

## **A Comparative Study of Liberian and the Gambian Varieties of West African English**

Esther Robert *Ph.D*, Ekemini Umoekah, Happiness Uduk *Ph. D*  
*Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Liberian and The Gambian varieties of West African English (W AfrE) have been investigated by some linguists. However, comparative studies on both Englishes are still lacking. This paper, therefore, compares the lexico-semantics, the phonology and the morpho-syntax of both varieties from the perspective of language contact theory. Drawing from the findings by other linguists who have worked on these aspects of these varieties (Singler, Mason, Peewee, Massalee, and Barclay, 1981; Ukut, 2017) in addition to data gleaned from the Internet (www.academia.edu), the paper discovers that, among other features, Liberian English is mainly characterised by consonant deletion at word final position, while The Gambian English is coloured by apicalisation/palatalisation of sounds. Besides, each of these varieties features a preponderance of peculiar loan words, neologisms and grammatical structures. However, both varieties share some features which are common to all varieties of W AfrE, such as absence of labio-dental fricatives/ð,θ/ and the presence of corresponding features in indigenous languages. Evidently, the peculiar features of these varieties of W AfrE have authenticated them as New Englishes among World Englishes.

**KEYWORDS:** Liberian English, The Gambian English, West African English, New English, Languages in contact.

---

Date of Submission: 28-02-2021

Date of Acceptance: 13-03-2021

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The English language has undergone tremendous modifications across nations and regions of the world. West Africa is no exception. Consequent upon its contacts with indigenous languages of the region since the period of colonisation, the English language has been domesticated, making the variety creatively unique among the New Englishes of the world. Robert (2017) notes that West African users of English from all walks of life, and of various educational levels, endeavour to communicate their experiences using different varieties of the language as influenced by formal and informal situations and occasions. She further avers that the type of English used in the regions earlier colonised by the colonialists is “certainly considered to be different from that spoken within the sociocultural and geographical environment of Britain and America” (p.413). Robert thus subtly points at the nativised uniqueness of West African English (W AfrE) which results from both the core linguistic features shared by all the sub-sets of the regional variety and those features which are evidently peculiar to each of the regional varieties of English, among which are Liberian and the Gambian varieties, the focus of this paper.

An investigation into the literature on these varieties reveals some significant treatment of The Gambian English (Richmond, 1989; Ukut, 2017; Peter, Wolf and Simo-Bobda, 2003) as well as a detailed study of Liberian English (Singler, Mason, Peewee, Massalee and Barclay, 1981). However, comparative studies of both varieties of W AfrE, are still lacking. Consequent upon increasing interests of contemporary linguists in investigating varieties of W AfrE (Chiluwa, 2013, Gut, 2010), this paper sets out to contribute to extant literature on World Englishes by comparing the main phonological, lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic features of Liberian and The Gambian varieties of W AfrE. Chiluwa (2017) contends that language is sensitive to its environment. This paper, following Chiluwa’s assertion, explores the major cultural and socio-linguistic influences of the nations on the language which bring about the peculiar features of Liberian (henceforth LE) and The Gambian (henceforth GE) varieties of W AfrE.

The paper is divided into seven sections with one being the introduction, while section two examines features of West African English. The language situations in Liberia and The Gambia are discussed in section three, whereas the fourth section explains the methodology of the research. The fifth, sixth and seventh sections focus on data presentation/analysis, discussion of findings and conclusion, respectively.

### **1.1 West African English**

West Africa describes a region of Africa that comprises sixteen countries. Some of these countries are Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and part of Cameroon. The six countries are described as anglophone, while the remaining eleven countries – Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and the other part of Cameroon – are referred to as francophone (Ukut, 2010). Nearly all of the anglophone nations (apart from Liberia) are former colonies of England; hence, the official language of many of these countries is English.

The West African variety of the English language (W AfrE or WAE) is a distinct subset of World Englishes developed in West Africa from the contacts of English speaking Western countries with the African natives from the colonial times to the present (*Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, 1998). Kachru's (1982) "Three Circles of English" model places the new Englishes spoken in West Africa and some other European colonies in The Outer Circle. He also recognises the variety as a contact language resulting from colonisation. In his words, "The Outer Circle represents the institutionalized non-native varieties(ESL) in the regions that have passed through extended periods of colonization ( e.g. Singapore, India, Nigeria, Ghana)(Kachru 1992, p.356). Corroborating this stance, Tunde-Awe (2014), explains that the Outer Circle varieties of English are norm-developing, unlike those varieties in the Inner Circle (e.g Britain, USA, Australia) which are endo-normative; while those in the Expanding Circle ( e.g China, Japan, and Egypt) are exo-normative. Tunde- Awe(2014,p.487) expatiates further:

The process of norm-development ... relates to what is termed new Englishes, particularly those 'Englishes' that are characterized by contacts of English with the first language of its first and second language users. Second language users of English now adopts the language to express their culture, thoughts, and habits..."

Tunde- Awe's explanation above underscores both the nature and role of new Englishes which are nativised varieties of English used in West Africa. It is a common feature in contact situations, as argued Eka (2000) that when a language leaves its native land and goes to a different environment and remains there for a considerable period of time, it gets nativised reflecting the features of its new environment. Udofot (2007) explains that the nativised variety of the English begins to carry a "sizeable functional load for the purpose of intra-group communication"(p.38). The case is true of the varieties of English spoken in West Africa whose peculiar features are both variant and unique as a result of the common core features of the language shared across the region, which at once differentiate the W AfrE variety from other regional varieties such as East African English, Southern African English, Australian English and of course the native British or American variety. Gut (2010) affirms that what the anglophone countries have in common is that English is spoken in a highly multilingual setting, in which it enjoys an important status as an official or national language and functions as the language of government, law, business and commerce, education and media. He, however, observes that not only one form of English exists in these West African countries.

Chiluwa's(2013) study of West African English in digital discourse with a focus on Nigerian, Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean Englishes reveals the peculiar features of the New English to include: loan words within the acrolect variety, code-switching between the acrolect variety and pidgin/krio, evidences of deviants/errors in the basilect variety, linguistic creativity such as coinages and the language style of the Internet. In addition, *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1998) highlights other common features of W AfrE to include: it is non-rhotic and /r/ is often trilled; intonation is influenced by the tonal systems of West African languages and because there is a tendency towards syllable-timing, the schwa in unstressed syllables is usually replaced by a full vowel, as in /stju-dent/ and /kwaiet-ness/ for *student* and *quietness*; the consonants/θ,ð/ are generally realised as /t,d/, for instance, *three of these* will be realised as /tri:ɔf di:s/. Besides, such words as *gush* and *fur* sound like "gosh" and "for". Diphthongs and triphthongs are frequently monophthongised, as in *bake* and *so* realised as /bek/ and /so/ respectively. In syntax, W AfrE is modelled after standard BrE, but with some peculiar constructions as: *A country where you have never been there; He is an important somebody*. Regional vocabulary includes loan words from indigenous languages, compounds of English(coinages) and vernacular words such as *akara*, ( bean seed baked in oil), *kanjo* (okro); loan translations and adaptations of local usages such as *bushmeat*; local extension of English expressions as in *go slow* (a traffic jam), *to wet plant* (to water plants),etc. Significantly, LE and GE assume these features, but also demonstrate some distinct characteristics which differentiate them from other West African varieties such as Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean and Cameroonian Englishes.

### **1.2 The language situation in Liberia and the Gambia**

Liberia is a multilingual nation where more than thirty languages are spoken together with English being the official language. The languages can be grouped into four: Mande, Kru, Mel and the divergent Gola. The term Liberian English(LE) is sometimes used for all varieties except the standard, and it is influenced by three primary forces and two less fundamental forces (Singer, Mason, Peewee, Massalee, and Barclay, 1981).

The forces include: the development of the West African coastal pidgin in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the return of freed slaves from the US, the influence of indigenous Liberian languages, the influence from other WA English-based speech varieties (especially Krio) and the American “connection” with Liberia. This paper reflects some of these influences.

According to Singler, et al (1981), there are five varieties of LE:

1. Standard Liberian English or Liberian Settler English:
2. Kru Pidgin English
3. Liberian Kreyol language (Vernacular Liberian English) from African-American Vernacular English
4. Merico language (Americo- Liberian settlers from the United States of America)
5. Caribbean English (ex-Caribbean slave settlers from the Caribbean islands)

Standard LE is similar to American English and is the language of those people whose African-American ancestors from the US and the Caribbean islands immigrated to Liberia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This variety is a transplanted variety of African American Vernacular English from the southern part of the US. The 1993 statistics indicate that approximately 69, 000 people, or 2.5% of the population, spoke Standard LE as a first language (en.wikipedia.org).

Kru Pidgin English is a moribund variety that was spoken historically by Krumen – people from Klao Madingoes and Grebo ethnic group. Contrastively, Liberian Kreyol language (Vernacular Liberian English) is also known as Liberian Creole. It is the most common variety, developed from Liberian interior Pidgin English, influenced by the Americo-Liberian and the Caribbean slaves Settler English.

Merico or Americo- Liberian (simply described as ‘American’) is an English-based Creole language spoken until recently in Liberia by Americo-Liberians – descendants of the Settlers, freed slaves and African-Americans who emigrated from the southern US in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Caribbean English is a broad term for the dialects of the English language spoken in the Caribbean and Liberia. It is influenced by the English-based Creole varieties. It should be recalled that Liberia was founded in 1822 as a homeland for freed slaves from America; hence, the derivative name of its capital, Freetown. The country was colonised by America. It is therefore not surprising that the natives speak the American variant of the English Language. Accordingly, Simo Bobda (2010) posits that Liberia is the only Black African country where English is the mother tongue to a large portion of the population and where American English predominates. He argues further that the LE accent may therefore not be considered representative of Africa. This argument notwithstanding, LE remains a WAfrE variety and its unique features significantly add to the distinctively innovative character of WAfrE, worthy of investigation.

Comparatively, a multilingual nation and former British colony like Nigeria, the Republic of The Gambia is the smallest of the mainland African countries and is completely surrounded by Senegal, except for a small Atlantic coastline (Juffermans and McGlynn, 2015). According to this source, the country, like other West African countries, was colonised by the British who planted the English language in the country with their landing in 1845. From that year to 1945 (when they gained their independence) and to the present, the contact of the British and the English language with The Gambians and their indigenous languages expectedly altered the sociolinguistic situation of the people. Hence, as a product of languages in contact situation, the English language, in its developmental and distinct variety, is spoken alongside ten indigenous languages. Juffermans and McGlynn (2015, p. 333) reveal that all of The Gambian languages fall under the family of Niger-Congo languages and are divided into two main branches of this phylum: Mande languages and Atlantic languages. Within the group of Mande languages, a central cluster of Manding languages can be discerned, including Mandika, Bambara and Jahanka all of which are mutually intelligible (Sullivan, 2004). Besides, Serahule, a Mande language, is related to the Manding languages, but not closely enough to be included in the Manding group. On the other hand, The Gambian languages in the Atlantic group all belong to the northern branch of this language family and can be subdivided into Senegambian (Wolof, Fula, Serer) and ‘Bak’ languages (Jola, Manjago, Balanta), plus Bainunka (Grimes, 1996). In addition to these indigenous languages, The Gambians speak Aku, an English-based creole language (Igboanusi, 2013).

Significantly, five of the local languages are often cited as the main local languages and they correspond with the five largest ethnic groups in The Gambia which are: Mandika, Fula, Wolof, Jola and Serahule (in that order). These five languages are used in government publications and policy documents (Juffermans and McGlynn, 2015; Sonko-Godwin, 1988), alongside the English language. Meanwhile, Mandika is the most widely spoken language in The Gambia, both as first and second language and carries some prestige because of its numerical majority and historical royal connections. In the majority of rural areas, as well as most of the towns located outside the capital, Banjul, and Kanifing LGAs, Mandika functions as a lingua franca and is used in radio and television broadcasting, although Wolof is increasingly being used in advertising and Kombo-based productions.

English language is the official language in The Gambia and is widely spoken by young people, particularly in the urban areas. However, Juffermans and McGlynn (2015) disclose that, generally, The

Gambians do not speak English with each other, unless in a specific domain. Therefore, the situation in which English is used depends on the participants involved in the activities as well as the purpose of the interaction.

Currently, British English is the standard in the teaching materials, but GE is the *de facto* standard in newspapers and other media output. Igboanusi (2013) investigates the language education policy in The Gambia and discovers that although the education policy provides for the use of L1 or area languages to serve as the media of instruction from Grades 1 to 3 and as school subjects from Grade 4 onwards, the policy has not been implemented and what is practised instead is the use of English as a means of teaching from primary to the tertiary level of education. He observes that this situation has brought about high drop-out and illiteracy rates, limited access to education and lack of understanding of the content of the subjects taught, among other consequences. Meanwhile, like LE, there are significant differences between British English and GE on lexical, syntactic and phonological levels (Richmond 1989; Peter, Wolf and Simo Bobda, 2003). This paper examines some of these linguistic features in contrast with those of LE.

### 1.3 Research Methodology

#### 1.3.1 Data Collection Procedure

For GE, the primary data for the analysis were drawn from the corpus originally collected from fieldwork that was carried out in The Gambia and from interviews with informants - from the major ethnic groups, differentiated by age, gender and education - in the country as reported in Peter, Wolf and Simo-Bobda (2003) and Ukut (2017). The corpus consisted of materials gleaned from the recordings of everyday communication, TV, online newspapers <http://www.gambiannews.com/gambia%20http://www.gambiannews.com/spectator>. The researchers also gathered materials from YouTube videos (*GambiaScholars*) which featured the conversations of students of Brikamaba, Armitage and Bansang Senior Secondary Schools of The Gambia. On the other hand, information on LE was scarce; hence, the researchers benefitted a great deal from the comprehensive, coherent and representative data available in Singler, Mason, Peewee, Massalee and Barclay (1981), Strammer and Migge (2014), and interviews with Siatta Scott Johnson and Michaeleen Doucleff, a National Public Radio (NPR) Journalist in Liberia as reported in Doucleff (2014). The secondary data were sourced from relevant textbooks, journals and the Internet.

#### 1.3.2 Analytical Procedure

Mutually linguistic influences on languages in contact and the outcomes of such influences are best studied in contact linguistics. Thus, the analysis of the data is qualitatively and descriptively approached from the perspective of language contact theory originally developed by Weinreich (1953), later expanded by Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and Mufwene (2001, 2005). The theory, as explicated by Schneider (2007), accounts for the socio-linguistic processes surrounding language evolution, the emergence of contact-induced varieties, bilingualism, etc. The framework is informed by its relevance in analysing the features of postcolonial Englishes (LE and GE) – being contact languages – which include: loan words, patterns of phonological and grammatical changes, code-mixing, semantic extension, etc, as explored in the following sections.

## II. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### 2.1 Liberian English

#### 2.1.1 Lexico- Semantic Features

LE features loan words, neologisms, euphemistic words and phrases, words and phrases of semantic blends and extension, most of which being highly influenced by Liberian indigenous languages and culture as well as American and Black American culture. A glossary of LE lexemes- their meanings, and, in some cases, sentence examples featuring the expressions-is here presented:

1. **Shikii** (pronounced “shee-ghee”): A man who dresses in high fashion and acts like the boss. Liberians, as explains by Scott Johnson in Doucleff (2014), like to bluff and so does a *shikii* who always wants the whole world to believe they have money.
2. **Big Jue**: An independent strong woman, who may be married or not, but does not depend on a man for her livelihood. The term is said to have become popular after Liberia 14-year Civil War (Doucleff, 2014).
3. **Tay-Tay water (literally, “titty water”)**: breast milk. Doucleff (2014, p. 1) quotes Scott Johnson as saying, “People don’t refer to this (touching her chest) as your breast, most people prefer to say ‘tay-tay’”. Thus, *tay-tay* is a euphemism for breast milk to cushion the vulgar denotation.
4. **Pem-pem**: A motorcycle (from the sound of a motor bike, *pem-pem, pem-pem*. Doucleff (2014) adds that in nearby Uganda, a motorcycle is called “border-border”, because it goes from border to border, without getting stuck in traffic. In Nigeria, it is commonly called “okada”.
5. **Small-small**: little by little or step by step. Its antonym is “quick-quick,” meaning “fast”. For instance, a typical LE reads: “Liberia is stopping Ebola small-small.”

6. **My Ne-Mo:** Don't quote me (from the phrase, "my name no"). For instance, before one starts gossiping someone at work, one might say:

"My ne-mo, but did you hear about..."

The expression therefore becomes a discursive warning marker, cautioning fellow gossips against revealing the speaker's identity to avoid undue reprisals from the subject of the gossip.

7. **Ya Hello-o:** Hello to you all. It is a common way to greet people. Liberians talk extra sounds on to the end of phrases, such as "o", "ya", or "Menh". These sounds help convey the speaker's emotion. Thus, almost every conversation is punctured by "o's" and "ya's" to express friendliness or a good mood as in:

"Hello-o. How are you-o?"

"Not bad-o."

"Right-o."

But if someone is struggling or sad, then s/he would add "menh" to convey a sense of frustration or disapproval:

"Hello-o. How are you-o?"

"Not bad-menh."

8. **Area:** One's job, domain, responsibility or area of specialty.

"My area to drive taxi. Not my area to make market."

9. **Bug-a bug ate his brain :** Someone is not all there in the head.

"That man crazy! Bug- a bug ate his brain."

This appears to be a typical Liberian idiom.

10. **Bright:** Lighter skinned, caramel colored Liberian.

"That bright man say he want to beat you."

11. **Carry:** To take you somewhere, to walk with you.

"I will carry you home." (i.e. I will walk home with you)

12. **Chunk:** To throw

"Tell them children them to stop chunking rock at the taxi-o."

13. **Da how I looking:** This is how I behave.

"If and you don't respect me, I don't respect you. Da how I looking."

14. **Dammit:** Wow! This phrase is acceptable even in church and is not viewed as offensive as it is by some in the US ([bloggingwithoutmaps.blogspot.com.ng/2012/05/introduction-to-liberian-english.html](http://bloggingwithoutmaps.blogspot.com.ng/2012/05/introduction-to-liberian-english.html)).

"Dammit! That was a good sermon!"

15. **Dress:** To move out of the way or "excuse me".

"Dress small, my man."

To add 'small' is to be polite when saying, 'excuse me' to someone who is in your way ([bloggingwithoutmaps.blogspot.com...](http://bloggingwithoutmaps.blogspot.com...))

16. **Dry:** Thin, skinny.

"That dry woman need to eat some cassava."

17. **Eat:** Money or to use money that is not yours.

"I gave him the money for the Old Pa but he eat it."

18. **Fat:** Healthy (this is actually a complement!)

"Aye fine girl. You looking too fat-o!"

19. **Fini:** Finished, all gone.

"He fini eating all the fufu." or "My money fini-o."

20. **Hada day:** How are you doing? How is the day?

"Hada day, my man?" a common response --- "I thank God."

21. **My heart cut:** scared, startled .

"When I saw the snake my heart cut straight!"

Here is another good Liberian idiom. It relates to, but slightly differs from, the English idiom or metaphorical expression, "cut to the heart," meaning, "to get around to the really important, essential issue or to affect the essence or soul of something" ([English.stackexchange.com](http://English.stackexchange.com)).

22. **Old Ma:** Mother, title of respect for older woman. It is respectful to call an older woman 'Old Ma' unlike in the US.

"The Old Ma makes good fufu."

23. **Old Pa:** Father, title of respect for older man.

"Old Pa, I beg you, listen to me yah."

24. **Pekin:** Small child, pre-adolescent, subordinate or someone under one's protection (pronounced somewhere between "pee-key" and "pee-king").

"She take the pekin to market everyday." or "That my pekin. You leave him!" (as in don't mess with this guy. He is under my protection).

25. **Reaching:** Leaving, heading out towards my destination.  
"Good night. I reaching." (as in I'm going home).
26. **Rouge:** Thief (pronounced "Ro!"). This is yelled aloud and repeatedly if someone is caught stealing.  
Be careful as a mob will usually ensue to deal with the thief.  
"The people them beat the ro."
27. **Sabu or Sabu head:** bald  
"That sabu head pekin there can be too frisky!"
28. **Show myself:** To reveal your strength usually by spanking, beating, fighting, or somehow using your authority.  
"Aye, my man! Take yourself from here! You don't know me? I will show myself to you!"
29. **Trying:** In good health, in response to How are you? How the day?  
"How you doing?" ---- response "I trying."
30. **Bisabadi** (originally, from English, "busybody"): A meddle-some person.
31. **Grona**(literally, a street urchin): An irresponsible person.
32. **Gbasajamba:** Cassava leaf.
33. **Jafen/jafe:** money.
34. **Manjaa:** Chief- a friendly appellation.
35. **Musu:** Woman, especially a young girl.
- It should be pointed out that the last four loan words are drawn directly from Vai language of Monrovia.

### 2.1.2 The Phonological features

LE is evidently different from other varieties of English as a result of its unique phonological features, although it also shares some of the elements with other varieties of WAfrE. The following analysed sound elements are most prominent:

1. **Shorter Vowels:** The vowels /i:,e,u,əu/ are shorter in LE than in American English. For example, /i:/ is sometimes pronounced as /ɪ/ and vice versa, so that there would be no clear distinction between *pick* and *peak*, thus both become homophones. Also, /ɪ/ and /e/ are realised the same way, making *with* and *way* becoming homophones. Other examples are:

*big*/bi:/, *hit*/het/, *whip*/wep/, *still*/ste/.

2. **Absence of the /θ, ð/ Sounds in Words Containing th:** This is a significant interference from indigenous Liberian languages. Where such sounds occur in LE especially at word initial, they are rendered as /t/ and /d/, respectively; thus, *thigh* and *thy* are realised as "tie" and "die", respectively. This feature aligns with the general phonological element of WAfrE (*Concise Oxford Companion to English Language*, 1998). Other examples are as follows:

those/doz/	breathe/briv/	breathing/brivê/	the/də/
bathe/bev/	bathing /bevê/	thought/tɔt/	thin/te/
throw/tro/	mouth/mawf/	wreath/rif/	Ruth/ruf/
teeth/tif/	faith/fef/		

It can be noticed in the above examples, as corroborated by the *Liberian English Dictionary* (2012), that at the end of a word, *th* is often realised as /f/. Thus, "mouth", "wreath", "Ruth", "teeth" and "faith" clearly illustrate this feature.

### 3. Consonant Deletion at Word Final Positions

Singler, et al (1981) reveal that a few indigenous Liberian languages (kpelle, Vai, Belle and Gola) do permit a nasal consonant at the end of a syllable, but do not permit any other consonant to occur there. Other languages (Kru, Grebo, and Lorma) do not permit any consonant at the end of a syllable. Take for instance, the expression: "Bold Dollar saved my life"

will be articulated in LE as:  
"Bo dala se ma lay."

Singler, et al (1981) further observe that, perhaps the single most distinctive feature of LE is the extent to which consonants are deleted, although the feature may not be absolute, even in word final consonants. The environment in which the consonant occurs dictates this phenomenon, for example, when a consonant occurs in post-vocalic environment as illustrated below:

Stop/sta/	take/te/	take us/tekɔ/
good/gu/	put/pu/	stop it/stepe/

Also, there is, most times, the lengthening of the vowel to "compensate" for the loss of the consonant in post-vocalic position, as in:



### 1. Corresponding Features in Liberian Languages

LE grammar is highly influenced by transliterations from Liberian languages. The LE sentence,

He got big heart

is a transliterated version of the Standard form,

He is excessively ambitious and self-centred.

This transliteration corresponds to the syntax of Kru and Via languages as illustrated below:

Kru	ɔɔ	wio	boA
	his	heart	big
	His heart is big		

Vai	a	fala	kolo.
	his	heart	big
	His heart is big.		

Most Liberian languages use their words for “come” as a way to mark the future, especially the immediate future, e.g.,

Kru	na	ji	dɛ	di
	I	come	thing	eat
	I’m coming to eat something or I’m about to eat.			

Lorma	ga	vaazu	liizu
	I	coming	going
	I’m about to go.		

Thus, LE uses “coming” in the same way:

I	coming	eat
I’m about to eat.		

### 2. Pronominal Divisions

Similarly, the pronominal divisions of LE are traceable to indigenous Liberian languages as demonstrated by the following chart of subject pronouns, comparing the three varieties: American Standard English (ASE), Kpelle (representing the indigenous languages) and LE far removed from the standard varieties (Singler, et al, 1981).

	ASE		Kpelle		LE
I,	we		n	ku	a      wi
You	you		l	ka	yu    yɔɔ
He, she,	they		n	di	I      de

As observed from the chart, ASE distinguishes three third-person singular pronouns: “he, she, it”; whereas, Kpelle, just like LE, has only one. Also, ASE has a single form for both second-person singular and plural pronouns, whereas each of Kpelle and LE has different forms. The form of the pronouns in LE is English in origin (each of them coming from a standard English form – “a” is from “I” and “i” is from “he”, except “yɔɔ”, which comes from Southern American English “y’all”), but the divisions are those of Liberian languages.

### 3. The Progressive Marker “de”

The influence of other WAfrE varieties on LE results in the use of the progressive marker, “de”(also le, dɛ and lɛ):

We de talk something serious.

(We are discussing something important).

This feature is widespread in the English-based pidgins of West Africa such as those of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, etc.

### 4. The use of “past”(written as pass) as a comparative and past tense marker

Again, this marker is influenced by the syntax of most Liberian languages such as Kru and it is also widespread in the WAfrE, especially the pidginised varieties.

John big pass James  
(John is bigger than James)

Here are parallels in Kru:

John	boa	si-o	James
John	big	pass	James

John    si        na        sia        pɛplaka  
 John    pass     my        house    yesterday.  
 (John went past my house yesterday)

Thus, in the first two pairs, “pass” serves as a comparative marker. However, in the last pair, it functions as a past tense marker as shown in the American Standard English.

**5. Number**

For nouns whose plurals are formed by adding -s or -es, the nouns’ plurality are ordinarily NOT marked following some conditions. For instance, when the plurality has already been established by other words within the noun phrase, as in:

- Three bus (instead of three *buses*).
- So-so bigshot (instead of *bigshots*).
- Those car there (instead of those *cars* there).

On the other hand, a verb’s plurality or past tense is either not established or not crucial, e.g.s.

He knock down the boy (*knocked*)  
 He can’t eat the rock yesterday (*couldn’t*).  
 She want to go there (*wanted*)

It should be pointed out that, this feature is prominent in the speeches of non-standard LE. Therefore, the extent to which number is marked directly relates to the place on the continuum of the speech in question: the less standard-like a person’s speech, the less likely that s’s will be present.

**6. Determiners**

Liberian Pidgin English speakers often place “the” before proper names and place names:

I meet *the* Flomo in the Sanniquellie. (I met Flomo in Sanniquellie).

As for indefinite determiners, when they are overtly marked, one is very often the singular marker, while some is usually the plural marker:

- He sold the meat to *one* man.
- He sold the meat to *some* men them.

The above analysis is taken as a reflection on the status of LE. We now shift our focus to describing The Gambian English.

**7. LE Negation**

Strammer and Migge (2014) further observe that LE negation is heavily influenced by early American English. “Didn’t” and “haven’t/hasn’t” (as a past tense marker) are generally replaced by the auxiliary “ain’t”; however, it may also mark negation in the present progressive as illustrated in the sentences below:

- Sister Rose ain’t come yet o.
- I ain’t goi to Morovia no mo. (I am not going to Monrovia any more)

**2.2 The Gambian English**

**2.2.1 The Lexico-Semantic Features**

The GE lexical peculiarities, being influenced by the process of indiginisation, find expression in loan words (Peter, Wolf and Simo-Bobda, 2003). They also feature neologisms which sometimes are mixed with loan words in hybrid structures to refer to “denotata” specific to The Gambia only (p.96). The items reflect indigenous food, socio-cultural milieu, religion and social activities. Ukut (2017) and Peter, Wolf and Simo-Bobda (2003) provide the lexico-semantic features shown on the tables below:

**Table 1: Lexis Associated with Food and Beverages**

Words	Meanings
Attaya	Local green tea [Chinese]
Benacheu	Rice cooked with fish or sometimes meat and vegetables(Wolof)
Cherrah	Meal of steamed millet flour balls(Wolof)
Churai-gerteh	Sweet porridge consisting of pounded groundnuts and rice(Wolof)
Chicken yassa	Chicken cooked with fresh lime, onions and ground pepper
Olele	Bean dumpling cooked in palm oil(Krio/Aku)
Wondjo	Red tea made from hibiscus(Mandika)

Domoda	Meat in groundnut stew and usually served with rice(Mandika)
--------	--

**Table 2: Lexis of Socio-Cultural life**

Words	Meanings
40 <sup>th</sup> day charity	Memorial celebration of the dead
Alkalo	Head of a community or village(Md)
berti	Fashionable hair style(Senegalese)
Griot	Story teller, poet and musician(French)
Gumbay	Music and dance traditional to the Akus(Krio/Aku)
Mansa	Traditional ruler;chief(Md)
Woman alkalo	Female head of a village(Md)

**Table 3: Lexis of Religion**

Word	Meanings
Marabout	A Muslim[Arabic]
Almudo	Boy given by his parents to a Marabout for Islamic education[Arabic].
Daras	Islamic community of followers[Arabic]
Fadjarr	First prayer of the day for Muslims[Arabic]
Konteh	Three-day Muslim feast of Eid al fitri[Wolof]
Talibeh	Islamic follower[Arabic, Wolof]

**Table 4: Lexis of Social Groups/Activities**

Words	Meanings
Kafo	Group of people forming an association or club[Mandika]
Osusu	Traditional scheme of saving money among women[W Afr languages]]
Bana bano	Fish monger[Spanish]
Bumster	A young man or boy who follows tourists pestering them to be guided by him for money, also take money for finding a taxi[neologism]
Dalasi	Gambian currency unit
Gate-takings	Total amount of entrance or admission fee[neologism]
Pus Push	Big hand-propelled two wheeled cart carrying a load[neologism]

From Tables 1-4, it can be observed that many of the loan words originate from the local languages, especially Mandika (e.g.s, kafo, mansa, Alkalo, etc) and Wolof (Cherreh, Churai-gerteh, etc.) The religious words (almudo, daras, Marabout) point at Islam as the main religion of The Gambians. Ukut(2017) earlier asserts that The Gambians tend to prefer indigenous religious terms to Arabic or English terms. However, from the available data as indicated, it is observed that The Gambians rather prefer Arabic religious words to indigenous (Mandika or Wolof) and English words. Thus, such words as “Marabout”, “almudo”, “daras”, “fadjarr”are all Arabic religious register. The neologisms (push push, gate-takings, etc) are influenced by the specific events/activities associated with them. It is equally noticeable that a number of The GE words [osusu, bana bano, berti, griot, etc) originate from other languages outside of The Gambia; perhaps, the effects of migrations and contacts. Thus, the New English plays a restricted communicative function for the Gambian speech community. This phenomenon affirms Udofot’s (2007) assertion that the nativised variety of English is assigned a “sizeable functional load for the purpose of intra group communication” (p. 38).

### 2.2.2 The GE Phonology

As in other WAfrE varieties, The GE pronunciation differs from the Standard British English in many ways, including the following features:

#### 1. Varying Forms of Sounds

Ukut (2017) notes that generally, The Gambian speakers of English tend to vary the vowel /n/ and realise it as/ɒ/ in most words such as *Monday*/mɒndɪ/, *cut*/kɒt/, *just*/dʒɒst/, *young*/jɒŋ/, *love*/lɒv/, etc. Thus, GE shares this feature with other WAfrE varieties, including Nigerian English. Again, they pronounce the “nurse vowel” and the schewa sound as /ɒ/ as in: *work*/wɒk/, *purpose*/pɒpɒs/, *journey*/dʒɒni/ and *culture*/kɔ:ltʃɒ/, *murmur*/mɒmɒ/,

*labour*/leɒð/ and *doctor*/dɒktə/, respectively. Notably, such words as *person* and *girl* are realised as p[a]nson and g[a]l.

The near vowel realised by The Gambians is similar to the diphthong /ɪə/, as in *near*, *beer*, *dear*, articulated by Sierra Leoneans and Nigerians, especially at the basilect and masolect levels of competence (Ukut, 2017).

## 2. Dental Fricatives

Like in LE and other WAfrE varieties, The Gambians pronounce /θ/ and /ð/ as /t/ and /d/ in words (expressions) such as: *thankyou* (“tank you”) and *theman* (“de man”). In the YouTube video (*GambiaScholars*), a student of Armitage Senior Secondary school says:

When I sat down to *tink* of which career to study and help my *peopul*...I am very grateful to them for all their support.

In this discourse, the student, a barely educated English language speaker from Upper River Region of The Gambia, uses *tink* instead of “think”. Note the use of other form, “*peopul*”, which is accounted for in 5 below.

## 3. Apicalisation/Palatalisation

Apicalisation results from the realisation of sounds with the tip of the tongue (Ladefoged and Johnson, 2011); whereas palatalisation occurs when the front of the tongue is raised during the articulation of a consonant (Gussenhoven and Jacobs, 2011). Ashby (2011) further explains that palatalised sounds are transcribed by adding a superscript [j] after the primary symbol.

Thus, in GE, Peter et al (2003) observe that this feature mainly concerns the pronunciation of affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ which are realised as /tj/ or /tʃ/ and /dj/ respectively, for examples: *change*[tʃientj] or [tʃentʃ]; *churches*[tʃetʃis], *contagion*[kɔntedjɔn].

## 4. The Confusion Between /f,v,b/ Sounds

This is traceable to the missing /v/ sound in Mandika and Wolof (cf. Haust, 1995, pp.85,89), which results in such realisations as *cassa*[b]a or *cassa*[f]a.

## 5. The Syllabic Dark /l/

RP syllabic dark /l/ is transformed into [-ul] in GE as in: *people*[pipul], *bicycle*[baisikul], *travel*[travul], *school*[skull], and *local*[lɔkul].

## 6. Simplification of Consonantal Clusters

The Gambian consonantal clusters, like LE clusters, are generally simplified (Peter et al, 2003). Hence, /sk-/ becomes [kr] as in *scratch* [krɛt].

## 7. Intonation

Intonation may differ from speaker to speaker, but pitch in mainstream Gambian English is generally very high on all stressed syllables, a feature common to both French and English speakers from the West Atlantic and northern group of Niger-Congo languages (Peter, et al, 2003). Whereas, Mandika is said to be tonal (with high and low tones), Wolof is considered a non-tonal (or accent) language (Haust 1995, p.85, 89). Consequently, it is observed in Mandika speakers the high pitches of content words and low pitches of unstressed syllables, with a fall on the nucleus in declarative sentences.

### 2.2.3 The GE Morpho-Syntax

Like other WAfrE varieties, including LE, The GE variety is evidently nativised. Here is a summary of The GE grammar.

#### 1. Transliterations/Translations from Native Languages

Ukut (2017, p. 387) further notes that some expressions are direct translations from the native languages, as in: I'm coming (when leaving).

I *am* having two dalasi (I have two dalasi).

He *is* arriving for the party (He arrives for the party).

#### 2. Pluralisation of the Non-Count Nouns and the Use of Indefinite Articles

Examples of such include: *furnitures*, *waters*, *equipments*, *anadvice*, *informations*, *hygienes*, etc. For instance, on the YouTube video (*Gambia Scholars*), a student in Brikamaba Senior Secondary School says:

I want to build abattoirs....For the supply of wheat, we need some *equipments* and a very good system of abattoir,

thus pluralising the word, “equipment”. This feature is common in WAfrE varieties, including Nigerian English. Jowitt (1991, p.109) observes that pluralisation of the non-count nouns such as “equipments” is “widespread among educated Nigerians” and acceptable to many who use standard forms.

#### 3. The pronouns *he* and *she* interchanged inappropriately

In Wolof and Mandika languages, *he* and *she* are often interchanged inappropriately, thus using the same gender for both sexes as in:

Allabatou is my senior brother. She is a teacher.

Beteng is not only beautiful, he is also intelligent.

In the first sentence, "she" is used to refer to a masculine antecedent, "Allabatou"; while in the second sentence, "he" is exchanged with a feminine gender, "Beteng". Also, notice the use of "senior" brother, instead of "elder" brother.

#### **4. Non Native Amalgamation of some words**

Expressions such as *infact*, *inspiteof*, *afterall*, *moreso*, etc., are often amalgamated in GE and they become: "infact, inspite of, afterall, moreso."

#### **5. Non Native Use of Prepositions and Pronouns**

A common feature of GE grammar, Ukut (2017) also points out, is inappropriate use of prepositions in such constructions as: "discuss about politics", "comprise of two things" instead of *discusspolitics*, *comprisetwothings*, etc. Most times, they do away with the pronoun "I" in sentences as in:

"Need a help" (I need help).

#### **6. Extra Grammatical Items**

Among other distinguishing features of GE grammar are some expressions with unique meanings such as "bad mouth" (to curse someone); "small change" (balance). Some idiomatic expressions in GE are very distinct in meanings from Standard British English. Few of such include: "She is in state" (She is pregnant); "to shoulder" (to take responsibility); "to stool a Chief" (to install a Chief) (Ukut, 2017, p.388).

### **III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The analysis reveals the uniqueness and similarities of LE and GE, as well as the common core features shared by all varieties of WAfrE. Among the distinctive features of LE, lexico-semantics are the loan words that are peculiar to LE and neologisms not found in any other WAfrE variety, such as *sabu*, *Manjaa*, *chunk*, *tay-tay water*, etc. LE phonology is mainly characterised by consonant deletion in word final position and consonant changes. For instance, from the online *Liberian English Dictionary* (2018), it is proven that at the end of a word, "th" is often pronounced as an "P" (i.e., 'truth' becomes "truf", and "Ruth" becomes "roof"). In terms of grammar, peculiar features of LE include: use of *done* as past tense marker, LE negation with the use of *aint* (a direct influence of American English), etc.

With respect to GE, the distinguishing lexico-semantic features include such lexemes as *attaya*, *benacheu*, *alkalo*, *gate-takings*, *kafo*, *Dalasi*, etc. Apicalisation/palatalisation and varying forms of sounds are predominant in the phonology. Thus, words such as "work" and "purpose" are realised as /wɔk/ and /pɔpɔs/ respectively. Also, peculiar idioms such as *to stool a Chief* add to the uniqueness of the variety as new English.

Significantly still, some notable similarities occur in both varieties, as well as other WAfrE varieties. Those common features include: absence of the dental sounds /ð, θ/ in words that contain the *th* sound, simplification of consonant clusters, corresponding features in indigenous languages, the progressive marker *de* (which is prevalent in all pidginised varieties of WAfrE), differences in pronominal divisions (for instance, in Ibibio language of Nigeria, there are two forms of the second person personal pronouns: singular "you" is *afo*, while plural "you" is *mbufo*). Other similarities are: confusion between sounds of English as in /v/ substituted for /f/ and /z/ exchanged with /f/ - a feature resulting from the absence of such sounds in the indigenous languages. Intonation also is different from the Standard British English since African languages are known to be tonal languages as against the intonational nature of the English language. Most languages of Sub-Saharan Africa are members of the Niger-Congo family, which are predominantly tonal and the indigenous languages of Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, The Gambia, Ghana, etc., are members of this language family (en.m.wikipedia.org). Hence, the high level of mother tongue influences on the English language spoken in Liberia and The Gambia is evident in these varieties. In line with Laughlin (2009, p.2), these Englishes indeed have shown "evidence of contact with a former colonial language, but not the colonial languages themselves."

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the discussion, we have examined, compared and contrasted both varieties of WAfrE: LE and GE. The paper explored the linguistic situations in both African nations and identified the unique as well as the distinguishing features of LE and The GE at the levels of lexico-semantics, phonology and morpho-syntax. Although, it is realistic that both varieties share some common WAfrE features such as translations from indigenous languages and absence of labio-dental fricatives /θ, ð/ as /t, d/, they also have peculiar lexemes, phonotactics and grammar which evidently mark them out as distinctively recognisable varieties of world Englishes. Among the peculiar features, GE English is characterised by apicalisation/palatalisation of sounds, while LE is mainly coloured by consonant deletion at the word final position.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Ashby, P.(2011). *Understandingphonetics*.UK: Hodder Education.
- [2]. Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language (1998). *West African English*. Retrieved from <http://www. Encyclopedia.com>. 12/1/2017.
- [3]. Chiluwu, I. (2013). West African English in digital discourse. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*, 1(1):
- [4]. Doucleff, M.(2014). *From 'Big Jues' to 'Tay-Tay Water': A quick guide to Liberian English*. Retieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014>. 12/1/2017.
- [5]. *EnglshinAfrica* (ND). Retieved from[https://www.uni-due.de>VARS\\_Africa](https://www.uni-due.de>VARS_Africa). 12/1/2017.
- [6]. Grimes, B. (Ed.)(1996). *Ethnologue : Languages of the World*. 13<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics
- [7]. Gussenhoven, C. & Jacobs, H. (2011). *Understandingphonology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. UK: Hodder Education.
- [8]. Haust, D.(1995). *Code-switching in Gambia: Einesociolinguisticsche untersuchcvon spandinka. Wolf and English in kontakt*. Sprachkontakt in Africa.koln: Rudiger Kopperverlag.
- [9]. Igboanusi, H.(2013). The English-only language education policy in The Gambia and low literacy rates. *Research Gate*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net>. 12/1/2017.
- [10]. Jowitt, D.(1991). *Nigerian English usage: Anintroduction*. Lagos: Learn Africa Plc.
- [11]. Juffermans, K. & McGlynn, C.(2015). A Socioliguistic profile of The Gambia. *SociolinguisticStudies*, 3(3): 329-355.
- [12]. Juffermans, K(2003). Local emplacement and global identities in sign board and bill-board literacies in urban Gambia. In A. Simo-Bobda(Ed.). *Explorations into language use in Africa* 197-219 Frank: Peter Language.
- [13]. Kachru, B.B. (1982). *The other tongue: Urbana: University of Illinois Press*
- [14]. Kachru, B.B. (1992). *Teaching world Englishes*. In B. B. Kachru (Eds). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. Urbana: 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Urbana and Chicago: university of Illinois Press.
- [15]. Ladefoged, P. & Johnson, K.(2011). *A course in phonetics* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- [16]. Laughlin, F. M. (Ed.) (2009). *The languages of urban Africa*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- [17]. *Liberian English dictionary* (2018). <http://universaloutreachfoundation.org/liberian-english/>
- [18]. Retrieved from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>. 12/1/2017.
- [19]. Mufwene, S.(2001). *The ecology of language evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [20]. Mufwene, S.(2008). *Language evolution: Contact, competition, and change*. London: Continuum Press.
- [21]. Peter, L., Wolf, H., & Simo Bobda, A. (2003). An Account of distinctive phonetic and lexical features of Gambian English. *EnglishWorld –Wide* , 24(1): 43-61.
- [22]. Richmond, E. B.(1989). African English expressions in The Gambia. *WorldEnglishes*, 8: 223-223.
- [23]. Robert, E. E. (2017). Lexical creativity in Ghanaian and Nigerian Englishes. In L. Eyoh & J. Udoudom (Eds.) *West African Varieties of English, Literature, Pidgins and Creoles, A festschrift for Professor Inyang Udofot*. Ikot Ekpene: Development Universal Consortia, 411-425.
- [24]. Schneider, E.(2007). *Postcolonial English varieties around the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [25]. Simo-Bobda, A.(2000). Comparing some phonological features African accents of English. *Journal of English Studies*, 81: 249-266.
- [26]. Singler, J. V., Mason, G., Peewee, D.K., Massalee, L. T. & Barclay, J. B.(1981).*An introduction to Liberian English. Michigan, USA: Michigan State University*.
- [27]. Sonko-Godwin, P.(1988). *Ethnic groups of the Senegambia: a brief history*. Banjul: sunrise Publishers.
- [28]. Strammer, P. & Migge, B.(2014). Liberian English in the context of its turbulent history.
- [29]. <http://www.academia.edu>.12/1/2017.
- [30]. Sullivan, T. D. (2004). A preliminary report of existing information on the Manding languages of West Africa: Summary and suggestins for future research. *SILElectronicSurveyReport*. Dallas: SIL International
- [31]. Thomason, S. G. & Kaufman, T. (1988). *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- [32]. Tunde-Awe, B. M. (2014). Nativization of English Language in a multilingual setting: The example of Nigeria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(6): 485-491
- [33]. Udofot, I. (2007). *English and the Nigerian situation: Trends and imperatives*. 18<sup>th</sup> University of Uyo Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Uyo.

- [34]. Ukut, K. S.(2017). English in the Gambia. In L. Eyoh & J. Udoudom (Eds.) *West African Varieties of English, Literature, Pidgins and Creoles, A festschrift for Professor Inyang Udofot*. Ikot Ekpene: Development Universal Consortia, 378-390.
- [35]. Weinreich, U.(1953).*Languages in Contact: Findings and problems*. New York:Linguistic Circle of the York.
- [36]. <http://www.bloggingwithoutmaps.blogspot.com.ng/2012/05/introduction-to-liberian-english.html>(English.stackexchange.com).
- [37]. <http://www.gambiannews.com/gambia%20>; <http://www.gambiannews.com/spectator>
- [38]. <http://www.Gambia Scholars.org>
- [39]. <http://www.gambiannews.com/gambia%20>;<http://www.gambiannews.com/spectator>
- [40]. <http://www.English.stackexchange.com>
- [41]. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Esther Robert Ph.D, et. al. “A Comparative Study of Liberian and the Gambian Varieties of West African English.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(03), 2021, pp. 28-41.