

(49) *de-ve-lɔp-ment   - de'velopment   dɪ-'vel-əp-mənt
(50) *eː-du-'keː-ted   - 'educated   'edʒ-ə-,keɪt-ɪd
(51) *seːf-(u)-"gaːd-iŋ   - 'safe-guarding   'seɪf-,gɑd-ɪŋ
(52) *mɔ-ti-veː-ted   - 'motivated   'məʊ-tɪ-veɪt-ɪd

We could provide numerous other instances that illustrate deviance in lexical stress placement in the English that trickles from the mouths of Tanzanian speakers and learners. Suffice it to add that, when a verb ends with the suffix –ed, or –ise (or -yse), it is more likely than not to be stressed on its penultimate syllable however long or short the word may be: as in *[prɔ-seː-'kju-ted], [neː-ʃi-nɔ-'laiz], instead of /prəʊ-sɪ-kjʊ-tɪd/, /næʃ-ə-nə-laɪzd/.

It is true that, in English, Second and Foreign Language learners are normally advised to learn every new word together with its stress pattern. That by no means implies that English word stress is haphazard or completely insensitive to any general rules. But it would be simplistic to suggest that there is a single rule of thumb for stress placement in English words as there is in, say, Swahili.[14]

The importance of stress in English speech is by no means limited to word stress. Communication, including communication through speech, does not rely upon isolated words only; they have generally to be combined to form phrases and sentences and even paragraphs. When words are used in such connected speech, whether in conversation or other types of spoken communication, lexical stress does not always remain static: not every stressable syllable in the citation pronunciation of each of the words occurring in an utterance will necessarily be manifested. Consideration of that must, however, is left for another occasion since it is beyond the scope of the current study.

## 6   Conclusion

In the foregoing Sections we have only briefly identified, and outlined some of the more prominent pronunciation difficulties faced by Tanzanian (and other Eastern African) speakers and learners of English. But we saw that there are no serious difficulties in the realm of consonant pronunciation, with the exception, especially, of /ʒ/, and the /ð/ - /z/ and /r/ - /l/ contrasts.

However, more numerous and serious difficulties are encountered - as we saw - in the realm of vowel pronunciation. We saw that most of the 20 vowel phonemes of RP are potential sources of difficulty of one form or another. Such difficulties, we pointed out, usually have to do with the failure to distinguish between pairs or sets of vowel feature contrasts in word pronunciation. We considered various types of pronunciation data. However, it must be underscored here that there is an almost inexhaustible quantity of such data; we have not under example (4) included tokens such as (4c) - (4h), which can be heard in everyday speech when English spoken at all.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (4c) *[kansil] | - | 'council | /kɑʊnsɪl/ |
| (4d) *[seiz] | - | says | /sez/ |
| (4e) *[seid] | - | said | /sed/ |
| (4f) *[lukwem] | - | 'lukewarm | /lukwɔm/ |
| (4g) *[sinet] | - | 'Senate | ['senɪt/ |
| (4h) *[bjuld] | - | build | /bɪld/ |

We did not, however, stop at merely identifying or diagnosing the problems faced by the speakers and learners who are the subject of our considerations. We went further by suggesting the likely principal causes of the deviations. It was proposed that the major causes stem from the failure to grasp, appreciate or recognise and then produce in the articulation of the respective vowels in words the distinguishing or contrastive features that are essential - even critical - in the distinction of each of the 20 RP vowel phonemes and its contrast with all the others.

Thus, it was stated that some of the difficulties and resulting deviations were due to the failure to grasp and apply (a) the distinction between the contrasting features *monophthong/diphthong*; (b) the contrastive values of the quantity features *long/short*, (c) the tongue features (i) which part of the tongue is raised: whether *front/central/back*, *(ii)* to what height is that part raised: whether *close/mid/open*, and (d) the presence or absence of lip rounding which accompanies one (or combinations) of the contrastive features in (a), (b) and (c).

Some of the pronunciation difficulties, we further indicated, were attributable to the various ways in which a given phoneme may be spelt in the writing or orthographic system of English. The contention here, as elsewhere (e.g. Maghway, (1981), is that - in the absence of a grasp of any principled system of contrasting between vowels in pronouncing English words, haphazard guesswork and the spelling of a vowel encountered in a word often have serious repercussions on the way the vowel is pronounced in a given word. It is maintained here that the identification of such principal causes of vowel pronunciation in English as we have done above goes a long way towards a solution of the problems: their step-by-step alleviation or amelioration and the ultimate goal of their eventual eradication.

Just as a correct diagnosis of the symptoms and causes of a disease is halfway to its cure, so is the accurate identification of English pronunciation difficulties (as well as other speech difficulties) and their causes a big step towards their eradication. However, every proper diagnosis, to be meaningful, must be followed by an effective prescription. Briefly stated, there is no shortcut to the solution to the problems faced in vowel pronunciation and other speech difficulties in English. It is an inescapable

prerequisite to be able to recognise (i.e. to hear and appreciate) and then produce (reflect in pronunciation) the essential distinguishing features of vowel phonemes as outlined above. Even such recognition and ability to produce those contrasts would not be sufficient. Also imperative is the knowledge of the distribution of each of the vowels in English words in which they occur. Finally it must be appreciated that spelling in English is the worst guide to pronunciation.

However, even when all the difficulties identified (and only briefly treated) above and others similar to them have been eradicated altogether, it would not be the case that we would have solved the whole puzzle surrounding pronunciation problems in English in this region of the world. For, as we have seen, there are problems not only in consonant and, especially, vowel pronunciation; many even more serious difficulties are to be found in the realm of stress. We have in mind here the difficulties we have seen in stress in words. We have only scratched on the surface of problems in stress since we have only looked at word stress here. Two principal causes of stress deviance were identified, viz. illicit generalization of rules not adequately grasped and the transfer of the Swahili penultimate stress (or pitch accent) – perhaps 'penultimitis', if it was disease!

Finally, it is important to recognise that what we have covered above is mostly only the classroom perspective of the problem; underlying are, of course, factors well beyond the classroom walls. The bottom line in any final solution to problems in spoken English, especially in Tanzania (and the Eastern Africa region in general), is the realisation of the basic fact that we do not have a local accent of English here on which we might base the teaching of spoken English in this part of the world. Yet, while the grammar of (written) English does not vary drastically in the world, spoken English has a large variety of native accents - many of them not intelligible beyond the geographical areas where they are spoken. It is, therefore, not only imperative but also critical that an <u>overt</u> choice is made of one native accent of English as a classroom target. That will give an orientation to all the training of English language teachers in the region so that it is unambiguously based on such target. The teachers so trained would then be the classroom models for that target. RP has hitherto implicitly been such a target. It must be openly and clearly spelt out. The importance of such a model is, of course, not that we necessarily wish that all our learners should ultimately emerge with impeccable RP; it is rather that the teaching and learning of spoken English will, consequently, be more systematic and will not continue to rely on guesswork by both the teachers and learners. But it is only in a dream world that s/he can base her or his teaching on all the Englishes of the world or on none and yet hope to have a successful outcome.

We would like to end by pointing out that, although this paper could have pursued from all possible angles the various aspects and nuances of spoken English dealt with in it, it was necessary to keep the discussion within its present length. This is a decision purposely and deliberately taken since the goal was to aim at the broadest audience possible by avoiding any chance of restricting our audience to academics (who would have both the time and patience needed to go through long journal articles) and alienate the teachers of English and university students - after all they produced the data for our study and should directly benefit from the output.[15]

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## Endnotes

[1] A shorter version of this paper appeared in *The Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education,* Vol. 1 1995, pp 30 – 45. That version was limited to consideration of the consonant and vowel systems only.

[2] Specifically in this country but, it may be assumed, to a large extent also in the rest of Eastern Africa.

[3] This paper arises from the analysis of data collected in a long-term, cumulative research in the day-to-day use of English in Tanzania: it is based on the observation of English spoken by Tanzanians in different situations and environments (at the work place: e.g. in the office, at university public lectures, academic conferences and workshops, University of Dar es Salaam official meetings - including those of the Senate - and, occasionally, in the bus or in the street), and College and Secondary School students in their classes (observed over a number of years during Teaching Practice Supervision of University of Dar es Salaam English Student Teachers) and even students in the University of Dar es Salaam in formal and informal situations.

[4] Although in this paper references outside English are limited to Swahili, a majority of the speakers who produced our data (and, indeed, of the other speakers of English both in Tanzania and the rest of East Africa) also each have an L1 that belongs to one of the four language families of Africa.

[5] It should be appreciated that /ð/ is also a loan phoneme (presumably from Arabic) in Swahili: hence the frequent realisation of /arði/ as /a'rizi/ and the frequent loss of contrast in the realisation of /ðana/ and /zana/ resulting in ['zana] for both, especially for non-highly uneducated Swahili speakers.

[6] The seriousness of the loss of this contrast in English was driven home once in a Dar es Salaam tourist hotel when the waiter (in his best English) asked the author and a companion (a visiting native speaker of English) whether we would not like to order their ['flaid 'tʃiken end 'lais] for /fraɪd 'tʃɪkən ən 'raɪs/ as it was quite well done that afternoon and was always the best in town.

[7] We must draw attention here to the laxity in this contrast (in the schools, other such institutions and the general society) in Tanzania to the extent of its loss even in Swahili speech and writing (leo/reo, salama/sarama), etc.; both consonant sounds being neutralised phonetically as a tap or flap.

[8] Although we specifically mention the native speaker here, it is important to add 'and/or a *proficient*' speaker since such a speaker would, by definition also be in a position to manipulate the variations manifested in the native speaker's fluent colloquial speech.

[9] The occurrence of the palatal nasal in English colloquial speech is usually the result of the process of speech simplification called *assimilation,* which is not intended to be within the scope of this paper.

[10] The horizontal lines in IPA nomenclature are from top to bottom 'close, close-mid, open-mid' and 'open'. However, our CLOSE, MID, OPEN here refer only to the spaces between the lines; and they, respectively, also from tops to bottom.

[11] For learners of English in Tanzania, the strongest background language is Swahili apparently because, not only is it the language of wider communication in the country, it's prestigious position as the national language also undermines the place of the other native languages; besides, it is the official language of education in the early years of school.

[12] The contrast between the two words in the pair may in stead utilise the long-short contrast.

[13] It should be noted that here we refrain from commenting on segmental deviations in both the consonant and vowel
phonemes.

[14] There is a more in-depth treatment of syllables and stress in another paper on rhythm (forthcoming).

[15] This paper is to be followed by at least three others based on the same cumulative data: one focusing on the central vowels (in preparation), another one on rhythm (forthcoming) and the third on intonation (in preparation).