Notes on Pronunciation Problems of Bakgalagari and Bakalanga Speakers of English in Botswana

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Abstract

When Botswana became a British Protectorate in 1985, the territory that is now Botswana, with its diverse ethnic languages came under the influence of English which would later become a school language. English was used as a medium of instruction for children who had no knowledge of the language. There was not even a sizeable English-speaking community who could provide a good example of English pronunciation. English was learnt from people who were themselves hardly literate in it. The effect and consequence of this was that bad pronunciation habits were entrenched, and have, unfortunately, persisted. If Setswana speakers were fortunate that Setswana was later used in the classroom, nothing helped the speakers of languages such as Shekgalagari and iKalanga. Their poor pronunciation of English is for the most part traceable to their mother tongue. This article presents a preliminary discussion on these pronunciation challenges. The discussion seeks also to contribute to debates on challenges of learning English as a foreign language. The realisation of these phonetic struggles may also contribute to better teaching strategies for English in Botswana.

Keywords:Shekgalagari; iKalanga; English; pronunciation; phonetics;vowels; consonants

Introduction

Botswana became a British protectorate in 1885. The understanding at the time was that a protectorate did not constitute a settler territory. So very few British people settled in the Bechuanaland Protectorate; only Administrators under the High Commissioner and few mercantile adventurers stayed in the territory. The capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was in Mafikeng, a town in South Africa.

Education was essentially under the missionary societies, and chief among them was the London Missionary Society which was based in Kudumane (Kuruman) in South Africa. The London Missionary Church run by British Protectant Missionaries was instrumental in convincing the British Government to seek protection over Bechuanaland. Because the missionaries were English speaking, and the protecting power was Britain, English was adopted as the official language of the Protectorate Administration. Missionary schools taught Setswana to would-be preachers for use among the masses and English for ease of communication with white missionaries. At the time that a protectorate was declared over Bechuanaland, the Bible was already translated into Setswana and missionary work had expanded and spread over territories of people who spoke different variants of Setswana, from the Orange River to the Zambezi River.

Public education was officially established by the Protectorate Government in 1910 as the growth of towns such as Francistown, Lobatse, Serowe, Mochudi, and Molepolole could not be catered for by the efforts of missionary education alone. English became the language of education after four years of literacy in Setswana. In public schools, trainees were no longer just pastors but administration officers in Government who needed to serve both the English administrators and their communities. So, the importance of English and Setswana were emphasized in education, and this

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continued until independence in 1966.

The development of language policy on Setswana was done by the Union of South Africa African Languages Conference of 1910 which sought to harmonize orthographies of Sotho and Tswana languages, and for the first time, linguists were involved in the debates (Chebanne and Mathangwane 2010). Prior to that 'natives' (Plaatje (1996), quoted in Volz (2003)) and missionaries were the champions of Setswana and other related languages of (Sesotho) Northern Sotho (Volz 2003).

Language Policy or Language Use Practice and Issues of Nation Building

In the submission by Janson and Tsonope (1991) there is no single enunciated Act or law that could be construed to constitute a language policy for Botswana. Consequently, there is no documented endeavor by the past and present Administrations to even present any direct policy on language use within the territory (Janson and Tsonope 1991). The extensive administrative activities that needed Setswana and English interpretation and translation eventually assumed a bilingual language use practice for Botswana (Datta and Murray 1989).Over the course of time, the use of English and Setswana became the norm in educational and administrative domains. That is how the mere mention of being fluent in English and Setswana as qualification for a member of parliament at independence was construed as arising from a language policy (Janson and Tsonope 1991).

Historical practice, therefore, is that a British colony or protectorate used English as a language of record and administration (Bagwasi 2016). What is remarkable for Botswana however is that there are vague allusions in the Constitution as reference for practice in regard to language use in the country, an example being the qualification of the Members of Parliament as mentioned above. Language use practices rather than reference to specific stipulations of the Law (Janson and Tsonope 1991; Nyati-Ramahobo 1999) were taken as policy. To date, the ethno-linguistic, quasi homogeneity around Setswana and the colonial history seems to be considered sufficient to guide language policy issues (Chebanne *et al*. 1997).

Another contributing factor in the determination of language policy was the need to build homogenous nations (Batibo 2015a and Batibo 2015b). At independence nationalism and nation indivisibility were used as rallying points for a nation-building project. English and Setswana were chosen as languages of nation-building (Batibo 2015a and Batibo 2015b). At independence most African states were guided by the efficiency of monolingualism in running state machinery: army, policy, education, public administration (Batibo 2006) and they did not seriously make consideration for language planning. This also explains how to date Botswana only identifies English and Setswana as languages that are recognized for administrative and educational processes (Tsonope 1995; Janson and Tsonope 1991; Nyati-Ramahobo 1999).

Linguistic pluralism in Botswana

Botswana is a multilingual and multicultural country with over 28 different groups of people resident within its borders. Chebanne (2022) avers that languages in the country may be distributed across five broad groups namely*Sotho-Tswana* which consists of Setswana, Shekgalagari, Chebirwa, Silozi, and Chetswapong, *Shona-Nyai* which comprises iKalanga, Nambya, isiNdebele, and Shona, *Herero-Kavango* which includes Otjiherero, Shiyeyi, Kwangale, Chiikuhane (Sesubiya), Thimbukushu, and Rumanyo, *San* which comprises !Xóõ, Ju|ʼhaonsi, ǂHua, and Sasi and finally *Khoe* which includes Gǁana, Gǀui, Naro, Shua, Danisana, Cua, Goro, Tshwa, Cire-cire, Ts'ixa, Khwedam (Aǁnikhwe, Bugakhwe, |Anda and Khwe), and some already extinct languages (Deti, Haise, Cara, and Caite)

(see also Andersson and Janson 1997; Smeija 2003). In exploring pronunciation problems of some speakers of English in Botswana, this study seeks to make a comparative and contrastive analysis between the sound system of English and that of Shekgalagari and iKalanga. The goal is to make preliminary predictions about problematic areas for the native speakers of these two languages in pronouncing some English sounds.

Phonemic inventories

English vowels
English has 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. The word monophthong is derived from the Greek prefix *mono* which means 'one' and the suffix or ending *-phthong* which means 'tone' or 'sound. A monophthong is therefore a vowel with a single tone quality. This is why monophthongs are sometimes called pure vowels. Monophthongs are transcribed with just one International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol. English monophthongs are divided into 6 short vowels, namely: /ɪ, ʊ, e, ɒ, ʌ æ / and 5 long vowels being /i:, u:, ɜ:, ɔ:,ɑ:/.The schwa /ə/ is also found in English but is not phonemic. The distribution of English vowel phonemes and the schwa in the Cardinal Vowel System (CVS) is plotted on Figure 1.

Figure 1: English Monophthongs

Source: https://www.englishpronunciationmadrid.com/vowels/vowels/
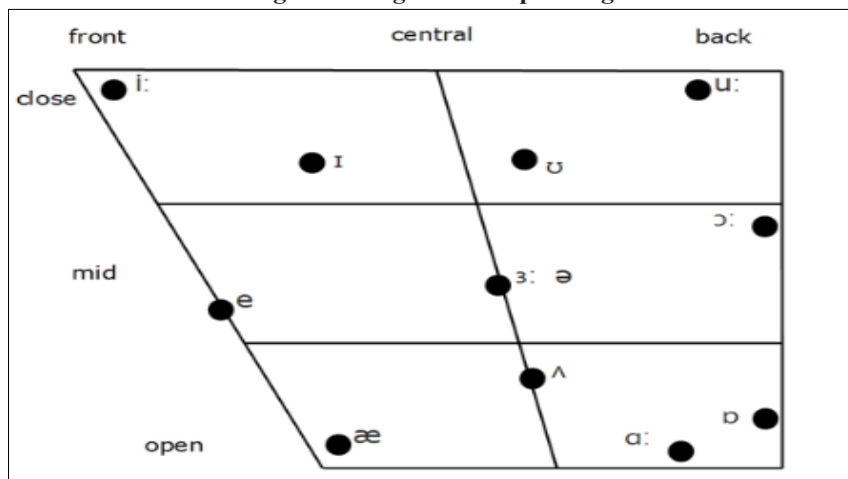
English monophthongs are distinguished on the basis of vowel quality, length and lip configuration. Vowel quality "is defined vertically by the degree of opening of the mouth and horizontally by the position of the tongue at the front or back of the oral cavity …[it] is about how much you open your mouth and how far back or forward you put your tongue" (Brunori nd). These vertical and horizontal attributes of vowels are typically presented in a vowel quadrilateral as can be seen in Figure 1. A vowel quadrilateral is a graphic depiction of the mouth, with horizontal lines mapping varied heights to which the tongue is raised to produce different vowels and the vertical lines representing the part of the tongue that is raised/involved in the production of the vowels. Distinctions between vowel sounds can *largely* be attributed to vowel quality.

Variation between English monophthongs can further be attributed to length. As mentioned earlier, there are 6 short vowels: /ɪ, ʊ, e, ɒ, ʌ, æ / and 5 long vowels /i:, u:, ɜ:, ɔ:, ɑ:/. Lip configuration is a third factor that differentiates between vowels in English. The lips can be round, neutral, or spread (unround). The general principle is that back vowels, especially close/high back vowels like

/u:/ and /ɔ:/ tend to be round, and front vowels like /ɪ, e, i:/tend to be articulated with spread or unround lips.As mentioned earlier, English also has the schwa vowel, which is not phonemic; full vowels in English may be reduced to a schwa in certain phonological environments.

Diphthongs are vowels sounds that involve a glide from one vowel sound/quality to another. Unlike pure vowels, diphthongs have two different sound qualities. There are eight diphthongs in English, namely: /aɪ, eɪ, əʊ, aʊ, eə, ɪə, ɔɪ, ʊə/. The diphthongs are further divided into closing diphthongs and centring diphthongs. Closing diphthongs glide towards either /ɪ/ or /ʊ/, and centring diphthongs glide towards the /ə/. Closing diphthongs are /aɪ, eɪ, ɔɪ/ and /əʊ, aʊ/ and centring diphthongs are /eə, ɪə, ʊə/.

Shekgalagari vowels

Shekgalagari has seven monophthongs; these are /i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u/. Unlike English, this language does not have long monophthongs and diphthongs. As is the case with Bantu languages, perceived vowel length in Shekgalagari occurs in the penultimate syllable position of a word when it is pronounced in isolation or when it occurs at the end of the sentence. Shekgalagari vowels are distinguished along two dimensions: vowel quality and lip configuration. The distribution of the seven pure vowels for Shekgalagari in the CVS is plotted on Figure2.

Figure 2: Shekgalagari Vowels
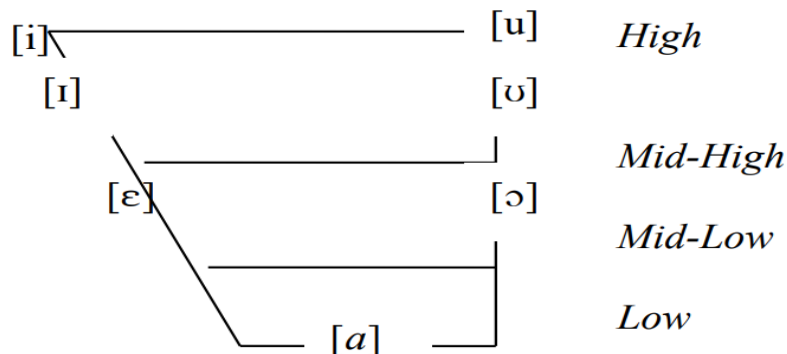
Source: Lukusa and Monaka (2008)

Consider the minimal pairs in Table 1 for Shekgalagari vowel phonemes.

Table 1: Minimal Pairs for Shekgalagari Vowels

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/mìná/	blow the nose	/mùná/	strain a seed through the teeth
/lɛ́mà/	pamper	/lómà/	bite
/sálà/	remain behind	/sólà/	make fruitful use of
/bɔ̀pá/	roar	/bìpá/	cover

The minimal pairs in Table 1 reveal that the /i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u/ vowel sounds are phonemic in Shekgalagari. Contrast in the words can only be attributed to the vowels since the word are identical everywhere else, including tone contours, and vary only with regards to vowels in the first syllable. Shekgalagari does not have non-phonemic vowels.

iKalanga vowels

iKalanga has 5 monophthongs; these are /i, e, a, o, u/. These vowels are distinguished along vowel quality and the shape of the lips. Just like Shekgalagari, iKalanga does not have long monophthongs and diphthongs.The distribution of the seven pure vowels for iKalanga is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: iKalanga vowels

	Front		**Back**
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Source: Mathangwane (1999)

Chebanne and Schmidt (2010) further recognize /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ vowel sounds in the speech of Bakalanga people, noting that they are phonemically "not pertinent."

Consider the minimal pairs in Table 3 for iKalanga vowel phonemes.

Table 3: Minimal Pairs for iKalanga Vowels

Word	**Gloss**	**Word**	**Gloss**
/sòlà/	despise	/sùlà/	fart
/bìlà/	boil	/bàlà/	read
/pélà/	finish	/pólà/	cool

English Vowels Versus Shekgalagari and iKalanga Vowels

It is evident from the vowel inventories presented above that English has far more vowels than the two Bantu languages, and that this is more likely and does lead to pronunciation difficulties when native Shekgalagari and iKalanga speakers pronounce some English words. Phonetic and numeric variation between the vowels in English and those in the two Bantu languages mean there will be peculiar pronunciation of English vowels by native speakers of the two Bantu languages that will be traceable to the native language. Table 4 and Table 5 show that the tendency is to collapse a number of English vowels into the vowels that exist in these languages. In the process other dimensions that distinguish between English pure vowels such as length and vowel quality are lost. The tense-lax distinction between the English pure vowels is also lost in the collapsing process.

Table 4: Reduction of English vowels to one Shekgalagari vowel

	English		Shekgalagari
1	**/e, æ, ɜ: /**		**/ɛ/**
(a)	dress	/dres/	/drɛs/
(b)	trap	/træp/	/stɛ/
(c)	stir	/stɜ:/	/trɛp/
2	**/ʌ, ɑ:/**		**/a/**
(a)	bud	/bʌd/	/bad/
(b)	start	/stɑ:t/	/stat/
3	**/ɔ:, ɒ/**		**/ɔ/**
(a)	war	/wɔ:/	/wɔ/
(b)	hot	/hɒt/	/hɔt/
4	**/i:, ɪ /**		**/i/**
(a)	keen	/ki:n/	/kin/
(b)	kin	/kɪn/	/kin/
5	**/ u:, ʊ/**		**/u/**
(a)	too	/tu:/	/tu/
(b)	book	/bʊk/	/buk/

It will be noted in Table 5 for iKalanga that non-phonemic /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ vowel sounds are also used in the articulation in the articulation of some English vowels sounds.

Table 5: Reduction of English vowels to one iKalanga vowel

	English vowels		**iKalanga vowel**
1	**/e, æ, ɜ: /**		**/e/**
(a)	dress	/dres/	/drɛs/
(b)	trap	/træp/	/stɛ/
(c)	stir	/stɜ:/	/trɛp/
2	**/ʌ, ɑ:/**		**/a/**
(a)	bud	/bʌd/	/bad/
(b)	start	/stɑ:t/	/stat/
3	**/ɔ:, ɒ/**		**/ɔ/**
(a)	war	/wɔ:/	/wɔ/
(b)	hot	/hɒt/	/hɔt/ or even /hot/
4	**/ i:, ɪ /**		**/i/**
(a)	keen	/ki:n/	/kin/
(b)	kin	/kɪn/	/kin/
5	**/u:, ʊ/**		**/u/**
(a)	too	/tu:/	/tu/
(b)	book	/bʊk/	/buk/

Unlike in English where the schwa is a reduced vowel under certain phonological processes or is produced as a weak form of a vowel, Bakgalagari and Bakalanga speakers pronounce the schwa sound /ə/ as a full strong vowel. Consider the illustration in Table 6.

Table 6: Pronunciation of the /ə/ as a full vowel

English		Bakgalagari	Bakalanga
about	/əbaʊt/	/**a**baʊt/	/**a**baut/
common	/kɒmən/	/kamɔn/	/kamɔn/
canal	/kənal/	/k**a**nal/	/k**a**nal/

Problems in the Articulation of Some English Diphthongs

Observed areas of problems in the pronunciation of English diphthongs by Bakgalagari and Bakalanga speakers have to do with the replacement of some vowels sounds with the ones in the native language, including non-phonemic vowels found in iKalanga. Thus, the diphthongs would thus be rendered as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Bakgalagari and Bakalanga rendering of English Diphthongs

English			Bakgalagari rendering		Bakalanga rendering	
aɪ	ice	/aɪs/	ae	/aes/ or /ajes/	ae	/aes/ or /ajes/
eɪ	pale	/peɪp/	ei	/peil/	ei	/peil/
əʊ	home	/həʊm/	ou	/houm/	ou	/houm/
aʊ	house	/haʊs/	ao	/haos/ or /hawos/	ao	/haos/ or / hawos
eə	air	/eə/	ee	/εε/	ee	/εε/
ɪə	ear	/ɪə/	ije	/ijε/	ije	/ijε/
ɔɪ	boy	/bɔɪ/	ɔe or ɔje	/bɔe/ or/bɔje/	ɔe	/bɔe/ or/bɔje/
ʊə	tour	/tʊə/	ɔɔ	/tɔɔ/	ɔɔ	/tɔɔ/

It can be observed from Table 7 that, in some cases, Bantu speakers insert a glide between the vocalic elements.

There is a probability that Bakgalagari and Bakalanga speakers of English treat English diphthongs are a sequence of two vowels rather than diphthongs. This probability stems from the fact that a sequence of vowels does occur in Bantu. However, unlike in English, in such instances the second vowel in Bantu always constitutes an independent syllable.

Another observation is that in some instances some English diphthongs are collapsed into one Bantu vowel. Examples include words like *Mary*/meərɪ/ and *serious*/sɪərɪəs/ which are rendered as /meri/ and /sirias/ respectively by both the Bakgalagari and Bakalanga.

Problems with some Consonants for Bakgalagari and Bakalanga Speakers of English

Consonants do not appear to present as many pronunciation problems as vowels. Some noted problematic areas include the occasional pronunciation of the voiced (inter)dental fricative /ð/ as a voiced alveolar plosive/d/, so that sometimes words like *they* /ðeɪ/, *that*/ ðæt /, and *then* /ðæn/are rendered as /deɪ/, /dat /, and /dan/. Furthermore, the /kl/ consonant cluster found in words such as *clay* /kleɪ/, *clap* /klæp/, and class /klæs/, is usually rendered as the lateral affricate /tl/:/kleɪ/,

/klap/, and /klas/. It is also common to produce the English post-alveolar approximant /r/, whose production in the Received Pronunciation (RP) of English involves as approximation of articulators, as a trill, with the front part of the tongue making repetitive contact against the alveolar ridge.

Palatalization also provides rather interesting observations which can albeit be just idiosyncratic. Consonants followed by the English high back vowel /u/ are more perturbing in the phonetic system of the speakers of these two languages. Plosives followed by /u/ can be palatalized in the speech of some speakers. Consider the examples in Table 8 which illustrate this point.

Table 8: Palatalization of plosives by Bakgalagari and Bakalanga

English		Bakgalagari	Bakalanga
particular	[pətɪ**kʲjʊ**lə]	/patit**ʃ**ula/	/patit**ʃ**ula/
calculate	[kælk**ʲjʊ**leɪt]	/kalt**ʃ**uleɪt/	/kalt**ʃ**uleɪt/
tutor	[t**ʲju**:tə]	/**tʃ**uta/	/**tʃ**uta/
regular	[reg**ʲjʊ**lə]	/re**ʒ**ula/ or /re**dʒ**ula/	/re**ʒ**ula/ or /re**dʒ**ula/

Furthermore, there are instances where *some* speakers idiosyncratically render the post-alveolar affricate /dʒ/ as a voiced velar plosive /g/. Examples include words like *suggest* /sə**dʒ**est/ >/ sa**g**est/, *gesture*, /**dʒ**estʃə/ > /**g**estʃa /and *digest* /daɪ**dʒ**est/ > /daɪ**g**est/.

The Devoicing of the English Plural Morpheme and the Third Person Singular Present Tense Form of the Verb

The English plural morpheme always assimilates to the voicing structure of the sound that comes before it. The morpheme has three allomorphs as follows /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/. [-s] is the voiceless allomorph assimilating to the voicelessness of the preceding sound. [-z] is the voiced allomorph assimilating to the voiced nature of the preceding sound. For the [-ɪz] allomorph, the /ɪ/ vowel is epenthesized to break up a sequence of consonants that is difficult to pronounce, and the morpheme is then realized as [-z], assimilating to the voiced nature of the preceding /ɪ/ vowel. /-ɪz/ occurs only when the based word ends with a sibilant/strident (ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, s, z). However, for Bakgalagari and Bakalanga speakers, while the voiceless allomorph remains unchanged, the /-z/ and /-ɪz/ allomorphs are realized as voiceless, /-s/ and /-ɪs/ respectively. Consider the examples in Table 9.

Table 9: The realization of the plural morpheme

English		Bakgalagari	Bakalanga
pets	/pets/	/pets/	/pets/
puffs	/pʌfs/	/pafs/	/pafs/
buns	/bʌnz/	/bans/	/bans/
seas	/si:z/	/siis/	/siis/
lashes	/læʃɪz/	/laʃis/	/laʃis/
badges	/bædʒɪz/	/badʒis/	/badʒis/

Similarly, the English third person singular present tense form of the verb morpheme always assimilates to the voicing structure of the sound that come before it. The morpheme also has three allomorphs as follows /-s/, /-z/ and /-ɪz/. Consider the illustration in Table 10.

Table 10: The realization of the third person singular present tense morpheme

English		Bakgalagari	Bakalanga
talks	/tɒks/	/tɔks/	/toks/
laughs	/lɑːfs/	/lafs/	/lafs/
sees	/siːz/	/siis/	/siis/
calls	/kɒlz/	/kɔls/	/kols/
kisses	/kɪsɪs/	/kisis/	/kisis/
teaches	/tiːtʃɪz/	/titʃɪz/	/titʃis/

In *some* cases where the base word ends in a voiced alveolar fricative /z/, that fricative is also realised as voiceless /s/ for the /-ɪz/ allomorph. This applies for the plural morpheme and the third person singular form of the verb morpheme. Consider the illustration in Table 11.

Table 11: Voiceless realization of the final alveolar fricative of the base word

English		Bakgalagari	Bakalanga
Plural			
noses	/noʊzɪz/	/nousis/	/nousis/
roses	/roʊzɪz/	/rousis/	/rousis/
quizzes	/kwɪzɪz/	/kwizis/	/kwizis/
Third person			
looses	/luːzɪz/	/lusis/	/lusis/
houses	/haʊzɪz/	/haʊsis/	/haosis/
freezes	/friːzɪz/	/friːzis/	/friːzis/
sneeze	/sniːzɪz/	/snizis/	/snizis/

Other Issues with Regard to Voicing

Bakgalagari and Bakalanga also produce some English sounds that are otherwise voiceless in context as voiced. Examples include the 'c' letter in the word De<u>c</u>ember /dɪsembə/ and the 's' letter in *simba* /sɪmbə/ as in *simba chips*. These are rendered as /dizemba/ and /zimba/ respectively.

Conclusion

This paper has made a quick observation that provides a pointer to some peculiar pronunciation of English by Shekgalagari and iKalanga speakers of English. The research cannot be conclusive, however, but sufficiently demonstrates the peculiar pronunciation of English by some indigenous groups of people in Botswana. Data presented here could be used as a springboard for more detailed analysis of errors of or peculiar pronunciation by these and other L_2 speakers of English in Botswana.

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