



*International Journal of Humanity Studies*  
<http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/IJHS>  
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## **KINGYAW'S RECITING POEM ON AFRO-AMERICAN ACCENT: THE WORLD-ENGLISHES MOVEMENT**

**Nurvita Wijayanti and Panggio Restu Wilujeng**

Universitas Bangka Belitung

correspondence: wijayavita88@gmail.com

**DOI:** 10.24071/ijhs.v5i1.3729

received 9 September 2021; accepted 29 September 2021

### **Abstract**

Fanon in his book titled 'Black Skin, White Masks' says that no matter how smart black people may become, white people will always feel the sense of 'inferiority' in which black people speak Pidgin. The sense of imitation of imitating makes the colonizer culture, in which the black people come across inferior from the white's perspective. KingYaw's YouTube video tries to break such a false perception. In his video, he talks the way black people have their unique accent It cannot be compared to the Received Pronunciation (BrE). Therefore, this study aims to unravel the linguistic theory on language variation as a part of the World-Englishes movement. This study uses descriptive qualitative method by having one of KingYaw's video performing and reciting a poem titled "Accent" that was uploaded in YouTube on December 17th, 2018. Post-colonialism allows the people to see the world without discrimination.

**Keywords:** World-Englishes Movement, Fanon, Post-colonialism, Accent, Postmodernism

### **Introduction**

Postmodernism in the Third World is part of the thought that developed countries are the standard of knowledge (Peter: 2018). It follows the emergence of capitalism and democracy that human should be equal though it turns out that it is part of the domination or the so-called containment (Fanon: 1970). what especially as developed countries in America and Europe become the center of universe, hence making the third world countries peripheral. Theory of postmodernism enunciates that the truth is relative and there is no absolute truth.

Africa as a part of the Third World has been struggled in Frantz Fanon's writings talking about the imperialism and western center. It is a witness that many of his ancestors, Africans, have an identity crisis as the result of colonialism (David: 2000). Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* says that no matter how smart black people may become, white people will always feel the sense of 'inferiority' in which black people speak Pidgin. The sense of imitation of the colonizer culture make the black people inferior from the white's perspective. It is supported by Chandra saying that colonization shapes one culture into a blended culture and the people in it (Chandra: 2019).

The inferiority nowadays has been struggled through the World-Englishes movement. It contains the movement from non-English Speaking Countries. Africa as the former colonized country. Some start to refuse the standard of the Received Pronunciation or British English standard when they speak. The consequences have the huge impact as this movement support anti-discrimination in speaking English. The term World-Englishes has been introduced by Nelson and Kachru stating that the inner circle is from British and America as the standardized accent while the outer circle is from the countries which have been trained to use English to form a new context (Sa'd: 2018). Furthermore, it involves the process of making English native for every country. The outer circle makes a progress by having its own native version of English.

World Englishes introduces three circles namely The Inner Circle, The Outer Circle, and The Expanding Circle. The Inner circle includes such countries as the USA, The United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Meanwhile, outer circle is the formerly colonized countries such as Singapore, India, and Malawi. Therefore, the expanding circle is Indonesia, China, Japan, and Greece (Sa'd: 2018). Africa is a part of the British colony (Europeans) mostly within a slave trade (Maier: 2020).

The YouTube video titled "Accent" shows a performance of reciting poem titled "Accent" by King Yaw, a Ghanaian, who strongly refuses the discrimination of English accent. He strongly disagrees with the concept of standardized accent, especially when African should sound like British or American English. In a video consisting of 3:07 minutes, he recites the poem showing his disappointment toward anybody who always rechecks the way he speaks. He performed it at the 2018 Texas Grand Slam Poetry Festival finals at Texas A&M University.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the contribution to linguistic aspect into the World-Englishes Movement reflected from the Poem titled *Accent* recited by King Yaw. The linguistic aspect can be varied based on the expression and the phrases brought by King Yaw in his YouTube video. Therefore the phonological, sociolinguistics, phonetic, and semantic aspects are included in this study. By having those linguistic aspects, the author wants to prove that the poem fights against accents discrimination. It propose the World-Englishes Movement.

This study brings the topic on the World-Englishes Movement as a part of the postmodern era where the truth is not absolute anymore. Thus, the ugly truth about standardized knowledge brought by the European or the Americans is no longer acknowledged (Karim & Azlan: 2019) Therefore, the theory used in this research is the theory of postmodernism, the World-Englishes and linguistic theories such as phonetics, phonology, and semantics.

Phonetics is the study of sounds and its symbol (Wells: 2014). The standardized symbols are written in the International Phonetic Association (IPA), where it covers mostly British English and American English. Phonetics matters the proper pronunciation based on its stress pattern, raising and lowering intonation, diphthong vowel, triphthong vowel, fricative, affricate, nasal sound, voiced, and voiceless. Zhengwei Pei and Yanhong Xing in their research in 2016 concluded that the Chinese students still refer to phonetic rule rather than the language variation proposed by the World Englishes (Pei and Xing: 2016). Their findings show that the teacher is aware of the World Englishes thus teaching it to the Chinese students.

However, the teachers need to explain the phonetic standard used in both British English and American English.

Phonology tries to accept the variation of the English language as a part of the assimilation language spoken by non-speaking English countries. Phonological studies, therefore, include the aspect of language variation such as flapping sound, L-vocalization, upper-case letters for consonant (Gardiner & Deterding: 2020) different accents, phoneme variation, rhyming, rhythm, and tone. Malaysian English (ME) has become the World Englishes Movement that makes it a postcolonial variety. It is part of the richness in intonation, tone, and rhyming. Thus it proposes the variety of a dynamic and rich New English (Rahim: 2014).

Semantics supports the concepts of a connotative meaning. Lakoff & Johnson propose that metaphors is one of the concept of semantic knowledge that has one meaning to something else (Lakoff & Johnson: 1980). Metaphors can be found in a major lexical category such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives (Glanzberg: 2008). Thus the acquire of metaphor is the understanding of the meaning behind a word, phrase, or clause that has a metaphor (Ngongo & Benu: 2020).

Postmodernism conceptualizes Fanon's famous work on his view about post-colonialism. In this context, his view is reflected through the postcolonial canon (Shringarpure: 2015). Those standards no longer exist in the concept of Fanon's theory which accepts all standards of English Language accents and dialects. World-Englishes movement emerges as the result of this well-known theory.

Therefore, the World-Englishes support the concept of postmodernism as it accepts non-standardized English accents. It refuses the form of Received Pronunciation brought by the International Phonetic Association (IPA).

## **Method**

This research uses the descriptive qualitative approach using the object of a YouTube video titled "Accent", a poem recital performed by a Ghanaian named King Yaw. The video shows the full performance within a 3.07-minute duration. Thus, it requires comprehensive data collection and data analysis. In this research, the author observes the expression performed by the speaker through his intonation, his gesture, his raising tone, and rhyming when performing the poem recital. In addition, the researcher would like to find the main issue which is the World Englishes Movement in a postcolonial era. The author also considers several terms that are part of connotative meaning therefore they can be included as the main object of the research.

The data collection includes both the poem titled "Accent" and the suprasegmental features shown in King Yaw's performance such as its gesture, intonation, tone, and rhythm. The authors played the video on YouTube several times to get a different focus on each playing. At first, the authors identified the utterances recited in the poem. Secondly, the authors collected some terminologies that might have a relation with the World-Englishes Movement. The next step is the focus on a suprasegmental feature such as the way the speaker speaks to the audience, expresses the poem recital, makes the gesture he shows to the audience, and accentuates the pronunciation and accent that he has in the video.

The authors used descriptive qualitative research which means that it is importantly descriptive rather than interpretive (Sandelowski: 2010). Some theories identify the elements in linguistics that are related to the movement of World-

Englishes. It concludes that there is a relation between the linguistic aspects and the postmodernism theory.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The English language has evolved and changed in many countries which use it (Schneider: 2007). The poem recital video shows King Yaw's expression when performing the poem titled "Accents". He opens the recital in a raising tone requesting to repeat the question:

*Huh, what? Say that again,  
Um, can you say it slowly and enunciate?  
Hmm, one more time? Bro, just spell it.*



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

The poet uses the raising intonation to confront the people who underestimate his Ghanaian-English accent. He imitates someone who asks him to repeat his unclear articulation. At worst, that someone mocks him by telling:

*Dude, are you even speaking English?*



**Figure 2**

King Yaw's intonation indicates the use of suprasegmental features in phonology. He resounds like a native to be sarcastic. He imitates the native speakers to show that he can be native-like but he refuses to do. King Yaw expresses annoyance toward native speakers who underestimate his Ghanaian accent.

By the second stanza, he highlights the concept of the Ghanaian accent. The three lines poem shows that Ghanaian is part of Africa and it has English as the national language as well. History forces the African to speak Black English as a result of slavery. Yet, it contributes to the variation of English. World Englishes tries to conceptualized the Englishes as equal English with some different backgrounds that create what are so-called accents and dialects all around the world.

*So let me get this straight,  
My home-bred, homemade Ghanaian accent  
is too foreign for your ethnocentric taste?*



**Figure 4**

King Yaw uses ethnocentric which is defined as a part of having a strong feeling of cultural or ethnic bias (Oxford Dictionary: 2021). When English is seen as an ethnocentric taste, King Yaw conceptualizes it as too foreign. It occurs that Ghanaian English does not deserve a place in The Inner Circle. Therefore, King Yaw uses the raising intonation to show his anger and annoyance.

The use of sarcasm is seen in the third stanza by mentioning the famous African American actor and its famous line on the famous African American movie titled *Black Panther* in 2018.

*You've been imitating Forest Whitetaker,  
Talking about 'the King will now have the strength  
Of the Black Panther stripped away' but all of sudden,  
You can't navigate a conversation with me?*



**Figure 5**

Intonation discusses the duration to communicate the discourse meaning. Other than duration, it also represents the intensity and pitch. In other words, intonation is the combination of these three called as the acoustic parameter (Levis: 2012). The discourse tells about the statement cited from the famous movie titled *Black Panther* that is the rising of African American actors who become the main players in several Hollywood movies. It promotes the spirit of Afrofuturism that discovers Black adventures across the African diaspora (Strong & Chaplin: 2019). From the use of rising intonation in the clause *'the King will now have the strength; Of the Black Panther stripped away'*, it indicates the paradox between the audience of the movie and the reality in discriminating the accents. At one time, people think that the clause is encouraging; however, at the other hands they do not accept accents spoken by African-American.

Connotative words and sentences are used to support the making of the rising intonation. The clause *You can't navigate a conversation with me?* enunciates the expression of anger by raising the word *navigate* and *with me*. *Navigate* in the Oxford Dictionary is "to plan and direct the course of ship, plane, car etc., for example by using a map" (Oxford Dictionary: 2021). Meanwhile, the non-literal meaning shows that the word *navigate* is the ability to read the code or map shown by the African American speaker. On the contrary, the listeners cannot acquire that ability. Therefore, it is part of the sarcasm.

Instead of feeling down, King Yaw educates the native speakers. This is shown in the fifth stanza:

*If we're being real, I can't understand shit you say either!  
But I have learned, I have learned to code switch,  
For your convenience .  
This is how I survive,  
It is a tool meant to keep me safe in this country.*

The reciter uses the term ‘code-switching’. The speaker uses the second or foreign language to adjust to the non-native speaker. Code-switching occurs when the speaker should show empathy by switching the language that the listener speaks (Hoffman: 1991). Code-switching is conducted when the speaker would like to be accepted in society. The speaker who does code-switching also respects the hegemony mode that he/s he should follow the rules from his/her superior (Gijimah: 2019).

Double identity is part of the issue faced by the reciter. This is part of W.E.B Dubois's concept stating that this is part of the double consciousness. It happens when the individual has two thoughts, two souls, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body (Carnegie Council: 2021).

*I go back home occasionally,  
To stay connected to my roots,  
But my family does not seem to recognize me,  
I like to think it because I've been gone too long,  
But the truth is, I have toyed with my West African accent,  
So much that I have become invisible to my own people.*

The stanza states that the two identities do exist. The reciter is the part of these two races and languages, therefore accents are not mattered. This hybrid identity is challenging as the individual will not feel received by both sides. As a Ghanaian, the reciter feels that his accent is outrageous to hear. It sounds so America. On the other hand, he feels rejected by American society. The history of the American Negro develops in the concept of not making America ‘Africanized’ nor making Africa ‘Americanized’ (Carnegie Council: 2021). This statement was confirmed by Martin Luther King Jr that double consciousness will become a true hybrid. Meaning to say that the American negro is not American nor he/she is African (Carnegie Council: 2021). These two statements are the reality faced by the reciter as he cannot forget and erase the cultures and values to be a Ghanaian, nor he can mingle completely and be called an American.

Yet, the issue of racism is still in the upbringing. Discrimination is described as people matter the varied accents. It is a set of circumstances that holds ‘whiteness’ to be superior (Bheero: 2021). The reciter is a member of the outer circle, however, he is raised in America that makes him part of the native speaker. His bloodline is African therefore it was the problem of the twentieth century (Du Bois in Novita Dewi: 2021). The last four stanzas show the climax of the performance by bringing up the raising intonation, connotative meanings, and discourse at once.

*You think, you think, this sexy, saucy, juiced,  
Home-toned inflection can be distorted?  
My accent is the realest thing about me,  
It has more than survived,  
Been burned alive,  
Struggled its way through ice,  
Yet still migrated,  
Limped on every college side-walk,  
But still graduated,*

*Joined speech and debate.  
Traveled all over the country,  
Slayed every single tournament.*

*My accent falls in love in five different languages.  
Medofo pa beda me nkyen  
In tsui ba ni oba ka in mase  
Chalee beh yu makucam slee ma der  
Mon amour, viens dormir a cote de moi  
My love, come sleep next to me*

*My accent is an open map  
Full of endless possibilities,  
It is why, when you speak,  
I try my hardest to listen.  
To understand.  
To taste the salt in your accent.  
So why do you refuse to taste the sweetness in mine?*

The reciter says the phrase ‘this sexy, saucy, juiced, Home-toned inflection’ refers to the Ghanaian accent. He describes the accent as 'sexy' as according to the Oxford dictionary it means sexually attractive, exciting, and interesting (informal). In connotative meaning, the word accentuates the quality of language sound that is interesting. The other words say the same when he uses saucy to describe the Ghanaian accent. It means “rude or referring to sex in a way that is humorous but not offensive” (Oxford Dictionary: 2021). The connotative meaning shows that the reciter wants to compare a Ghanaian accent with an object that refers to human appearance as sexy, saucy, and juicy. Moreover, they refer to the language inflection that Ghanaians have while English does not have. That is the concept of the World-Englishes movement when everybody has a right to speak with their own accent brought since they were born. It is expected not to be adjusted and leave it sounds natural. The outer speakers including Ghanaian accent deal with this World-Englishes movement to be accepted in American society, moreover world society which speaks English.

Outer speakers use the concept of World-Englishes to be accepted in the world society of English speaking. According to Bhowmik, measuring the standard of English speaking is different from time and space. He says that spelling errors matter to Britain people, others are in the grammatical, lexical, and phonological systems (2015). meanwhile, Widdowson in Bhowmik accentuates that there are two elements of English variation. It is seen from its communal and communicative perspective. Spelling and accents are part of the communal system while the communicative goal is to share communication among its user (1994). In other words, The World Englishes points out the term communicative because it will not reduce the essence of the goal of communication. The spelling and accent can be different from standard English but the main message is delivered successfully.

This poem voices the World-Englishes in several attempts which are phonological suprasegmental features, semantics, and discourse analysis. The intonation shows how the reciter feels about the race issue used when he speaks his

Ghanaian accent. Semantics is shown in the use of connotative meaning, and discourse supports the connotative meaning in the wider context. This poem is generally the voice of the World-Englishes movement.

Said says that the world is already mixed that every race is migrated to other places. So there will be mixed races as well. It can be seen through the mobility of Africans who move into France and learn to be Francophonic. He also points out that to be utilitarian in this century is not significant anymore as there are critics who are English and who are not English (Said: 2001). Based on his explanation, this poem is part of the movement that the English users should be revised. It does not only belong to the inner circle but also is part of the outer circle.

### Conclusion

The video shows how the poem reciter uses mostly high tone and rising intonation. Or, even worse the speaker accentuates several terms by having mispronounced the terms. However, it actually is acceptable and understandable. The point delivered is to campaign the term The World-Englishes as the main aspect of communication that is accepted the divergence in accent and dialect of English language. Sarcasm is part of the output of the discourse. The poem reciter mostly uses raising intonation, metaphor, and connotative meaning. In the video, he uses raising intonation to mock the listeners that are mostly native speakers. He also uses the connotative meaning to compare with the others aspect of words so that the sarcasm can be delivered significantly. Metaphor is used to point out the meaning of connotative words.

### References

- Bheeroo, L., Mafethe, P., & Billing, L. (2021). *Racism, power, and truth: Experiences of people of colour in development*. Bond Society Building: London
- Bhowmik, S. K. (2015). World Englishes and English language teaching: A pragmatic and humanistic approach. *Colomb. Appl. Linguist. J.*, 17(1), 142-157.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The souls of black folk*. New York, Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books.
- Fanon, F. (1970). *Toward the African revolution*. London: Penguin Book.
- Carnegie Council. (2021). African American identity and double consciousness. <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/education/002/worksheets/ushistory/mlk/doubleconsciousness>
- Chandra, T. M. (2019). The reclaiming Cban cultural identity while living as a Cban diaspora in Aerica as depicted in Camilla Bacello "HAVANA". *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 3(1), 60-65.
- Gijimah, T. (2019). Code-switching as a means of struggling against the English hegemony at Midlands State University. *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8, 44-60.
- Hoffmann, C. (1991). *An Introduction to bilingualism*. London: Longman.
- Karim, M. H. B. A., & Azlan, A. A. (2019) Modernism and postmodernism in feminism: A conceptual study on the developments of its defination, waves and school of thought. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(1), 1-14
- Kyeremateng, Y. (2018). Accent. *Texas Grand Slam Poetry Festival*. Texas A&M University. <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=d9obCZ-Fhog&t=29s>

- Maier, D.J., Davies, Oliver, F., John, D., & Boateng, E. A. (2020, April 1). *Ghana*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ghana>
- Ngongo, M., Benu, N. (2020). Interpersonal and ideational metaphors in the writing of thesis texts of undergraduate students of English study program: A systemic functional linguistic approach. *Retorika: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 6(2), 113-120. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22225/jr.6.2.2320.113-120>
- Dewi, N. (2021). Countering xenophobia and racism through short stories for history students. *International Journal of Humanity Studies*, 1(1), 38-46. DOI: 10.24071/ijhs.v5i1.3697
- Oxford Dictionary. (2021, March 30<sup>th</sup>). *Definition of navigate*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/navigate>
- Peter, M. A. (2018). After postmodernism in educational theory? A collective writing experiment and thought survey. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1299-1307
- Pei, Z., & Yanhong, X. (2016). Perceptions of world Englishes accents in English phonetics instruction of China. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 5(4), 183-188. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.4p.183>
- Rahim, H. A., & Shakila, A. M. (2014). *English in Malaysia: Postcolonial and Beyond*. New York: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0351-0696-1>
- Tamimi Sa'd, S. H. (2018). World English and World Englishes: perspectives from English language learners in Iran. *Journal of World Languages*, 5(1), 23-45.
- Said, Edward. (2001). *Power, Politics, and Culture*. Bloomsbury: UK
- Sandelowski, M. (2010). What's in a name? Qualitative Description Revisited. *Res Nurs Health*, 33(1), 77-84.
- Schneider, E. (2007) *Postcolonial English. varieties around the world*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Shringarpure, B. (2015). The afterlife of Frantz Fanon and the reconstruction of postcolonial studies. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 23, 113-128. DOI 10.5195/jffp.2015.676
- Strong, M. T., & Chaplin, K. S. (2019) Afrofuturism and black panther. *American Sociological Association*, 18(2), 58-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504219854725>
- Wells, J. (2014). English phonetics: Theory and practice. In *Sounds Interesting: Observations on English and General Phonetics* (pp. 38-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139871327.003
- Widdowson, H. G. (1994). The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 377-389