

The Evolution of Ghanaian English: Trends and Insights

Sena Kwaku Kumah, B.A, M.Phil.

English Language
University of Education, Winneba
kumahsena1@gmail.com

Genevieve Enyonam Atakro B.A, M.Phil.

English Language
University of Education, Winneba
geneenyokro@gmail.com

Kafui Mishio-Ametame, B.A, MPhil.

English Language
University of Education, Winneba
mishioametame@gmail.com

Abstract

This study delves into the dynamic landscape of Ghanaian English, exploring its evolving linguistic trends across various branches of linguistics. The primary objective is to discern and categorize these trends, shedding light on their prevalence and significance. Drawing from the fields of sociolinguistics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, the study examined the levels at which these trends manifest. This paper identified and described the prevailing trends in Ghanaian English. Through comprehensive linguistic analysis, the study unveils the various linguistic shifts that have shaped this unique variety of English over time. From lexicon to pronunciation, these trends reflect the rich interplay of linguistic influences in Ghana. It also assessed the levels at which these trends operate within the various branches of linguistics. The paper scrutinized how these linguistic phenomena manifest in sociolinguistic contexts, such as sociolect variations, code-switching, and language contact. Additionally, it explored their impact on phonological patterns, morphological structures, syntactic constructions, and semantic nuances.

Finally, the paper provided concrete examples of these trends across the linguistic branches. By analysing real-world instances, this study offers a comprehensive view of the linguistic evolution in Ghanaian English. Through extensive data collection and analysis, the paper presents compelling evidence of the ongoing transformation and adaptation of this language variety and its socioeconomic impacts. This research contributes to our understanding of the intricate dynamics of Ghanaian English, offering valuable insights into the broader field of linguistic trends within sociolinguistic and structural contexts. It underscores the need for continued exploration of language variation and change, particularly in regions where English has taken on a unique identity.

Keywords: Ghanaian English, trends, phonology, lexical, syntactic, morphological

1. Introduction

The use of English as the official language in Ghana can be traced to the period of independence and colonialism where the language was passed on by the British to the then Gold Coast in the 16th century (Adika, 2012). English is now utilised across all discourse levels in Ghana, encompassing governance, education, religion, administration, business, commerce, media, entertainment, and other spheres. Kachru (1998) argues that as the English Language leaves its original home, new varieties arise. These varieties of the English Language are currently termed New Englishes or World Englishes, and have evolved into varieties which serve a wide range of purposes, and at the same time, developed their own character (Jenkins, 2003).

These varieties and characters differ from the native varieties, typically the two leading standard varieties: British English and American English. Ghana's use of English and its variety falls within Kachru's (1998) outer circle (ESL) in his three concentric circles. Ghana's variety of English, initially referred to as Gold Coast English by Brown and Scragg (1948) is now referred to as Ghanaian English with literature crediting its coinage to Grieve (1964) and its popularity to Sey (1973). Sey (1973) opines that English language as used in the Ghanaian context is not used as it was transported from its original home. He then defines Ghanaian English as that kind of English that is currently used in a way which is peculiar to Ghanaian context.

Kumah (2025) defines Ghanaian English as that dynamic variety that blends Standard English with indigenous linguistic expressions, accents, grammatical structures, creativity, and pidgins, forming a communicative medium that is mutually intelligible and accepted in both formal and informal settings, widely used in schools, churches, homes, and public spaces. Its uniqueness lies in its strong connection to local languages, which shape its pronunciation and vocabulary. Owusu-Ansah (1996:22-23) on the other hand, discusses that Ghanaian English can be discussed as a nativised language. He explains this nativisation as “norm-breaking and standardization of the English language in Ghana”. He discusses that Ghanaian English like any other variety of English, does show different features from standard English. Ghanaian English is a unique variety of English spoken in Ghana, which exhibits distinct linguistic features influenced by the local languages and cultural context.

Linguists have long advocated for the codification and standardisation of Ghanaian English, and one of the numerous reasons is that Ghanaian English satisfies all the various branches of linguistics (phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics etc.). Studies including that of Sey (1970), Bobda (2000), Ngula (2011), Adjei and Logogye (2016) and Kumah (2025) reaffirm that Ghanaian English is characterised and expressed by all the linguistic features of English. For example, with phonology, Ghanaian English exhibits specific phonetic features such as spelling pronunciation; the pronunciation of English Language words based on their orthographic representations rather than their usual phonetic transcriptions (Ngula, 2011; Kumah, 2025). Ghanaian English phonology comes with phoneme substitution such as the substitution of voiceless dental fricative /θ/ with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ or with the voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/. For instance, “thank” əæ may be pronounced as “tank” or “fank”. Additionally, the vowel sounds may be influenced by Ghanaian languages, resulting in variations such as the pronunciation of “e” as [ɛ] in words like “red” or “pen” (Koranteng, 2006). Also, Ghanaian English incorporates a range of loanwords from local Ghanaian languages such as Akan, Ewe, and Ga, reflecting the multilingual nature of the country. For example, terms like “chop” meaning “to eat”, and “trotro”, referring to a “public transport” or “minibus”, are commonly used in Ghanaian English (Owusu-Ansah, 2016).

On the level of syntax, Ghanaian English shows grammatical structures influenced by local languages. One feature is the use of “dey” as an aspectual marker, indicating ongoing or habitual actions. For instance, “He dey talk plus me ridees” meaning “He is speaking with me”. Another feature is the replacement or the omission of the copula verb “is” with the base form “be” in sentences, reflecting substrate influence from local languages like Akan dialects and creating structures such as “She be a teacher” instead of “She is a teacher” (Agyekum, 2018). Lastly, Ghanaian English employs expressive devices, such as reduplication and amplification, for emphasis or intensification. For example, “small small” means “gradually” or “sharp sharp” for ‘quickly’ and “plenty plenty” for ‘a lot’ may be used to convey a high degree, as in “The business is going on small small!” meaning “The business is growing”. This shows that like the known standard English expressions, Ghanaian English expressions are not erroneous but they are creative varieties adding to the growth of the world’s language (English Language).

2.0 Focus

The issue of this paper is to examine the trends in Ghanaian English and to analyse them as innovative divergent features that are giving Ghanaian English its own features or character.

3.0 Statement of the Problem

There is consistent research interest in Ghanaian English. There are works such as Sey (1973), Bamgbose (1997), Bobda (2000), Adika (2012), Ngula (2014), Kumah (2025) and others who have studied Ghanaian English right from its colonial inception and given descriptions about its unique dynamism in terms of its grammatical structures, vocabulary inceptions, semantic ascriptions and its diversified phonological attributes. Literature on Ghanaian English reveals that this unique variety undergoes transformation and dynamism. In recent times, technology and innovations have been a great influence of the transformations in growth of this unique variety, in terms of the various aspects of linguistics. These are referred to as ‘levels’ which would be discussed as trends in this paper.

Scarcer are works that have been done on the trends in Ghanaian English. The only existing work which seems to focus somewhat on trends in Ghanaian English is Ngula (2014), which studies the hybridized lexical innovations in Ghanaian English. Ngula (2014) discusses the forms and communicative domains of the product features in the English of educated Ghanaians. He argues that the motivations behind the use of these hybridized lexical formations stems from a conscious awareness of the mutual co-existence between English and the L1 languages in Ghana. The study highlighted an aspect of the distinctiveness of Ghanaian English lexicon, and it also has implications for the codification of the features of Ghanaian English for its legitimacy to be properly acknowledged in Ghana and beyond. This study, however, looked at innovations in Ghanaian English, it only focused on lexical innovations, it did not focus on other linguistic elements in Ghanaian English. Again, it only focused on educated speakers only.

It is in this light that this paper would contribute to literature on Ghanaian English by looking at the trends, factors that account for these trends, the levels of linguistics at which these trends occur, and discuss with some examples to demonstrate how these trends are conspicuous in the use of Ghanaian English.

4.0 Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the trends in Ghanaian English and what factors account for them?
2. On what levels of linguistics do these trends occur in Ghanaian English?

5.0 Methodology

The research design employed for this study was the qualitative design. It employed the descriptive research approach which sought to observe certain linguistic features that helped in understanding trends in Ghanaian English.

6.0 Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through random sampling which was done through observation from both selected spoken and written Ghanaian English expressions from the media, printed literature from sampled texts, and chats from social media handles.

7.0 Analysis and Discussions of Findings

The analysis and discussions of results in this paper follow qualitative thematic analysis, and they centre on the applications of empirical studies and various linguistic theories on New Englishes.

Research Question 1: What are the trends in Ghanaian English and what factors account for them?

Trends in Ghanaian English and Factors Accounting for Them

Language is a complex and ever-changing phenomenon. New words are coined, old words fall out of use, and the meanings of words can shift over time. These changes are driven by a variety of factors, including social, cultural, and technological changes. One of the most significant trends in language in recent years has been the rise of social media. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have given people a new way to communicate with each other (Adika, 2012; Arthur-Shoboa & Quarcoo, 2012). This has led to a more informal style of communication, with people using abbreviations, emoticons, and other forms of shorthand.

Trends in Linguistics though not scholarly defined in literature, is the observable patterns of change, development, or emphasis with language use its self and in the scholarly approaches used in the study of language. Furthermore, Trends in Ghanaian English is simple the is the observable patterns of change, and development of the English Language pertinent to the use of the English language Ghana. Ghanaian English, a recognised variety within Kachru's (1985) Outer Circle of World Englishes, displays distinctive linguistic patterns that reflect both local innovation and adaptation to sociocultural contexts. The trends observed in this study show that Ghanaian English is not a deviation from Standard British English but a dynamic variety shaped by Ghana's multilingual setting, educational history, and social interaction patterns. The present findings reveal several noticeable trends in Ghanaian English: lexical creativity, semantic shift, orthographic influence, phonological adaptation, and syntactic variation. These features are driven by factors such as mother tongue interference, educational exposure, social identity, and digital communication.

The table below shows results of common recent Ghanaian English Expressions.

Table 1.1: Selected Ghanaian English Expressions and Their Standard Equivalents

Ghanaian English Expression	Literal / Local Meaning	Standard English Equivalent	British
Light off	Power outage	Power cut / Blackout	
One-touch victory	A decisive or effortless win	Landslide victory	
By-force marriage	A marriage contracted under pressure	Forced marriage	
Noisy blessing	Success that attracts public attention	Showy success	
Shockprise	A surprise that causes shock	Surprise	
Slay queen	A woman admired for her looks and fashion	Fashionista	
Betpreneur	One who earns a living from betting	Sports bettor	
You do all	You did very well	Well done	

Theme 1: Lexical and Semantic Trends

The data show that Ghanaian English speakers exhibit remarkable lexical creativity through compounding, clipping, semantic shift, and blending. Words such as 'light off' and 'by-force marriage' demonstrate semantic extension, where familiar English words are used in new contexts to convey culturally relevant meanings. Sey (1973) and Dako (2003) observed similar tendencies, describing how Ghanaians expand the meaning of English words to express local realities. The innovation in 'one-touch victory' mirrors a football metaphor for effortless success, showing how everyday Ghanaian experiences influence language use.

Expressions like ‘shockprise’, ‘slay queen’, and ‘betpreneur’ show how Ghanaian English absorbs modern social and technological experiences. These neologisms, largely popularised through social media, reflect the linguistic creativity of the youth and the impact of digital culture. Ngula (2014) points out that the rise of social media has accelerated language innovation in Ghana by allowing speakers to mix creativity, humour, and identity expression. Thus, the lexical trend in Ghanaian English reveals an expanding vocabulary that adapts to changing social realities.

Theme 2: Phonological and Orthographic Trends

Another trend evident in the data is spelling pronunciation, the tendency of speakers to pronounce words according to their written form rather than established British pronunciation. Examples include /'hɒspɪtl/ for 'hospital' (/ˈhɒspɪtl/), /'kɒledʒ/ for 'college' (/ˈkɒlɪdʒ/), and /'bæɪsɪz/ for 'buses' (/ˈbʌsɪz/). These patterns stem partly from the orthographic structure of English and partly from the influence of Ghanaian languages, which are syllable-timed and tend to pronounce each vowel distinctly. Koranteng (2006) and Okoro (2017) confirm that educated Ghanaian speakers often exhibit orthography-based pronunciation patterns, which have become widely accepted features of Ghanaian English. Flege’s (1995) Speech Learning Model further explains that such variations occur because second-language speakers reorganise their phonetic systems based on perceptual learning and exposure.

Theme 3: Syntactic and Structural Trends

Ghanaian English also shows syntactic innovation influenced by local language structures. For instance, expressions such as ‘I am coming’ (meaning ‘I will be back shortly’) and ‘He is having two cars’ (for ‘He has two cars’) illustrate progressive tense overgeneralisation and pragmatic transfer from Ghanaian languages, where aspect and intention are expressed differently. These patterns align with Dako’s (2003) and Bamgbose’s (1998) findings that local syntactic structures often reflect a process of nativisation, in which English grammar is adjusted to convey local pragmatic meanings. This does not represent linguistic error but rather a system of adaptation and intelligibility within the Ghanaian context.

The table below displays some examples of syntactic innovations in Ghanaian English:

Ghanaian English Expression	Literal / Local Meaning	Standard English Equivalent	British
Light off	Power outage	Power cut / Blackout	
One-touch victory	A decisive or effortless win	Landslide victory	
By-force marriage	A marriage contracted under pressure	Forced marriage	
Noisy blessing	Success that attracts public attention	Showy success	
Shockprise	A surprise that causes shock	Surprise	
Slay queen	A woman admired for her looks and fashion	Fashionista	
Betpreneur	One who earns a living from betting	Sports bettor	
You do all	You did very well	Well done	

Theme 4: Sociolinguistic and Cultural Factors

The trends observed are not random but influenced by a network of sociocultural and educational factors. Ghana's multilingual environment encourages constant language contact, resulting in substratum interference from languages such as Akan, Ewe, Ga, and Dagbani. This interference affects both pronunciation and structure. For example, the omission of weak vowels in words like 'education' (/ɛdu'keɪʃn/ → /ɛdu'ke:ʃɒn/) reflects tonal and syllabic influences from local languages. Educational exposure also shapes linguistic patterns. The findings reveal that postgraduate students and teachers tend to approximate Standard British English more closely, while undergraduates and non-academic professionals use more localised expressions. Flege (1995) suggests that greater

exposure and formal training improve phonological and lexical accuracy in second-language learners. Social class and prestige further influence the choice of forms. English functions as both a language of status and identity in Ghana; hence, speakers adjust their usage depending on formality and audience, consistent with Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) acts of identity model.

Theme 5: Influence of Technology and Popular Culture

The rapid growth of social media, music, and entertainment has accelerated linguistic change. Expressions such as 'noisy blessing', 'slay queen', and 'betpreneur' arise from online communities and reflect the intersection of English with Ghanaian youth culture. These expressions gain acceptance through frequent use in songs, advertisements, and public discourse. As Bamgbose (2018) observes, African Englishes evolve dynamically in response to changing social environments. Thus, the media serve as a major factor in shaping and spreading new Ghanaian English expressions.

The trends and influencing factors identified in this study confirm that Ghanaian English has evolved into a distinct and rule-governed variety of English. Its features are not signs of deficiency but of adaptation and identity. Lexical expansion, semantic innovation, phonological adaptation, and syntactic restructuring demonstrate how Ghanaians have reshaped English to suit their communicative and cultural needs. Influenced by education, social identity, and technological exposure, Ghanaian English continues to develop as an important marker of Ghanaian linguistic identity within the global family of English varieties.

Research Question 2: On what Levels of Linguistic do these Trends in Ghanaian English Occur?

The linguistic trends identified in Ghanaian English occur across several interrelated levels of linguistic analysis, namely the lexical and semantic, syntactic, transliteration, and phonological levels. Each level reveals how Ghanaians have reshaped English to reflect local realities, communicative needs, and sociocultural identity. The data from this study confirm that educated Ghanaian speakers exhibit stable and rule-governed

variations in these levels, consistent with findings by Sey (1973), Dako (2003), Koranteng (2006), and Ngula (2014).

Theme 1: Lexical and Semantic Level

Ghanaian English Word	Meaning / Usage	Standard British English Equivalent	Meaning in Ghanaian English
1. Legend (semantic shift)	Noun	1. One who sets a good record and his records are beneficial to people.	1. One who womanizes 2. One who is careless and doesn't factor risk in their doings. 3. Perceived Ghanaian Attitude, typically common to the Ghanaian community vis a viz the Westernisation.
2. Location (semantic shift)	Noun	1. A geographical setting	1. A venue for an event. 2. A hook up
3. Cucumber	Noun	1. A vegetable used for preparing meals.	1. The size of a man's manhood 2. A vegetable for cooking meals.
4. Shockprise	Noun (Clipping – shock and surprise)		1. To experience a shock out of a given information.
4. Betpreneurs	Noun (Clipping – Bet and entrepreneur)		1. Sport betting companies
5. Brocode	Noun (Clipping– Brothers and code)		1. A secret or code of conduct between friends or relatives, particularly among young boys or adults.
6. Beef (semantic relation & semantic shift)	Noun	1. Meat gotten from cattle.	1. An argument between persons. 2. Meat gotten from cattle
7. Brotherhood	Noun	1. A state of being brothers. 2. An association for any purpose.	1. A term used for describing an act that is negative and socially ascribed to men in the Ghanaian context. For example,

(semantic shift)			irresponsible fatherhood, theft or robbery, defilement and others.
8. Sisterhood	Noun	1. A state of being sisters. 2. An association for any purpose.	1. A term used for describing an act that is negative and socially ascribed to women in the Ghanaian context. For example, prostitution, being pregnant unmarried, being broken hearted and others.
(semantic shift)			
9. Ghosting/ Ghosted	Verb	1. Noun (The practice of hiding prisoners) 2. The blurry appearance of a television picture resulting from interference.	1. The act of being inactive on social media. 2. Not being able to communicate for a longer period of time
(semantic shift)			
10. Browning	Noun	1. The act or operation of a giving a brown colour as to gun barrels, cooked food.	1. Betrayal 2. Neglecting 3. Not keeping an end to a bargain.
(semantic shift)			
11. Blueticks or blueticking (Nominal)	Noun (Clipping-blue and tick)	-	1. An act of reading a social media comment, especially (WhatsApp) and not reacting to it or giving any response or feedback.
(semantic shift)			
12. Aired	Noun	1. Having been uttered or spoken	1. An act of reading a social media comment, especially (WhatsApp) and not reacting to it or giving any response or feedback.
(semantic shift)			
13. Link Up	Phrasal Verb	1. To join or joined together.	1. To meet or to communicate through every means.
(semantic shift)			
14. PM (Private Message)	Adverbial Phrase	-	1. To send a direct message to a person privately other than in a public group chat (pertinent in social media platforms)
(semantic shift)			
15. Slay queen	Noun	1. A young female gold digger who is active on	1. A harlot

(semantic shift)		social media and pretends to afford a lavish partying lifestyle.	
	16. Slaying	Verb	1. Killing, especially the murder of a human.
(semantic shift)	17. Awwn	Noun	1. Practicing the act of harloting.
	18. Lol	Abbreviation	1. Expressive emotive device used as a response to a complementary comments, commendations, and others.
(semantic shift)	19. Investors	Noun	1. To laugh hysterically.
	20. Vawulence	Noun	1. Those who are addicted or practising the act of staking sport betting.
	21. Comrade	Noun	1. To cause havoc or disgrace or conflict to an event or someone.
(semantic shift)	22. Gameboys	Noun	1. A fraudster
	23. Lenden	Noun	1. A fraudster
	24. Sidechic	Noun	1. A relative who lives abroad.
	25. Mainchich	Noun	1. A female concubine.
			1. A sexual partner to whom one is not married.
			1. The wife of a womaniser.
			1. A woman who is legally married to a man.

26. Banku	Noun	Counterfeit 1. Not the original of something.	1. A counterfeit.
27. Qwikloan	Noun	Loan 1. Money given to someone to be repaid with or without interest.	1. A defaulter of a loan.
28. Beans	Noun	Disappointment	1. An unsuccessful event or a rescheduled programme.
29. Toast	Verb	1. A proposed solution 2. A person or a group to which a salutation with alcohol is made.	1. To propose love to someone.
(Semantic shift)			
30. Squatish Lady	Noun Phrase	-	1. A young lady who is not beautiful and does not respect too.
31. Figure Eight	Noun	-	1. A desired stature of ladies, mostly admired by both ladies and gentlemen; where the waist is thin and both the bust, hips and buttocks are and broadened.
32. Free SHS	Noun	-	1. An educational policy introduced by the New Patriotic Party, which allows any school-going-Ghanaian-child to attend Senior High School freely. 2. Any young Ghanaian child who completed his secondary education under this policy.
33. Aviator	Noun	1. An aircraft 2. An experiment 3. A flying machine	1. Sporting bet
(semantic shift)			

34. Uber/ Bolt/ Yango	Noun	1. A car ride requested using the mobile application Uber.	1. Every cab
(semantic shift)			
35. Reception / Refreshment	Noun	1. The act of receiving 2. A social engagement, usually to formally welcome someone.	1. Any party held after a marriage ceremony.
(semantic shift)			
36. Bridal party	Noun	Bridal train	1. A bachelorette party held for a bride-to-be the night before her wedding, to spend time with her bridal train and friends and recount joyous moments, and also wish her well in her marriage.
37. White Wedding	Noun	Wedding	1. A wedding where the bride wears a white wedding gown. 2. Ordinance marriage
39. Kaftan	Noun	-	1. A particular dress or shirt or outfit that is either long or short and usually sewn (same fabric for shirt and trousers).
40. Corset Dress	Noun	-	1. A bridal dress that has stiff pads from its bust to the waist, prevent the abdomen to be seen and its usually uncomfortable to wear.
41. Galamsey	Noun	Illegal Mining	1. Illegal small-scale mining.
42. Reign	Noun	-	1. To receive a visitor or to be showered with a gift, particularly on special events like birthdays, graduations or visiting hours in colleges or schools.
(semantic shift)			
43. Sponsor	Noun	-	1. A rich boyfriend or a girlfriend's admirer who is

(semantic shift)			known for spending money or showering gifts on their girlfriends.
44. Showboy	Noun	-	1. Nana Akuffo Addo (President of the republic of Ghana). 2. Someone who is wealthier and likes to give and to party a lot.
45. Fellow Ghanaians	Adjectival Phrase	-	1. Nana Akuffo Addo (President of the republic of Ghana). 2. Coronavirus pandemic in Ghana
(semantic shift)			
46. Breakfast	Noun	-	1. Being heartbroken, especially in a relationship.
(semantic shift)			
47. Agenda	Noun	Agenda	1. A group with a common goal. 2. Trending issue or news.
(semantic shift)			
48. Knack	Verb	Sex	1. To have sexual intercourse.
(semantic shift)			
49. Broken heart	Noun	Heartbroken	1. Being heartbroken from a relationship.

At the lexical level, Ghanaian English shows remarkable creativity and semantic expansion. Speakers coin new words, modify existing ones, and use idiomatic expressions that capture the Ghanaian experience. The study revealed several coinages, semantic shifts, and lexical borrowings that have gained stable usage among educated Ghanaians.

These expressions reveal that Ghanaian English users tend to localise English to suit sociocultural contexts. The phrase ‘light off’ / ‘Dumsor’, for example, is understood

nationwide as referring to power outage, a term reflecting the Ghanaian energy situation. Surprisingly it has been standardized in the Macmillan dictionary, tracing its etymology to Ghana (specifically from the word ‘dum’ (shut) in ‘so’ (light something) in Akan). Similarly, ‘one-touch victory’ derives from football commentary and the electioneering campaigns has broadened to mean any decisive achievement. Sey (1973) and Dako (2003) observed similar lexical innovations in earlier Ghanaian English, suggesting that such coinages emerge from pragmatic necessity.

Semantic extension and blending also occur. The term “shockprise” (a blend of “shock” and “surprise”) captures the emotional intensity of an unexpected event. Such playful formations demonstrate linguistic creativity, reflecting what Bamgbose (1998) calls ‘domestication of English’. These patterns confirm that the Ghanaian variety of English is not deviant but expressive, innovative, and culturally grounded.

Theme 2: Syntactic Level

At the syntactic level, the study found constructions influenced by local language structures and pragmatic transfer. Educated Ghanaians frequently use progressive forms, plural markers, and tense shifts differently from Standard British English.

The table below details some examples that show some syntactic level of trends in Ghanaian English.

Ghanaian English Construction	Intended Meaning	Standard British English Equivalent
I am coming	I will be back shortly	I'll be right back.
He is having two cars	He owns two cars	He has two cars.
She said she will come yesterday	She said she would come yesterday	Reported speech error.
I have a brother, he is called Kofi.	Identifying a person	I have a brother called Kofi.
The boys are not serious, they are always playing	Expressing disapproval	The boys are not serious; they always play.

These examples illustrate syntactic variation that often mirrors local language structure. The use of “I am coming” to mean “I’ll be back soon” reflects pragmatic transfer from Akan and Ewe, where similar expressions denote temporary absence rather than literal motion. Likewise, “He is having two cars” exemplifies overgeneralisation of the progressive aspect, a common feature of New Englishes (Bamgbose, 1998; Dako, 2003).

The overuse of coordinators such as “and” and “but” in long sentences also reflects speech rhythm patterns influenced by Ghanaian discourse structures. These features, however, are not grammatical errors but stylistic markers that reflect localisation and naturalness in Ghanaian English usage.

Examples of transliteration occur frequently in both literary and non-literary language. In Ama Ata Aidoo’s “No Sweetness Here and Other Stories”, a text once prescribed by the Ghana Education Service (GES), numerous transliterated expressions mirror the speech patterns of educated Ghanaians who merge indigenous linguistic forms with English syntax. Aidoo’s stylistic choices reflect authentic Ghanaian speech and illustrate how transliteration functions as both a linguistic and literary device.

Theme 3: Transliteration Level

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**

Sena Kwaku Kumah, M.Phil. and Amma Abrafi Adjei, Ph.D.
A Study on Trends in Ghanaian English

Transliteration in Ghanaian English involves the adaptation of phonological, lexical, and syntactic elements from indigenous Ghanaian languages into English expressions. This linguistic process enables speakers to encode culturally specific meanings within English discourse, reflecting the multilingual and multicultural realities of Ghana. As Dako (2003) and Ngula (2014) note, transliteration is a defining feature of Ghanaian English, functioning simultaneously as a cultural marker and a pragmatic device that facilitates precise communication. It allows English to carry indigenous conceptual frameworks, proverbs, and speech patterns that would otherwise lose their semantic depth if rendered idiomatically into Standard British English.

Transliteration performs three key functions in the Ghanaian sociolinguistic context. First, it preserves cultural identity, allowing speakers to project indigenous worldviews through English (Sey, 1973; Bamgbose, 1998). By embedding local linguistic and cultural elements in English, Ghanaians assert their connection to their heritage while retaining intelligibility within broader English-speaking contexts. Second, transliteration enhances communicative efficiency, as it provides linguistic resources for expressing culturally bound experiences or phenomena without exact Standard English equivalents. Third, it enriches the Ghanaian English lexicon by introducing novel idioms, syntactic structures, and expressions that expand English's communicative scope in Ghana (Ngula, 2014).

Transliteration, as evidenced in Aidoo's literary corpus and in everyday Ghanaian discourse, exemplifies how English functions as a flexible vehicle for local expression. It encapsulates the dynamic interplay between global linguistic norms and local identity construction. Far from being a sign of linguistic interference, transliteration should be understood as a marker of Ghanaian linguistic creativity, reflecting the continuous indigenisation of English and its adaptation to Ghana's socio-cultural realities. The study revealed several instances where Ghanaian speakers employ English words to translate expressions from Akan, Ga, or Ewe literally.

Examples of Transliteration Trends

1. African Wear – Refers to traditional African clothing; a semantic transfer from local expressions denoting indigenous attire. Example: “The government advised that all workers dress in African Wear on Fridays”.
2. Hard- A word transliterated from the from Akan word “den”, meaning “difficult” or “tedious”) – Used to describe difficulty or effort. Example: “The bey too hard”, or “E check like the work be hard” (Standard English: The work is tedious).
3. Ebe Like Say – A Nigerian Pidgin expression now integrated into Ghanaian English to indicate speculation or uncertainty. Example: “Ebe like say tomorrow be Monday.”
4. Twa (Akan for “cut”) – Used in English discourse to refer to surgical or cutting actions. Example “The doctors cut her open during labour”. (Meaning: She delivered through Caesarean section.)

The table below display some example of documented forms of Transliteration used by Ama Atta Aidoo in her “No Sweetness Here”

Local Source	Expression	Transliteration in English	Literal Meaning / Cultural Reference
	“Krɔ̀nkrɔ̀nyi”	“holy man”	Spiritualist
	“Ɔyɛ dunsinyi na ɔyɛ krɔ̀krɔ̀nyi nso”	“He is both medicine man and holy man”	He practises both spiritual and herbal healing
	Yehun serew kakra wɔ n’enyim	“A smile passed over his face”	He gave a smile
	Mara na mese, abofra yi be tsena ase	“I myself say this child will live”	Assuredly, this child will not die.
	Ɔwo ara mma nnwe mbɔgya nam	“Yourself you must not eat meat”	You must not eat food made with meat

Akontasekan sika	“Dowry”	“Dowry”
Ntu yi sika	“Ejecting fee”	Payment for eviction
Ɔse ne na	“Looks so much like my mother”	He or she resembles their mother
N’ano ye dew	“His mouth is sweet”	He is persuasive or a liar
Sesei ara dze ɔafɔn dodow	“Now himself is too small”	He has lost weight.

The data demonstrate that transliteration in Ghanaian English is systematic rather than arbitrary, influenced by the bilingual competence of speakers who alternate between English and local languages. Each transliterated form reveals the transfer of indigenous grammatical, semantic, or pragmatic features into English. For example, Aidoo’s “Yourself you must not eat meat” mirrors the Akan reflexive pronoun emphasis, while “His mouth is sweet” represents a literal metaphorical transfer from Akan to English, producing a culturally resonant idiom.

Sey (1973) categorised such usages under “English words with native meanings”, arguing that they constitute distinct semantic innovations rather than errors. Bobda (2000) and Ngula (2014) similarly affirm that transliteration and semantic extension illustrate the nativisation of English in Ghana, reflecting speakers’ attempts to domesticate English to local communicative needs. Through such processes, transliteration has become a stable feature of educated Ghanaian English.

Contemporary linguistic trends further affirm transliteration’s vitality in digital and urban Ghanaian communication. Terms such as “dumsor” (from Akan “dum” “to turn off” and “so” anglicized to “sor” means “to turn on”) and “wahala” (problem or trouble) have gained both national and regional currency. Expressions like “I’m coming” (meaning “I’ll be right back”) and “He’s doing himself” (meaning “He is the cause of the challenges he faces”) illustrate ongoing transliteration and semantic extension in social media discourse.

These trends are emphasise that Ghanaian English continues to evolve through interaction between local languages, regional pidgins, and global Englishes. It also confirms Ngula (2014) that transliteration creates a distinct linguistic identity that bridges local and global communicative norms.

Although transliteration may seem non-standard from the British perspective, it represents a creative adaptation process, confirming Bamgbose's (2018) observation that African Englishes are pragmatic and context-driven varieties shaped by users' communicative needs.

Theme 4: Phonological Level

Phonological trends in Ghanaian English are among the most noticeable features of the variety. The study found strong evidence of spelling pronunciation, the tendency to pronounce words based on their orthography rather than the British pronunciation. These variations arise from the influence of Ghanaian phonology, which is syllable-timed and vowel-based, unlike the stress-timed rhythm of Received Pronunciation (RP).

Word	Ghanaian English Pronunciation	RP Pronunciation	Comment
Hospital	/ˈhɔspɪtɪl/	/ˈhɒspɪtl/	Retention of final vowel.
College	/ˈkɑledʒ/	/ˈkɒlɪdʒ/	Orthographic vowel /ɛ/ maintained.
Buses	/ˈbʌsɛs/	/ˈbʌsɪz/	Influence of spelling and local vowel system.
Education	/ɛduˈkeːʃɪn/	/ˌɛdʒuˈkeɪʃən/	Influence of syllable timing and tone.
Vegetable	/ˈvedʒɪtəbəl/	/ˈvedʒtəbl/	Full vowel pronunciation.

These phonological patterns demonstrate systematic variation rather than random deviation. Flege's (1995) Speech Learning Model explains that second-language phonological acquisition is shaped by the learner's first-language sound system. Thus, educated Ghanaian speakers adapt English phonemes to fit the phonetic constraints of local languages.

Ngula (2014) and Bobda (2000) also note that these features contribute to intelligibility among Ghanaians while maintaining mutual comprehension with other English users. Hence, Ghanaian English pronunciation reflects linguistic identity rather than incompetence. It is a legitimate phonological variety shaped by local articulatory norms and pedagogical history.

8.0 Socioeconomic Influences on Trends in Ghanaian English Usage

Beyond the linguistic patterns identified above, these trends may also be interpreted within broader social and socioeconomic contexts that shape English use in Ghana. Although the present study did not explicitly characterise speakers according to educational attainment or socioeconomic class, existing sociolinguistic scholarship suggests that language use in postcolonial English contexts is closely intertwined with speakers' social environments, occupational demands, and access to linguistic resources.

In Ghana, English functions as both a communicative tool and a marker of social mobility, often associated with institutional participation and socioeconomic advancement. As such variation in English usage is likely shaped by differential access to formal domains where English is used in education, administration, and professional workplaces. Speakers who regularly operate within such domain may orient towards forms perceived as prestigious or internationally acceptable, while those whose interactional contexts are predominantly informal may prioritise intelligibility and functional effectiveness over adherence to external norms.

Additionally, occupational exposure and urbanisation play significant roles in shaping patterns of English use. Urban settings provide increased contact with diverse varieties of English through media technology, and transnational communication, which may

encourage hybrid or innovative forms that blend local and linguistic features with elements of global Englishes.

8.0 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the trends in Ghanaian English, the factors accounting for these trends, and the linguistics at which they manifest. The findings have revealed that Ghanaian English is a dynamic and evolving variety that continues to develop in response to socio-cultural, technological, and global influences. The study has demonstrated that while Ghanaian English shares many features with Standard British English, it is marked by distinctive lexical, syntactic, and phonological innovations that express the Ghanaian identity and communicative needs of its speakers.

The analysis revealed that lexical trends in Ghanaian English are particularly vibrant, characterised by processes such as semantic shift, extension, coinage, borrowing and transliteration. Lexemes such as *slay queen*, *legend*, *vawulence*, *beef*, and *breakfast* reveal how speakers assign new meanings or local connotations to existing English words, thereby creating expressions that resonate with the Ghanaian socio-cultural experience. These innovations reflect creativity, humour, and the influence of social media.

At the syntactic level, the study identified innovative sentence constructions and phrasal usages such as *break the eight*, *boot for boot*, and *you do all*. These syntactic trends reflect both linguistic creativity and the blending of English with local political, cultural, and social realities. The influence of popular culture and political discourse was evident in these expressions, suggesting that Ghanaian English syntax evolves through contact with national events and the public sphere.

The phonological trends revealed in the data further confirm that Ghanaian English pronunciation is influenced by local phonetic systems, spelling pronunciation, and exposure to foreign media. The emergence of LAFA (Locally Acquired Foreign Accent), especially among educated speakers, demonstrates the role of globalisation, social aspiration, and prestige in shaping speech patterns. However, traditional Ghanaian English has specific pronunciation features, such as vowel substitution and reduction of final consonant clusters.

In explaining these trends, the study found that factors such as social media use, education, youth identity, music, media language, and contact with foreign Englishes play significant roles. The increasing digitalisation of communication, the global exposure of Ghanaian youth, and the influence of entertainment and religious platforms have accelerated the rate of linguistic change and innovation. Consequently, Ghanaian English continues to reflect both the local linguistic ecology and global linguistic.

Overall, this study concludes that Ghanaian English is not a deviation from Standard English, but a legitimate and codifiable variety with its own internal logic, norms, and creativity. Its trends at the lexical, syntactic, and phonological levels demonstrate a living language shaped by Ghana's socio-cultural realities, history, and global interactions. The study therefore underscores the need to recognise and document these linguistic features for academic, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic purposes.

References

- Adika, G. S. K. (2012). English in Ghana: Growth, tensions, and trends. *International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication*, 1, 151–166.
- Adjei, A. A., & Logogye, C. (2016). Towards standardisation of Ghanaian English: The case of UEW students. *Language in India*, 16(9).
- Agyekum, K. (2007). *Ghanaian English: A comprehensive grammar*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Arthur-Shoboa, J., & Quarcoo, M. (2012). English in the mix: Evolving roles of English in the language practices of Twi speakers in Ghana. *Language matters* 43(1), 77-96.
- Dako, K. (2003). *Ghanaianisms: A Glossary*. Ghana Universities Press.
- Bamgbose, A. (1998). Torn between the norms: Innovations in World Englishes. *World Englishes*, 24 (1), 85–93.

- Bobda, A. S. (2000). The uniqueness of Ghanaian English pronunciation in West Africa. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 30 (2), 185–198.
- Brown, P. P & Scragg, J. (1948). *Common errors in Gold Coast English*. (3rd ed.). London.
- Flege, J. E. (1995). Second language speech learning: Theory, findings, and problems. In W. Strange (Ed.), *Speech perception and linguistic experience: Issues in cross-language research* (pp. 233–277). York Press.
- Grieve, D. W. (1964). *English Language examining*. Oxford University Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1998). English as an Asian language. *Links & Letters*, 5, 89–108.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the Outer Circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge University Press.
- Koranteng, L. (2006). *Ghanaian English: A description of the sound system and phonological features* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ghana, Legon).
- Kumah, S. K. (2025). *Spelling Pronunciation in Spoken English in Ghana: An Exploration of Educated Speakers' English in UEW*. (Unpublished MPhil Thesis). University of Education, Winneba.
- Ngula, R.S. (2011) 'Ghanaian English: Spelling Pronunciation in Focus', *Language in India*, Vol. 11, No.2, pp. 22-23
- Okoro, O. (2017). Nigerian English usage and the tyranny of faulty analogy III: Pronunciation. *California Linguistic Notes*, 41 (1), Spring 2017.
- Owusu-Ansah, J. K. (2016). An analysis of the phonological features of Ghanaian English. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*, 5 (1), 81–100.
- Sey, K. A. (1973). *Ghanaian English: An exploratory survey*. London.