



# I get maf wey you get mɔf<sup>1</sup>: Pronunciation and Identity in Ghanaian Student Pidgin

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**Abstract (Ghanaian Student Pidgin).** This study dey describe phonological processes (vowel change, deletion and stress/tone variation) wey the young people dem dey speak pidgin for Ghana dey take dey create different pronunciations for the pidgin inside, which dem dey use alongside the original pronunciations. The study also dey look say what be the implications wey e dey give the different pronunciations for the people wey dem de speak the pidgin. The info wey I take do the study dey come from people wey them do group conversation, interview then focus group discussions give. The findings dey indicate say free variation dey happen sake-of the people wey dem dey speak the pidgin dey wan get a code that go be distinctive dem divergent from the ble wey people de speak for Ghana then the old people dema pidgin. This also dey mean say the people wey dem no dey speak GSP no go fi barb am. Also, the people wey dem dey the focus group inside dey talk say the various pronunciation choices dem get for pidgin inside (sake-of the phonological variation) dey show who fit speak proper pidgin. E be like say the people dem dey use the pronunciation wey ordinary people no go fit barb be the ones dem de talk the proper pidgin.<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract (English).** This study describes phonological processes (vowel change, deletion and stress/tone variation) which are employed by the speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin (GSP) – a Ghanaian youth language – to create variable pronunciations existing in free variation with the original pronunciations and explores the implications of the variation for the GSP speech community. The data for the study was collected by recording group conversations, conducting individual interviews and two focus group discussions. The findings indicate that free variation happens because the speakers want to create a code that is distinctive to them and as divergent from Ghanaian English (and Town Pidgin) as possible and, by extension, make GSP nearly unintelligible to the non-speaker. In relation to this, the focus group discussions reveal that the various pronunciation choices that are available to speakers (as a result of phonological variation) create the possibility of levels of proficiency for the speakers. That is, speakers who use the more divergent (and by

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'I have a mouth and you also have a mouth'. A saying in Ghanaian Student Pidgin which means *I have an opinion and you also have an opinion*.

<sup>2</sup> Many thanks to Alfred Boakye and Ebenezer Twum Duodo for their help with translating the abstract into GSP

implication more unintelligible to a non-speaker) pronunciations are considered more proficient by the GSP community.

**Keywords:** Ghanaian Student Pidgin; Youth Language; Phonological Variation; Identity.

## 1. Introduction

Previous studies (Forson 1996; Huber 1999; Dako 2002a, 2002b; Rupp 2012) on Ghanaian Student Pidgin (GSP) have emphasized its status as a (male) youth language that serves the function of in-group bonding. Huber (1999) adds that one of the most interesting things about GSP is the variety in its lexis and Osei-Tutu & Micah (2014) have investigated some semantic processes that feed into the productivity of this Pidgin. However, there is as yet no study on the phonology of GSP and how it contributes to the unique identity of the language and its speakers. This paper attempts to fill this gap by arguing that there are phonological variants in GSP which exist in free variation and that particular phonological forms are indicators of what **authentic** or **proper** GSP is and, by extension, who a good speaker of the language is. The paper further argues that these free variants the language and are conditioned by social factors – specifically, the desire of speakers to diverge from speakers of other varieties of English in Ghana (i.e. standard Ghanaian English and Town Pidgin). Consequently, this paper describes some phonological variation evident in GSP and discusses the (sociolinguistic) implications they have for the speakers. The study does this by answering two research questions:

RQ1. What are the phonological processes responsible for the free variation in GSP?

RQ2. What are the options this free variation offers to speakers and what are the implications of the choices speakers make?

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, I provide a brief historical background of GSP by tracing its development from Town Pidgin (TP) and outline some of the features that distinguish the two from each other. In this section also, I give a brief overview of the pronunciation of Standard Ghanaian English, since this is essential to establishing the free variation in GSP. In section 3, I describe how the data for the study was collected and processed. Sections 4 and 5 present the findings of the study and discuss them with regard to the research questions posed above. The final section (Section 6), summarizes the arguments of the paper.

## 2.0 Background to the Study – A Brief History of Pidgin in Ghana

According to Huber (1999), traditionally, many people did not believe that a pidgin developed in Ghana. The pidgin that is spoken in Ghana was thought to have been brought in from other West African countries such as Nigeria and Liberia. Dako (2002a) reiterates this when she states that Ghanaians commonly referred to pidgin as *Abongo Brofo* (the English of the barracks<sup>3</sup>) and *Kru Brofo* (Kru<sup>4</sup> English). Dako (2002a) cites these two names for pidgin in Ghana as evidence to support the argument that Ghana did not develop an indigenous pidgin. Additionally, in Ghana, pidgin was widely known as the language of the Army and the Police force. Originally, pidgin in Ghana served a very specific purpose as a means of communication between the educated and the uneducated. According

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<sup>3</sup> Many Ghanaian soldiers had come into contact with Nigerian (and other West African) soldiers when they served in the West African Frontier Force during World War I and II.

<sup>4</sup> The Kru were migrant workers from Liberia who travelled all along the West African coast to work and they spoke Liberian Creole.

to Amoako (1992), the main users of pidgin outside the barracks were migrant laborers from the north of Ghana who came to the south to work and many of them found jobs as security men in companies and in the homes of rich people. In fact, so widespread was the view that pidgin was spoken by these workers that they were stereotyped for a long time in Ghanaian television programs – virtually every show on television that had a security man, would have one who was a northerner and who spoke pidgin. As a result of the manner in which pidgin developed in Ghana, the language has come to be seen as a distinctively male language. Researchers (Amoako 1992; Huber 1999; Dako 2002a) have noted that since *Abongo brɔfo* and *Kru brɔfo* were used by a largely male population (i.e. soldiers and manual laborers, respectively), historically, pidgin speakers in Ghana were typically male and, consequently, any women who used pidgin would have signaled that they had come into contact with an all-male population through questionable means. Dako (2002a) tells the following anecdote to reinforce this point:

And I will finally mention the student who told us about a woman who came to one of the male halls of the University of Ghana looking for someone whose name she had forgotten. She spoke pidgin, and the students assumed she was a prostitute. (Dako 2002a:74)

Generally, scholars who have written about pidgin in Ghana agree that there are two varieties and a multiplicity of names has been given to these varieties (Educated/Institutionalized and Uneducated/Uninstitutionalized Pidgin – Huber, 1999; Student Pidgin and Motorpark Pidgin – Amoako 1992; GhPE<sup>5</sup>/Town Pidgin and Student Pidgin – Dako 2002a; 2002b). This study borrows Dako's (2002a; 2002b) terms, with a slight modification - Town Pidgin and **Ghanaian** Student Pidgin. Despite the variety of names, the above-mentioned researchers agree that the major difference between these two pidgins is the function they perform. Of the two, Town Pidgin is the older variety and serves as a lingua franca generally between the uneducated and the educated, while Ghanaian Student Pidgin serves as an in-group language for students in high schools and universities.

It is unclear how pidgin made the leap from the uneducated to the educated and from older people to youngsters in school. According to Dadzie (1985), school boys in coastal towns like Cape Coast started to use pidgin because it was being used by sailors and the sailors were the trendsetters. He adds that the sailors came back from trips overseas with knowledge of the newest trends and clothes, etc. These kids therefore copied them from the way they walked to the way they talked. He dates this phenomenon to the mid-1960s. Dako (2002a), on the other hand, dates pidgin in high schools to the early 1970s and she says it started in the multilingual coastal schools. She adds that students adopted pidgin perhaps as a way of protesting against the rule enforcing the use of English in school. According to her:

It would appear that [GSP] started out as an “anti-language” spoken by trend-setting urban boys. Interviews with men who were in school in those days reinforce the impression of “protest” in that quite a few associated the emergence of pidgin with the ban on speaking any Ghanaian language in school. A pidgin sound-alike was used instead of SE<sup>6</sup> with the argument, “You say we should speak English, but not what type of English we should speak.” (Dako 2002a:75)

Interviews conducted for this research with some respondents who belong to the generation that were in high school in the early 70s appear to corroborate what both Dadzie (1985) and Dako (2002a) say. One of the respondents, for example, who went to high school in the Volta Region of Ghana reports that only one person in their school spoke pidgin and that student came from Cape

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<sup>5</sup> Ghanaian Pidgin English

<sup>6</sup> Standard English

Coast<sup>7</sup> (which is further evidence that seems to confirm the earlier research that suggest that pidgin spread from the coast to the other high schools in Ghana). He, however, mentioned that this individual was looked upon as a trendsetter or pacesetter and before long, many of the students had learned pidgin from him. The same respondent also adds that speaking pidgin was a sort of fashion that made (male) students appear to be ‘in-the-know’:

*Saa time-no, na wo ka pidgin-a, ekyere se wo no... wo feel se w'ahye. Ahaa... ehε, wo ye guy! Aye se fashion bi. Ye nfa no se obi firi Takoradi na o-ko school wo Cape Coast, na ɔ-ba na ɔ-ka pidgin no, na w'ahu se ɔ-no w'ahye. Ehεε... efiri that area no na ebae.*

<sup>8</sup>During that time, if you spoke pidgin, it showed that you... you felt that you were hip... yeah, you were a guy! It was some sort of fashion. Let say, for example, if someone came from Takoradi<sup>9</sup> and went to school in Cape Coast, when he came and he spoke the pidgin, you could see that he was hip. Yeah... it came from that area.

Another possibility that both Dadzie (1985) and Dako (2002a) mention is that, shortly after independence (in 1957), Ghana had series of military coups and for long periods, soldiers were at the helm of affairs in the country. As has already been mentioned, pidgin was the language of the military and police service and once they came into prominence, the language also changed position to one of power. In addition to this new language-power dynamic for the speakers of the pidgin, Dadzie (1985) points out that military/police-student/civilian clashes went back to the period just before independence when there was heightened political agitation and this continual contact between the two groups led to some transfer because of the need for communication:

At the beginning [,] imitation of the language of these people – usually uneducated or semi-literate – was derisive, but it was discovered that, to be understood by them, the students had to speak the same language. (Dadzie, 1985:118)

We can infer from the discussion so far that (in its incipient stages) the pidgin used by students (what is now GSP) was not different from what was spoken in town (Town Pidgin). This is supported by the fact that though my respondents in this age range<sup>10</sup> agree that pidgin was already being used in their high schools, they all unanimously confirmed that there was no difference between the pidgin they spoke and what was used in town and also mentioned that the pidgin students speak today is very different from what they (the respondents) spoke and that it took more effort on their part to understand. As one of member of that generation put it ‘that pidgin [i.e. GSP] is an entirely different animal’ (Kofi Anyidoho, personal communication, July 2015). These observations about the difference between GSP and Town Pidgin have also been echoed in previous research. For example, Huber (1999:276) provides the following list (which has been slightly modified<sup>11</sup>) as some of the features that differentiate GSP from Town Pidgin:

- the use of *wana* and *dema* for the possessive of the first and third persons plural [instead of GhPE’s *our* and *their*]
- the negative-completive function of *neva* – not found in uneducated GhPE
- the preference for possessor + pronoun + possessed constructions over possessor + possessed sequences. For example:

<sup>7</sup> It is worthy of note here that both Dadzie (1985) and Dako (2002a & 2000b) mention Cape Coast as one of the first places students started to speak pidgin.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s translation

<sup>9</sup> Another coastal town, Takoradi (approximately 50 miles from Cape Coast) was the location of Ghana’s first harbor

<sup>10</sup> Those who were in high school in the late 1960s and early 1970s

<sup>11</sup> Explanations [in square brackets] and numbered examples have been added to some items

1. the man in teeth (GSP)  
DEF<sup>12</sup> guy 3sgPD<sup>13</sup> tooth.PL  
'the man his teeth'  
'the man's teeth'
  2. the man teeth (GhPE)  
DEF man tooth.PL  
'the man's teeth'
- locative constructions where the prepositions *insai* or *autsai* follow the NP, rather than preceding it as in uneducated GhaPE. For example:
    3. e dey the bank inside (GSP)  
3sgSBJ LOC<sup>14</sup> DEF bank inside  
'(s)he is inside the bank'
    4. e dey inside the bank (GhPE)  
3sgSBJ LOC inside DEF bank  
'(s)he is inside the bank'
  - the use of the copula *bi*<sup>15</sup> as a topicalizer, e.g. in *sɔm kɔmandos bi* '(police) commandos'.
  - preference of unreduced *dɛm* for the third person plural bound pronoun
  - in the area of the lexicon: the frequent use of *ʈfali*<sup>16</sup> (< *Charlie*), a very salient feature of the school and university varieties whose main discourse function apparently is to keep the channel of communication open, *dɛn* for 'and', possibly deriving from English *then*, *huk* 'hold', *plas* 'with', *wikit* 'serious', *rɔf* 'sound, impressive, thorough', and others.

In addition to Huber's (1999) features, Dako (2002b:58-60) provides ten (10) additional features typical of GSP which can be summarized as follows:

- Lexical borrowings (especially, functional items) from Akan (e.g. *kura* 'at all', the definite post-determiner *no*, etc) and Ga (the contrastive marker *nɔɔ* 'right now') which are used extensively in GSP.
- a lower frequency of reduplication than GhPE
- a tendency to keep the plural forms of nouns
- the use of calqued expressions from Akan and Ga

It is clear, based on the differences these researchers point out, that sometime between the late 60s or early 70s (when students started to use pidgin in school) and today, the language underwent changes that are identifiable by the older generation. Though it is difficult to place exactly when these changes started to take place, we can assume with some measure of confidence that these changes are fairly recent (in the mid to late 1990s). The evidence for this assumption comes from looking at earlier research on Ghanaian pidgin. Dadzie's (1985) paper does not mention any differences between the pidgin that students were speaking and what was spoken in town. Indeed, Dadzie (1985) does not even mention the possibility of two varieties of pidgin in Ghana. Amoako's

<sup>12</sup> DEF = Definite Determiner

<sup>13</sup> PD = Possessive Determiner

<sup>14</sup> LOC = Locative

<sup>15</sup> This *bi* is actually the Akan indefinite marker 'bi' (roughly translated as 'some'). So, in reality, there is a double marking of the indefinite (– a point which Dako, 2002b also raises).

<sup>16</sup> Used as a term of address

dissertation (written in 1992) is the first to mention that there appeared to be two varieties of pidgin in Ghana (one spoken by the uneducated and the other by the educated). However, he shows virtually no difference between the two varieties and only mentions some peculiar vocabulary (such as *plus* meaning 'with') favored by the students. The next researcher in the continuum is Huber (1999) and (as shown above) he identifies a lot more features that are specific to GSP. Finally, as already mentioned, Dako (2002b) adds to the list of features that Huber (1999) identifies. Interestingly, Huber (1999:151) had already hinted at what might be the beginnings of the current radical difference in the two varieties saying, '[d]ue to its predominant function as an in-group language, the "educated" variety shows **highly productive processes of word formation** and a **large number of lexical idiosyncrasies**<sup>17</sup> ...'.

In attempting to explain this 'parting of ways' of GSP and Town Pidgin, Dako & Bonnie (2014) argue that the differences between the two varieties became more marked after Ghana's educational system was redesigned to admit younger students into universities from the high school level. In 1996, the number of years students spent in high school was reduced from seven to three years. This meant that the average student completed high school when they were (approximately) 18 years old, instead of 22 years old. According to Dako & Bonnie (2014) this meant that students who were going to university were still at the stage where they were formulating an identity for themselves and were more likely to chart a new course with the language they had appropriated from their elders. This charting of a new course appears to be supported by the findings of Osei-Tutu (2008) and Osei-Tutu & Corum (2014) which indicated that the speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin utilize various linguistic processes (both semantic and morphological) to create vocabulary that is unintelligible to the outsider. The findings also pointed to the fact that though there exist many options for word choice for speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin, the use of a particular word also indicated one's level of proficiency or how deeply embedded in the group of speakers one was. In other words, a speaker's choice of one vocabulary item or the other influenced how they were viewed (or accepted) by the other speakers. Furthermore, Osei-Tutu (2008) showed that the variety in vocabulary items generally followed a cline from standard (Ghanaian) English to Ghanaian Student Pidgin – with the latter being the positive end of the scale. For example, to express the concept of 'understanding', speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin can use any of three words – *understand*, *tease*<sup>18</sup> or *barb*<sup>19</sup>. Of the three, the standard English word *understand* is seen as the least authentic form, while the Ghanaian Student Pidgin word *barb* is seen as the most authentic form and the one which will be used by a proficient (or true) speaker of the language. Osei-Tutu's (2008) research suggested that speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin did this in order to create a code that outsiders will not understand, as is confirmed by one of the respondents in that study who says '[S]ome students are very good in the pidgin... when they speak, it is sometimes difficult to understand what they are saying' (52).

## 2.1 Ghanaian English Phonology

In order to provide a point of comparison for the variant pronunciations in GSP, it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks about the major lexifying language of Ghanaian Student Pidgin – standard<sup>20</sup> Ghanaian English (GhE) – since this appears to be the language that the speakers of GSP

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>18</sup> Akan for 'to understand'

<sup>19</sup> it's not clear where this word comes from

<sup>20</sup> The term is used tentatively here as there is currently no officially recognized Standard Ghanaian English. Previous researchers have avoided controversy by referring to the variety as English in Ghana (Ciper, 1971; Dseagu, 1996) or Educated Ghanaian English (Sey, 1973). However, neither term works for this paper since the former encompasses all varieties in Ghana (including Town Pidgin and Student Pidgin) and the latter excludes varieties spoken by people who have not attained a certain (debatable) level of education. In other words, the former is too inclusive, while the

want to diverge from most. In addition to Ghanaian English, GSP also incorporates words from the various Ghanaian languages with whom it is in constant contact; however, more often than not, these vocabulary items are easily identified (by the speakers) as borrowings. Additionally, as Osei-Tutu (2008) points out, many of these Ghanaian language borrowings serve the purpose of making GSP *diverge* from GhE. The relationship between Ghanaian English and Ghanaian Student Pidgin, is, however, not just one of lexifier and pidgin, since the two languages are in contact with each other daily. In other words, by virtue of how it is learned, speakers of GSP are more often than not, also speakers of GhE. Consequently, one would expect that an English lexical item used by the same speaker will have the same phonology whether the speaker is speaking GhE or GSP. However, the variation that concerns this study occurs because speakers of GSP have the option of using different pronunciations in GSP for the same words that they use in GhE. What this reveals therefore is a pronunciation cline with Ghanaian English pronunciation at one end and GSP pronunciation at the other. The next section, therefore, outlines a short description of the vowel inventory of GhE is necessary, since the majority of the variants that are discussed in this paper are vowels.

According to Dako (2003), Huber (2004) and Adjaye (2005), Ghanaian English has a smaller vowel inventory than RP<sup>21</sup> and one of the reasons is that the central vowels /ə/, /ɜ:/ and /ʌ/ of RP are not found in the Ghanaian English vowel repertoire. Consequently, /ə/, /ʌ/ and /æ/ are conflated into /a/, while /ɜ:/ is produced as /ɛ:/. Also, the RP diphthong /əʊ/ is monophthongized to /o/. However, as Huber (2004) notes, some of the RP vowels have a range of pronunciations in GhE and he accounts for this by saying that since GhE is a system of “tendencies rather than categorical differences from BrE”, the variation is affected by factors such as the L1 of the speaker, the English proficiency of the speaker and the situational context. Consequently, while a vowel such as RP /ʌ/ may be more commonly pronounced in GhE as /a/, it is possible for some speakers to pronounce it /ɔ/ or /ɛ/, depending on the factors mentioned above.

### 3. Methodology

The data for the study was gathered through a series of recordings and the writer’s own knowledge of the language. There are two sets of recordings – the first contains speech from groups of students engaging in conversations in pidgin and the second contains recordings of two (2) focus group discussions and interviews of other students who share their thoughts on Ghanaian Student Pidgin. The first focus group is made up of 4 students (including a student facilitator) and the language they speak is mainly pidgin. In this discussion, the students share how and when they came to speak pidgin and their thoughts on what sort of identity Ghanaian Student Pidgin gives them. The second focus group comprised three (3) students, with the researcher as the facilitator. In this discussion, the researcher presented the students with some of the vocabulary items that had been identified from the earlier recordings and asked students whether (1) they were aware of the varying pronunciations of these words, (2) what the significance of the various pronunciations was – i.e. whether a particular pronunciation signaled anything about a speaker, and (3) their motivations for making the pidgin sound the way it did due to their novel pronunciations. These questions were asked with the aim of discovering what the (phonological) linguistic variables in Ghanaian Student Pidgin are, what those variables indicated and the motivations for their development. Though Ghanaian Student Pidgin is used only sparingly in the focus group discussion and the interviews, the recordings are essential to this study because they allowed for the gathering of useful information

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latter is too exclusive. I use the term, therefore, to represent the variety of English Ghanaians speak on formal occasions.

<sup>21</sup> RP (Received Pronunciation) is still the standard for phonology in the Ghanaian educational system.

about the participants' attitude to the language they speak. The sections that follow will first present the phonological processes and then sociolinguistic motivations and implications are discussed.

#### 4.0 Findings: RQ1 – What Phonological Processes Lead to Free Variation in GSP?

Generally, phonological processes occur in all languages and can (usually) be explained by the phonotactics of the language. However, the processes described below cannot be solely attributed to any such linguistic explanation. Additionally, since the phonological processes in question here lead to free variation in GSP, it stands to reason that sociolinguistic factors will be considered in order to find a reason for the variation. The sections that follow consequently describe the phonological process that create alternative (variant) pronunciations in GSP from the GhE vowel system. Segmental processes are first described, followed by supra-segmental processes. An important point to note here is that though these processes may be described individually, it is not unusual for them to interact with one another to create the variants that concern this study.

#### 4.1 Vowel Change

The most productive phonological process of interest to this paper is Vowel Change. This process involves some sort of change in vowel quality within the GhE word which creates a variant counterpart in Ghanaian Student Pidgin. Table 1 below provides examples:

Table 1. Examples of Vowel Change

Words	GhE	GSP
Rush	/raʃ/	/raʃ/ ~ /rɛʃ/
Crush	/kraʃ/	/kraʃ/ ~ /krɔʃ/
Catch <sup>22</sup>	/katʃ/	/katʃ/ ~ /kɛtʃ/
Mansion	/manʃɪn/	/manʃɪn/ ~ /mɔnʃɪn/
Happy	/hapi/	/hapi/ ~ /hɔpi/
House	/haus/	/haus/ ~ /hos/

Table 1 Cont'd. Examples of Vowel Change

Words	GhE	GSP
Make	/mek/	/mek/ ~ /mok/
Self	/self/	/self/ ~ /saf/
Down	/daun/	/daun/ ~ /dɔ/
Ground	/graund/	/graund/ ~ /grɔ/
Mouth	/mauθ/	/mauθ/ ~ /məf/

In the examples above, the change of the vowel leads to two pronunciations of the same word and both pronunciations are acceptable in GSP. There are, however, other implications which will be discussed later in the section on sociolinguistics. As mentioned earlier, there does not appear to be any underlying (phonological) systemacity to the vowel change that occurs. The first five words, for example, have the same vowel /a/ that becomes /ɔ/ or /ɛ/. Let us, therefore, briefly examine the phonological environment to see if we can determine a phonological motivation for the vowel change.

<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the /kɛtʃ/ pronunciation of *catch* is influenced by American English, since there is evidence of this type of influence in mainstream Ghanaian English producing an accent that is referred to (both popularly and in research) as LAFA – Locally Acquired Foreign Accent (Shoba *et al*, 2013).



/raʃ/ and /kraʃ/ are near minimal pairs in that the only difference between them is the /k/ in /kraʃ/. Consequently, since the /a/ in both words is followed by the same phoneme /ʃ/, that can be discarded as a possible influence for the vowel change. This then leaves the possibility that the initial /k/ of /kraʃ/ is responsible for the change from /a/ to /ɛ/ in /krɔʃ/. However, this is difficult to claim because it would raise the question of why Ghanaian English *crash* /kraʃ/ is pronounced /kraʃ/ in GSP and not /krɔʃ/. The evidence, therefore, does not seem to support the analysis that the phonological environment conditions the change from /a/ to either /ɔ/ or /ɛ/.

With regard to the vowel change from /au/ to /ɔ̃/, it seems plausible that the nasalization effect on the vowel is caused by the /n/ in /daun/ and /graund/. However, it is not as clear why the change occurs in the first place. This is because there are other words with a similar environment in which no vowel change occurs. **Round**, for example, is pronounced in GSP exactly the same way it is pronounced in Ghanaian English – /raund/, not /rɔ̃/. In addition to this counter example, it is not clear how phonological environment can explain how /hapi/ becomes /hɔpi/, /mauθ/ becomes /məf/<sup>23</sup> or /haus/ becomes /hos/. The same can be said of **make** and **self**; in that, there are several counter examples that show that not all words with the same (or similar) phonetic structure undergo sound change. Based on these examples, therefore, it can be argued that the choice of which words undergo vowel change and which do not is purely arbitrary. Further to this, it will be argued (in the discussion section) that these changes are motivated by the desire of the speakers of GSP to create a unique identity for themselves.

## 4.2 Deletion

In GSP, this process is applied both to English words and those borrowed from Ghanaian languages. For example, in GSP, Ghanaian English **self** /self/ is pronounced either as /self/ or /sef/<sup>24</sup> and Akan **bisa** /bisa/ (meaning ‘to ask’), is pronounced /bia/ or /biz/. In the first example, the phoneme /l/ is deleted to create an alternate pronunciation. However, in the Akan example, the variant is created by applying either one phonological process (deletion) or two (deletion and voicing assimilation). With /bia/, the /s/ is deleted, while, in the case of /biz/, the word-final /a/ is deleted and /s/ is voiced<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, in GSP the forms **bia** and **biz** are in free variation and either one can be used by speakers to mean ‘ask’ (in addition to the word **ask** itself). As with the vowel changes above, it is difficult to determine a system that motivates the selection of words that undergo these processes. The case of **biz** is particularly interesting because, as Huber (2004) notes, there is the tendency for speakers of Ghanaian English to devoice word-final obstruents. Consequently, one would expect **bis** as a more likely outcome after /a/-deletion is applied to **bisa** and, even if, voicing were to have occurred first (i.e. /bisa/ → /biza/), one would still expect final devoicing to apply after /a/-deletion. As things stand, there is not enough evidence to explain the process, as there are no other words in the data to which this happens<sup>26</sup>. **Self** is also unique in this regard because it is the only word in the data that undergoes the type of /l/-deletion described here. Huber (1999:173) mentions dealveolarization as a common phonological process in Ghanaian pidgin<sup>27</sup> (Town Pidgin)

<sup>23</sup> /məf/ has the additional process of TH-fronting

<sup>24</sup> As already mentioned above, this can also be pronounced /saf/

<sup>25</sup> The order in which this is written is purely descriptive and should not be taken to imply that deletion happens before or is a conditioning factor for voicing assimilation as this paper does not provide any evidence for that assumption.

<sup>26</sup> Osei-Tutu (2015) discusses phonological processes that are applied to words borrowed into GSP from Akan, but has no other examples that behave like *bisa*

<sup>27</sup> As mentioned earlier, Huber’s (1999) data includes recordings from student speakers, so the fact that he does not mention *sef* (or *saf*) indicates (1) that no student used the word in any of his recordings or (2) students had not yet

in which word-final /d, t, l/ are often dropped and provides the example of '**shovel**' which is pronounced '[sɔful] ~ [sɔfu]'. This process, however, does not seem to occur in GSP. Additionally, **shelf** /ʃelf/ (a minimal pair to **self**) does not undergo /l/-deletion and is pronounced /ʃelf/ in GSP. It can, therefore, be argued that (like the vowel changes above) this particular deletion process targets words arbitrarily<sup>28</sup>.

#### 4.3 Supra-Segmental Processes

The other processes that create variation in GSP are the combined supra-segmental features of tone and stress. According to Huber (2004):

Like other West African Englishes, GhE is syllable-timed, resulting in the characteristic up and down of sentence intonation. A corollary of syllable-timing is that, unlike BrE, GhE does not show vowel reduction in unaccented syllables. Thus, unaccented vowels generally retain their full quality and schwa is hardly ever heard... In contrast to accent languages like English, these languages show prominence of an individual syllable by realizing it at a higher pitch than neighbouring, non-prominent syllables. (862)

What this means is that, in GhE, the word **photographer** will be pronounced /fòtògráfà/ (with the high tone placed on the third syllable<sup>29</sup>) instead of RP /fə'tɒgrəfə/. The phenomenon described here is taken a step further in GSP, where in some cases, the syllable that receives the high tone is reversed leading to the creation of a different-sounding word. For example, the word **matter**, RP /mætə/, is pronounced in Ghanaian English as /mátà/; however, when it is used in GSP, it is pronounced /màtá/. Consequently, for the same word (**matter**), speakers of GSP have the choice of /mátà/ or /màtá/, which are in free variation. However, it will be argued later that the choice a speaker makes has sociolinguistic implications. Other words which undergo the same process are **body** (<sup>30</sup>/bòdì/ ~ /bòdí/), **money** (/mání/ ~ /mòní/), **happy** (/hápì/ ~ /hòpí/), and **cousin** (/kázìn/ or /kùzón/)<sup>31</sup>. Apart from the words provided as examples, there are many others which appear to undergo this process. What cuts across all of them is that they are disyllabic and that they end up with a low-high prosody. This patterning appears may present *prima facie* evidence that GSP has a strong preference for disyllabic words with a low-high prosody. An additional case in support of this is the word **sati** (/sàtí/) 'satisfied', which is borrowed into GSP by first clipping the English word to two syllables. Here, even though the clipped form is never used in GhE and, therefore, there is no high-low version (i.e. /sátí/<sup>32</sup>), GSP still uses low-high prosody suggesting that this is the rhythm<sup>33</sup> speakers prefer. Nevertheless, though all the examples here have a change in tone from high-low to low-high, it is difficult to say for certain that this is the only direction of change allowed in GSP (in the absence of a more in-depth study of the process). What can be said now is what was said above – that GhE tones are reversed in GSP and that the reversal leads to free variants in the language.

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started pronouncing *self* differently. The second point will support this paper's argument that though GSP may have started as an imitation of Town Pidgin, its speakers now mark themselves as different from the speakers of Town Pidgin.

<sup>28</sup> Of course, with the possible exception of special cases like *catch*.

<sup>29</sup> Huber (2004) also mentions that GhE generally has a different prominent syllable than BrE.

<sup>30</sup> In both of these examples, the first pronunciation in the series is the GhE version and the second is the GSP version.

<sup>31</sup> The last three examples show that the process can be combined with vowel change.

<sup>32</sup> Of course one could argue that since *satisfied* in GhE is /sàtísfáid/, the clipped form still provides the high-low conditioning that could trigger the GSP reversal.

<sup>33</sup> This issue of 'rhythm' will be revisited in the section on sociolinguistic implications.

### 5.0 Findings: RQ2 – Implications of Free Variation

Though the phonological processes described above are interesting in themselves as linguistic processes, their implication for the speakers of GSP holds additional value for this paper. As mentioned in Section 2, one of the major features of Ghanaian Student Pidgin is variation in vocabulary and, though previous studies have mentioned that, none has ever said what that means for the speakers of the language. The major assertion of this study is that the free variation that exists in GSP serves as a marker of proficiency or authenticity for the speakers. In other words, speakers are aware that they have a variety of pronunciation choices available to them in any speech context and they make that choice (sub)consciously. However, based on the choices they make other speakers of GSP can tag them as proficient speakers of GSP or not so proficient speakers. From the focus group discussions, it emerged that proficiency is ascribed to speakers who use the less standard forms of the variant. What this means is that is someone who says **hos** instead of **haus** or **sɛf/saf** instead of **sɛlf** would be considered by other speakers as more proficient in Ghanaian Student Pidgin than someone who uses the standard Ghanaian English forms. This point is made very strongly in the following excerpt from one of the focus group discussions<sup>34</sup>:

*R: So there are things I have heard. When I was in secondary school, instead of saying like (..) we started saying stuff like “you mə”. Like “you mə do this”, “you mə do that”, right? From “you must”, sort of. Ok. And then I’ve also heard stuff like, now, instead of (..) **katf**, people are saying **ketf**.*

*Alf: yeah, **ketf**.*

*R: I don’t know if those are things (..) there are a lot of, erm, like ‘sɛlf’ “I no see am **sɛlf**” or something like that. There is **sɛf***

*Leo: **sɛf**. Yes.*

*R: there is **saf**. I don’t know if —*

*Leo: yeah*

*R: Aha. Ok, (..) so (..) let me put it this way, if someone says like **katf** and someone says **ketf** will you see one person as more proficient than the other?*

*Alf: Yes*

*Leo: sure*

*R: who will be more —*

*Alf: the one who says **ketf**.*

*Leo: **ketf**.*

It can be surmised from the excerpt above the speakers of GSP are aware of the variants in pronunciation that are available to them; but, even more importantly, are also aware of the implications of using a particular pronunciation. In other words, we can think of the pronunciation choices of speakers of GSP represented on a cline, with Ghanaian English at one end and GSP at the other:

<sup>34</sup> ‘R’ is the researcher; ‘Alf’ and ‘Leo’ are the participants. ‘(..)’ is used to indicate a pause and ‘...’ (elipses) are used to show elided speech. The relevant pronunciations are in bold italics.

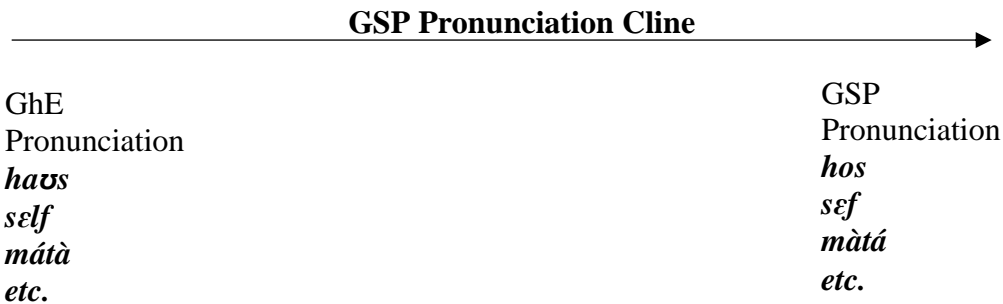


Figure 1: GSP Pronunciation Cline

Consequently, even though the pronunciation at Ghanaian English end of the scale is permitted in Ghanaian Student Pidgin, using that pronunciation while speaking signals to your interlocutor that you are a novice speaker.

This is interesting because one of the reasons that respondents gave for speaking GSP was that it is easy to use and to learn. Many also add that it has a smaller vocabulary than standard English and there are fewer rules. The extract below (taken from a conversation in which three speakers discuss their preference for GSP over GhE) illustrates the point being made:

*Mk: if you de speak say (..) as you say, say English, if you de speak English, you for de you know construct the words for some (..) yeah, but pidgin, if you de speak pidgin like no grammar dey inside. E de flow.*

*Leo: E de flow*

*Mk: like you de feel free. Like, like, like, the way righthee I de flow. If I de speak English righthee eh, I go de break small, wey I no de like say I go de break whiles I de speak.*

*Dk: ba e cool, e cool. That be why righthee, we the youth-no eh we say the English-no we no go speak am. E be the pidgin nor we de like.*

<sup>35</sup>*Mk: if you are speaking say (..) as you say, say English, if you are speaking English, you should know how to construct the words in some (..) yeah, but with pidgin, if you are speaking, it is like there's no grammar inside. It flows.*

*Leo: it flows*

*Mk: like you feel free. Like, like, like, the way right now, I am flowing. If I was speaking English right now, I would be pausing a little, and I don't like to pause while I am speaking.*

*Dk: but it's cool. That is why right now, we the youth we say that we won't speak the English. It is the pidgin we like.*

The sentiments expressed by the speakers above are also supported by the findings of Rupp, 2012 and point to the fact that students are more comfortable using GSP because they do not feel pressured to speak it *properly* or *correctly*. To buttress this point, almost all the students who were asked if a person can speak ungrammatical GSP, replied in the negative and insisted that everything was acceptable in the language. That sentiment seemed to extend to levels of proficiency in the sense that GSP seemed to be a *laissez-faire* language. However, once presented with the various pronunciation options, these same speakers recognized some choices as indicating higher proficiency. It appears, therefore, that despite what speakers may think they judge one another when

<sup>35</sup> Author's translation

they use the language. For example, the excerpt below is from an exchange that ensued during the focus group discussion after the participants had earlier disapproved of the researcher's word-choice in a pidgin sentence:

- R: can you be wrong in pidgin? Can you say something and someone will say no, no, that's not how it's said?*
- Leo: I've never heard anyone say that*
- Alf: no, all is accepted*
- R: but when I spoke the pidgin, you said no, no, you won't say that, you'll say it this way... but you wouldn't have said I had made a mistake?*
- Leo: no. I didn't get, what you said. I didn't get what you said that's why (..)*
- R: when I said "open the door give me" you were like "nah," both you and Alf, nah, we'll say 'gbele'. So that's what I was talking about. Why (..) how do you (..) but if I spoke that way, speakers like you will look at me and say "no, he's not really —"*
- Leo: he's not really good*
- R: eh-heh<sup>36</sup>. So it means that there are levels of proficiency?*
- Leo: levels of proficiency [nodding]*
- R: doesn't that mean that you can be wrong?*
- Leo: mmm, no*
- R: no? so you can't be wrong, but you can be less proficient?*
- Alf & Leo: yes*
- R: that's difficult to understand. You can't be so bad that in the end you're wrong?*
- Alf & Leo: no*
- R: no? ok (..)*
- Leo: all we'll say is that you don't really understand pidgin*
- R: you don't really understand pidgin but you're not wrong?*
- Leo: you're not wrong.*
- R: So pidgin is free? You can say what you want to say, but you can be criticized for saying something?*
- Leo: mmm, definitely.*

The exchange above reveals a contradiction between what the speakers of GSP say and what they actually do. This is because it is difficult to see how in one breath speakers can say that GSP is 'free-for-all' and in the same breath pass (negative) judgement on another speaker's competence (especially, on the basis of word choice and pronunciation). What this suggests is that, despite what speakers may think, they are subconsciously aware of the (sociolinguistic) rules of the language and the role phonological (and lexical<sup>37</sup>) variation plays. In other words, speakers resist what they consider as prescriptive grammatical rules which may be applied to GSP and, as a consequence, they overtly resist any 'dos and don'ts' that have a semblance of prescriptivism, while subconsciously (covertly) conforming to a set of (socio)linguistic preferences.

Another implication of this variation is that it tends to create a code that is easily identifiable for the speakers. This is to say that students see themselves as a unique community of speakers and it is their desire to create a code that defines them as members of this group. As earlier mentioned, previous studies (Forson, 1996; Dako 2002a, 2002b; Huber, 1999; Rupp, 2012) on the function of GSP have concluded that it serves as an in-group language. In fact, Rupp (2012) says:

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<sup>36</sup> yes

<sup>37</sup> Osei-Tutu (2008)

... the Ghanaian students would seem to form a community of practice that have employed the particular linguistic practice of Student Pidgin to project an identity for themselves. (20)

It is with this quote in mind that this paper argues that the speakers of GSP employ phonological processes to aid them in creating this identity. In other words, since the speakers of GSP want to be recognized as a unique group and they are using language to achieve this purpose, it follows that they would want to distinguish their language from other pre-existing forms that may be similar. This desire is expressed in the following quote from one of the participants<sup>38</sup> in the focus group in response to a question on their motivation for speaking the way they do:

*Me, I think the main reason why all this is going on is we, we want to make it so different, like modified, mmm, molded in a different way. If we take something, we want to try and make it something different. So we have, like even with, ermm, our African print, we, we, they used to, ermm, wear it but it got to a time when, ermm, depending on the European clothes and all that (...) and we've gone back for it (...) and we've now modified the way they were sewn. So even though we will take a word in English, but we will not make it sound English we will want to modify it or make it something that will suit the pidgin... If someone says mātà, and someone says mātá,... in the pidgin environment, mātá is more pleasing than mātà. If you say mātá it's like, it's more pleasing. It's more pleasant than just say mātà (...) mātà looks so boring (...) looks so dull.*

There are two interesting points in the excerpt above. The first is that the participant draws an analogy between how Ghanaians have given a modern slant to something traditional (i.e. sewing traditional fabric in a Western style) and students taking a language (Town Pidgin), which they consider 'old/traditional' and making it 'modern'. The second point of interest is that part of what constitutes the students' notion of 'modernity' is a certain *rhythm* to the pidgin and it is this rhythm the participant tries to explain when he talks about one pronunciation of *matter* being 'more pleasing' than another.

A corollary to the above point is that speakers of GSP want to distance themselves from Ghanaian English and Town Pidgin. With regard to Ghanaian English, we can see that in the majority of the words in free variation, a phonological process is applied to a Ghanaian English word to create a variant which holds more prestige in GSP. In other words, even though you can use any of these Ghanaian English words in GSP, you may never be considered a truly competent or proficient speaker until you use the non-standard English forms. What is even more interesting here is that some of the vowels in these non-standard variants actually have low prestige in Ghanaian English. For example, as can be seen in the Table 2 (from Huber, 2004) RP /ʌ/ is realized as /a/, /ɔ/ or /ɛ/ in Ghanaian English. However, he notes that /a/ is the form used more by highly educated Ghanaians as it is the nearest to the RP /ʌ/. However, in GSP the variants with /ɔ/ as in *crush* and /ɛ/ as in *rush* are the ones that are indicators of high proficiency. However, the relationship between Town Pidgin and GSP is slightly different in the sense that, in addition to adopting a radically different pronunciation, students sometimes also drop a word which has lost its uniqueness in order to make themselves distinct from Town Pidgin. For example, the use of *saf* for *self* is fairly recent and seems to have been adopted because *sef* was no longer only associated with GSP<sup>39</sup>. Additionally, in many cases, the speakers of Town Pidgin approximate the pronunciation of GhE (and, as already mentioned GSP distances itself from that).

<sup>38</sup> Alf

<sup>39</sup> This is only a preliminary observation and needs more research to confirm. Another pronunciation that possibly developed this way is /mɔk/ for *make*. Both GhE and Town Pidgin will have the pronunciation /mek/.

## 6.0 Summary and Conclusion

The observations made in the discussion so far tie in with the point that was made earlier about Osei-Tutu's (2008) findings on synonyms in GSP and their implications on the sociolinguistics of the language – i.e, where a GSP variant exists, the English language word is always the marker of low proficiency. These observations (Osei-Tutu, 2008 and the findings of this paper) taken together suggest that the process is an established one which serves to make GSP more different from the other (English) language varieties in the Ghanaian linguistic context and more difficult to understand by the outsider. Also, the fact that, in many cases the speakers of Town Pidgin would use the variant which is closer to the standard further shows that while speakers of Town Pidgin may speak it because they **cannot speak** standard English (but they want to), speakers of Ghanaian Student Pidgin speak GSP because they **do not want to speak** standard English. It seems justifiable, therefore, to conclude that that the linguistic processes occurring in Ghanaian Student Pidgin have a strong link to the sociolinguistic practices of the speakers. In effect, one can say that the phonological processes that lead to free variation in the pidgin are driven by sociolinguistic motivations such as youth, identity and divergence. Also, combining these findings with other earlier findings on lexical semantics in GSP (Osei-Tutu, 2008, Osei-Tutu & Corum, 2014) suggest a deliberate (even if unconscious) desire on the part of the speakers to create an identity that makes them unique. This is reinforced by Androutsopoulos *et al* (2003), who, in reference to the use of language to construct youth identities, assert that '... language use is often interpreted... as a symbolic assertion of autonomy and as an index of affiliation... or distance.'

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