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## EXPLORING SOME PARTICULAR CASES OF PRONUNCIATION IN CAMEROON NATIONAL LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF SCHWA IN ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN AWING

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### ABSTRACT

The mid central vowel, schwa [ə], is one of the most frequent vowels in English. The vowel appears uniquely in unstressed positions in English, a phenomenon that sets the language apart from most of its non-native varieties around the world. Most of these varieties exhibit a syllable-timed rhythm as opposed to English which is stressed-timed. Interestingly, it has been observed that Awing, a Bantu language in the North West Region of Cameroon, is replete with the sound although with a strikingly different phonological distribution. This paper examines English loanwords in Awing with focus on how the schwa is distributed in these words in order to give them an Awing flavour.

### 1. Introduction

A word from one language that has been adapted for use in another is called a loanword or a borrowed word. Borrowing arises in a context where two or more languages come into contact. When languages co-exist, or when they are in contact, the tendency is that words can be borrowed by both. This means that borrowing can go in both directions between the two or more languages in question. The words borrowed are referred to as borrowings or loanwords. The two words are used metaphorically because in actual fact there is no literal lending and borrowing process taking place between the languages concerned.

Hocket (1958) thinks that borrowing from one language into another is primarily motivated by what he calls the "need filling motive" although in some cases the receiving language is motivated by the way they see the source language. If they perceive it as possessing some positive characteristics that their own language lacks, they can be motivated to learn it. In some cases, the speakers of a language or the language itself can be so dynamic that they borrow from every language they come into contact with. A case in point is

English. English is such a dynamic language that it has borrowed extensively from the languages of whatever culture it came into contact with to make up its word-stock. This dynamism has led English to borrow more than half of its vocabulary stock from other languages in the world ranging from the most remote to the well-known. In this light, Crystal (1997) describes English as an "insatiable borrower" as about 120 languages serve as sources for the contemporary English vocabulary. Unlike in many continental European countries like France and Spain that have established academies that restrict new borrowings into their languages, there has never been a national academy in the native English-speaking countries to play such a policing role. However, English has, in the process of borrowing, also lent to many languages all over the world. This process has been all the more facilitated by the fact that English has spread its tentacles to almost all the nooks and crannies of the world assuming many statuses and functions. It is today seen as the leading world language or a world lingua franca through which millions and millions of people who speak mutually unintelligible languages communicate at different levels.



Borrowing is a very complex process. In most cases some speakers of the borrowing language have some knowledge of the source language. In this case bilinguals tend to pronounce the words the same or similar to the way the words are pronounced by speakers of the source language. Some French loanwords in English such as *garage*, *entourage*, *regime*, are pronounced the same as in French. It is assumed that the very first people who used these borrowings knew at least some French and actually heard the pronunciation from the French speakers themselves. In some cases, the borrowed words undergo some adjustments at varied levels of linguistic analysis in order to fit into the system of the recipient language. The level that is most likely to be affected in this situation is pronunciation of the borrowed words. In the French loanwords above, the orthography and meaning of the words remain intact but the pronunciation can easily be affected especially when non-native English speakers use the language. For example, Cameroon English speakers would produce the words *regime* and *entourage* [redʒim] for French [Reʒim] and [intoretʃ] for French [ãntuRaʒ]. Thus, the recipient communities use the habits of their Language one (L1) to produce the loans. This is the same scenario we will see with borrowing from English into Awing.

This option is the more likely one because people in the receiving language in most cases are not even proficient in the source language. That is why it is difficult to find loanwords in the recipient languages that maintain their original pronunciations. As time goes on, they continue to nativise the pronunciation to the point that even speakers of the lending community would not be able to identify the words as words borrowed from their language. This is what happens to most loanwords that come into Awing from English. Some of them are so assimilated that it would be very difficult to recognise their source. The most outstanding process that the Awing speakers use to indigenise or nativise the loanwords is through the use of the schwa. Our focus in this paper is limited to the way the Awing speaker uses this sound to give the English loanwords an Awing flavour. But before we engage this discussion, it is important to

look at the historical background of the contact of Awing with English.

## 2. Historical Background

As reported in Atechi (2006), the Portuguese were the first to visit the coast of Cameroon in about 1472, followed by the Dutch, the Germans and then the English. The interaction between the Europeans and the indigenous population was in an English-based Pidgin especially on the plantations that were established by the Germans in the coastal region of Cameroon. This is where the Awing people came into contact with English. Since these plantations needed mostly unskilled labour, the Awing people like any other Cameroonians streamed to the coast to earn their living. As they worked on the plantations, they needed to communicate not only with their European employers but also with their fellow Cameroonians who spoke mutually unintelligible languages. Linguists have described Cameroon's linguistic landscape as one of the most complex not only in Africa but in the world at large. The country is home to over 250 mutually unintelligible indigenous languages (see *Ethnologue*, 2009), a dominant English-based pidgin and two received languages, English and French which function as official languages. Even though English and French and to an extent Pidgin English were not part of the linguistic landscape at the time of the contact between Awing and English, the numerous indigenous languages were there and posed a huge challenge to the workers on the plantation who came from different ethnic groups. Caught up in this tower of Babel, they needed some sort of a link language or better still, a lingua franca, and that is how some form of English with reduced forms was adopted to fill this need. Awing people like all other indigenous people from the hinterlands learned this language since it served an instrumental purpose, that of communication on the plantation. Most of the vocabulary items they learned were in the area of administration, names of new crops, fruits, household utensils, clothes and many other notions that were not common to the tropical setting at the time, especially the grassfields hinterlands from where the Awing people came. These Awing folks, who were mostly uneducated, learned these words

by means of oral transmission (Atechi 2006:233). When they got back to their community, they introduced the words into the Awing language as borrowings and the rest of the villagers learnt them the way they heard them pronounced by the returnees. They were held in high esteem when they arrived the village. They were from the coast where they worked for the white man who is a symbol of modernism. With this mentality, whatever the returnees introduced was seen as prestigious and worth identifying with. Thus, the villagers were so excited to learn these loanwords and use them to show that they were keeping pace with modernism or civilisation. This perception of those who came back from the coast as the elite, has not changed much today, anyway, as those who travel to the main cities as well as out of the country are held in very high esteem by those who do not have this opportunity. Within a very short time, these words were disseminated in the Awing community as the people struggled to adjust especially the pronunciation to fit into their L1 phonology. This is the reason why these English borrowings are today so assimilated or integrated into the Awing language that one tends even to think that these are originally Awing words and not borrowed from another language.

This exposure to the English loanwords was later reinforced by the establishment of formal education in Cameroon by the missions like the Basel Mission, the Baptist Mission and later the American Presbyterian Missions. This further exposed the indigenous population to more English and thus what we have today as loanwords in Awing are actually the outcome of these two phases of exposure.

As seen in the Awing example above, cases of linguistic change that are caused by inter-lingual influence are usually brought about by a group of speakers whose usage spreads throughout the whole speech community (Atechi 2006:234). In the case of Awing, labourers from the plantations returned with these new words and the Awing monolinguals then learnt them with all the difficulties and so reshaped the pronunciation of these words and sometimes their meanings and forms. In this paper we shall lay more emphasis on

those loanwords that have no direct equivalents in Awing but would also highlight the difference between the younger and the older generation of Awing speakers. The loanwords from the plantations and used by the older generation tend to be more integrated and more assimilated into the language than the borrowings that came in as a result of the introduction of formal education. Although our intention is to avoid projecting instances of code switching and code mixing as far as possible, we may be obliged to once in a while bring in words that have direct equivalents in Awing, mostly used by Awing-English bilinguals who have been exposed to so much English.

The older loans tend to be more phonologically assimilated in the way that those who are not used to the language would not recognise them as English borrowings into Awing. For example, English words like *station*, *parable*, *Ruth*, *Helen* are pronounced [atesɔŋə, wurətə, panəpə, alina]. Again, the primary focus of this paper is not to show how all English loanwords into Awing take on an Awing flavour, but to show that the central English vowel, schwa which is the most frequent vowel in Awing, plays an important role in transforming the borrowings from English into Awing or in giving the loans an Awing coloration. The most significant phonological role played by the schwa is to appear at the end of most nominal items, in this way, opening up all closed English syllables or rendering English closed syllables, open. This is a major characteristic of Awing lexical items especially nouns. This paper concentrates on nouns. But before we go ahead to do this, it is expedient to look at the Awing phonological system.

### 3. The Phonological system of Awing

The Awing language is spoken by over 45 000 people. Awing is classified as Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Benoue-Congo, Bantoid, Bantu, Grassfield, Ngemba, along Pinyin, Mankon, Nkwen and Bafut. The Awing phonetic inventory counts 31 sounds divided into 22 consonants and 9 vowels. The letters of this alphabet are read and called by their sounds. That is, the names given to them are the sounds they produce. This is a big contrast with what happens in English where there is hardly a one to one correspondence between the sound and the

letter. Given that the scope of this paper is limited to the manifestation of the schwa in English borrowings into Awing, I will delve straight into vowels and gradually narrow down to the mid central vowel, schwa and its manifestation only in English loanwords into Awing. The Awing vowel inventory exhibits some peculiar characteristics that set it apart from the other Grassfields Bantu languages. In this vein, Van den berg (2009) reports that 'while an underlying seven vowel system is common to grassfields Bantu languages, Awing has, like many western Grassfields languages, added additional central vowels [ɪ, ə]. Vowel length is also attested in Awing but it is restricted to the first syllable of the root and only with the vowels. Furthermore, although certain vowels in Awing are

• [ə] as in	[ndzə:mə]	dream	[ndzəmə]	back
• [o] as in	[no:lə]	snake	[nolə]	put together
• [a] as in	[akya:rə]	support	[akyarə]	a type of dance
• [e] as in	[ape:bə]	roasting stick	[apebə]	hunting ground
• [ɛ] as in	[əlɛ:rə]	bridge	[əlɛrə]	beard
• [ɔ] as in	[fwɔ:tə]	mumble	[fwɔʔtə]	hollow out
• [u] as in	[nəkwu:nə]	entrance	[nəkwunə]	a grain of rice

### 3.2 The schwa and vowel sequences in Awing

As Alomofor and Anderson (2005:6) and Van den Berg (2009:19) explain, there are three possible combinations of adjacent vowels in Awing, namely [iə, iə, uə]. Alomofor and Anderson (ibid) explain that of these three, [iə] and [uə] are more common and do not contrast with palatalisation and labialisation before the schwa. Unlike English, the only diphthongs in Awing are centring diphthongs, that is, with the schwa as their second element. As it is the case in most English diphthongs, Van den Berg (ibid) points out that the first element of each diphthong is distinctively longer than the second. This phenomenon is especially glaring in diphthongs in which the schwa is attested at glide position. The schwa is naturally a weak sound and in Awing the lengthening of the first element of the diphthong could be as a result of this weak nature of the schwa although the schwa is not always weak in Awing as it takes high tone in some environments.

### 3.3 Schwa and tone in Awing

There are four main tones in Awing: the high tone, the low tone, the rising tone, and the falling tone. Of all these tones only the low tone is

written the same as in English, they sometimes take tone in order to indicate the pitch of the voice used to pronounce the words. Although this paper is limited to English loanwords into Awing, it would be rewarding for us to briefly show how the schwa functions in this language before moving on to show how it functions in English loanwords into Awing.

### 3.1 Schwa and vowel length in Awing

The additional central vowels to the Awing phonetic inventory, [ɪ, ə] and the role they play in the language makes Awing unique among the Grassfields Bantu languages of this region. As Van den Berg reports, length quality is a noticeable feature of Awing vowels as exemplified in the following. Notice the dominance of the schwa especially at word final position.

unmarked. Tone is placed on vowels and sometimes on nasals in Awing. While in English, stress is so important that it determines meaning, word class, spelling etc, tone also determines meaning and in some cases word class in Awing. However, while in most tone languages all tones need to must be marked, in Awing, no diacritics are written on syllables with low tone (Alomofor and Anderson: 2005).

[kónǎ]	ditch	[ako:rə]	latrine
[kónǎ]	flow	[ako:rə]	leg
[koŋǎ]	owl	[aləmǎ]	pool
[koŋǎ]	yell at	[aləmǎ]	cloud
[tǎ]	father	[tǎ]	five
[pǎ]	plant or sow	[pǎ]	give birth

### 3.4 Schwa and plurality in Awing

The plural marker in the following words shows that schwa contributes immensely in marking plurality in Awing. Notice the first syllable of each word, playing the role of the plural morpheme and at word final position opening up what is supposed to be close syllables as we shall see in the English loanwords selected for this study.

[mǎ-neemǎ]	cows
[me-sɔŋǎ]	teeth

[mə-saŋə]	brooms	[ə'se'enə']	to break
[mə-kolə]	legs	[ə'fugə]	to remove
[mə-ndɔŋə]	ducks	[ə'sha:bə]	to comb

**3.5 The high vowel [ə'] in Awing**

One salient characteristic of verbs in Awing is that they make use of the high tone schwa, [ə']. When this sound appears at the beginning of a verb, it is always high. However, the schwa occurs only before verbs which begin with the letters *s*, *f*, and *sh* as in the following data:

<i>word initial</i>	<i>word medial</i>	<i>word final</i>
[ə'fo] (fon)	[məte:nə] (market)	[mo:nə] (child)
[ə'sa'ə] (quarrel)	[məkolə] (legs) [no:lə] (snake)	[tɔŋə] (town)
[ələlə] (bridge)	[atəɔŋə] (station)	[brətə] (bread)
[əse] (God)	[məte:nə] (strength)	[səmo:mə] (wickedness)
[nəpɔ:lə] (sky)	[samunə] (Simon)	

**3.7 Schwa in English loanwords in Awing**

In Awing the syllable structure is different from that in English. While English exhibits mostly closed syllable structure, Awing tends to exhibit an open syllable structure. Thus English loans into Awing need to undergo some phonological restructuring to fit into this dominantly open syllable system. Thus, Awing predominantly uses the schwa to resolve this phonotactic problem as seen in the examples below. Schwa is also attested in many other environments in the word, giving the loanwords a distinct Awing flavour.

**3.7.1 Schwa in the words from the plantation**

As mentioned earlier, the Awing returnees brought with them a sizeable number of English loanwords pertaining to their activities and the new notions they encountered on the plantations. The scope of this paper, however, will not discuss all the loanwords they brought back but just the loans that are affected by the schwa.

<i>taken word</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Awing</i>
German	[dʒɜ:mən]	[ndzəmanə]
headman	[hedmən]	[hedmanə]
punishment	[pʌnɪʃmənt]	[pɔnəsəmenə]
office	[ɒfɪs]	[ɔfɪsə]
table	[teɪbl]	[təpelə]
bell	[bel]	[belə]
clerk	[klɜ:k]	[kləkə]
contract	[kɒntrækt]	[kɔntrəkə]
nurse	[nɜ:s]	[nɔsə]
madame	[mædəm]	[madamə]
coast	[kəʊst]	[kosə]
labourer	[ləbərə]	[ləplə]

**3.7.2 Schwa and loanwords from western religion**

**3.6 Schwa and phonological context in Awing**

The schwa is found almost in every word in Awing and appears in all positions in the word, that is, at word initial, medial and final positions as seen in the data below:

The return of most of the Awing people from the coastal region of Cameroon coincided with missionary activities of the American Presbyterian church and the Catholic Church in the village. These missionaries especially the Presbyterians used Pidgin English alongside Mungaka, a local language spoken by the Balis in the North West Region of Cameroon. The use of an English-based Pidgin significantly increased the stock of the English loans in Awing. In most cases the missionaries used Pidgin English for evangelism because the population at the time was largely illiterate. The examples below show some of the loans they brought into the Awing language:

<i>Taken word</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Awing</i>
church	[tʃɜ:tʃ]	[tʃɔsə]
Basel	[beɪsl]	[baselə]
mission	[mɪʃən]	[mɪʃɔnə]
Catholic	[kæθə'lɪk]	[katɔlə]
Jesus	[dʒizəs]	[dʒɪsɔsə]
cross	[krɒs]	[krɔsə]
Baptist	[bæptɪst]	[baptɪsə]
mass	[mæs]	[masə]
Bible	[baɪbl]	[baɪbələ]
satan	[sætən]	[satənə]

**3.7.3 Schwa in Christian names**

With the coming of the Christian religion, many Awing people, both old and young were converted to Christianity, baptised and given Christian names. These names taken up by a largely uneducated people had to undergo some phonological adjustments to suit the Awing

phonological system. Thus, a good number of these names are pronounced with an Awing flavour, so much so that if you were to use that realisation to address someone whose ears are not attuned to this local flavour, they may not answer you because this means nothing to them. On the other hand, if you decide to pronounce the name of an Awing man with a native English flavour, say, Abel and Joan as [eɪbl] and [dʒəʊn] for [abelə] and [dʒoanə], they would think you are addressing someone else because what you say sounds strange to them. In the examples below we consider just the Christian names affected by the mid central vowel. One would notice that this dominant vowel either plays the role of opening up closed syllables in English words or appears in other positions in these words, thereby giving them a local Awing flavour. Let us consider the following examples:

Taken word	English	Awing
Agnes	[ægnɪs]	[agenəsə]
Abraham	[eɪbræhəm]	[abrahamə]
Job	[dʒəʊb]	[jɔbə]
John	[dʒɒn]	[dʒɔnə]
Abel	[eɪbl]	[abelə]
Paul	[pɔl]	[pələ]
Simon	[saɪmən]	[samunə]
Samuel	[səmjʊəl]	[samolə]
David	[deɪvɪd]	[devirə]
Joan	[dʒəʊn]	[dʒoanə]

### 3.7.4 Education

Apart from evangelism, the missions equally brought in a lot of loans through the educational system. As Atechi (2006) points out, the first school in Awing opened its doors in 1950 and not everybody had the privilege to attend because there was only one school at the time and it was seen by most villagers as an opportunity reserved for a particular class of people in society. Besides, cultural myths also militated against this positive development especially regarding the girl child. In fact things could have been different after the English took over from the Germans in 1919, but the economic quagmire in the 1930s made the situation worse as the colonial masters suffered from lack of funds to open more schools especially in the hinterlands. Britain then halted the construction of new subsidised schools, which eventually led to

stagnation in education in their colonies. The Basel Mission, one of the main providers of education, was also bankrupt. As a result, the loans were mostly learnt by means of oral transmission from those who managed to attend school. This explains why there are still a very large number of monolingual Awing speakers in the Awing community today. Most of the teachers who taught in these schools were not well educated. The children came back from school with a sizeable stock of English words, and as they tried to use them, these gradually disseminated and before long they were accepted by the society as part of the Awing lexicon (Atechi 2006:236). Again the English loanwords listed below comprise just those that are affected by the mid central vowel, schwa. For more on English borrowings into Awing, (see Atechi 2006)

Taken word	English	Awing
school	[skul]	[skolə]
headmaster	[hedmæstə]	[hedməsə]
blackboard	[blækbɔd]	[blakbɔrə]
examination	[ɪgzæmɪnɪʃən]	[adʒamɪʃənə]
pencil	[pensl]	[penselə]
pen	[pen]	[penə]
punishment	[pʌnɪʃmənt]	[pɔnəsəmenə]
band	[bænd]	[banə]
flag	[flæg]	[flagə]
chalk	[tʃɔk]	[tʃəkə]
classroom	[klæsrum]	[klasrumə]
handwork	[hændwɜk]	[hanwɜkə]
table	[teɪbl]	[təpələ]
bell	[bel]	[belə]
first	[fɜst]	[fesə]
last	[læst]	[lasə]
line	[laɪn]	[lanə]

### 3.7.5 Technology

These were borrowings that were brought in as a result of modernism. The Awing man in those days was not used to gadgets such as the radio, gramophone, and so on. The returnees either brought along with them some of these modern items or simply brought back the names into the community. It should be noted that not all the items cited below were brought by the returnees as many of them are quite recent like the *television* and *telephone*.

taken word	English	Awing
Lamp	[læmp]	[lamə,]
torch	[tɔtʃ]	[tɔsə, tɔtʃə]
gramophone	[græməfəʊn]	[gramafonə]
watch	[wɔtʃ]	[wasə]
clock	[klɒk]	[kəlɔkə, klɔkə]
machine	[məʃin]	[məʃinə]
television	[telɪvɪʒən]	[teləvɪʒnə,
televɪʒnə]	telephone	[telɪfəʊn]
	[telɪfonə]	

### 3.7.6 Foodstuff

The returnees from the plantations equally brought back some new words in the domain of foodstuffs. The ones below are those whose pronunciation is affected by the schwa.

taken word	English	Awing
onion	[ʌnɪən]	[anjusə]
tomato	[təmətəʊ]	[təmətə]
rice	[raɪs]	[ləsə, raɪsə]

### 3.7.7 clothing

word	English	Awing
coat	[kəʊt]	[korə]
slippers	[slɪpəz]	[sələpasə]
canvas	[kænvəz]	[kambasə]
shirt	[ʃɜt]	[ʃələ]
skirt	[skɜt]	[skələ]

### 3.7.8 Miscellaneous

Taken word	English	Awing
christmass	[krɪstməz]	[keləsəmelə]
summons	[sʌmənz]	[sɔməsə]
government	[gʌvənmənt]	[gɔbmenə]
bank	[bænk]	[banə]
jug	[dʒʌg]	[dʒɔgə]

### 3.8 Schwa and vowel epenthesis in Awing

As mentioned earlier, the Awing and English phonological systems are not the same and as such, English borrowings into Awing are subjected to some extensive phonological adjustments to be able to fit into the Awing system. The schwa tends to play a leading role when it comes to the processes that Awing employs. The one we consider here is vowel epenthesis, which refers to a process whereby a segment, in most cases a vowel, is inserted in an environment where there is no underlying sound. Lass (1984:184) identifies two types of insertion, namely, prothesis and anaptyxis. The former refers to the insertion of an initial segment with a

phonotactic innovation, for example, the Latin word, 'spirit' into French 'esprit'. The latter is the more common one, which refers to the insertion of a vowel between two consonants as in the English loanword 'school' into Awing 'sekule' [səkulə]. This process is used extensively in Awing because the Awing phonological system does not support heavy consonant clusters the way English does. Atechi (2006:237) reports that English permits as many as three consonant clusters at word initial position as in *sprite*, *scream*, *strike*, but Awing does not entertain many consonant clusters in any position of the word. What we have in Awing as consonant clusters can be seen as pre-nasalised consonants as in [mbanə, ndɛ, ndzɛ] *stick*, *house*, and *vegetable*. It is this contrast in the phonotactics of the two languages that has caused Awing speakers to resort to this phonological process to resolve. According to Lass's definition, Awing monolingual speakers seem to make extensive use of the two kinds of epenthesis as shown in the loanwords below:

Anaptyxis epenthesis and the schwa in Awing

Taken word	English	Awing
diver	[draɪvə]	[dərəpə]
clerk	[klɒk]	[kələkə]
franc	[fræŋk]	[fələŋə]
French	[frɛntʃ]	[fələntʃiə]
gramophone	[græməfəʊn]	[gərəmafəʊnə]
store	[stɔ]	[sətɔ]
Christmas	[krɪstməs]	[kələsəmelə]
bricklayer	[brɪkleɪə]	[bərəkələ]
contract	[kɒntrət]	[kɒntərəkə]
bread	[brɛd]	[bərətə]

As seen in the examples above, Awing monolingual speakers make extensive use of the schwa to break up consonant clusters. It should be noted that this process is attested more in the speech of Awing monolingual speakers, that is the older generation of Awing speakers than in the speech of the younger generation who are now more exposed to English as a result of school attendance. With regard to the second type of vowel epenthesis, Atechi (2006), reports that this type of vowel epenthesis is not common in West African varieties of English but Awing makes use of it in an interesting fashion. Simo Bobda (1994) reports that South East Asian languages use this process as a

common strategy to break onset consonant clusters. Although a variety of vowels are used in this process, we have not identified clear cases of English borrowings into Awing that use the schwa to resolve this phonotactic difficulty.

The phonological adjustments undergone by English loanwords into different languages in the world is not a new phenomenon. Given that languages may have the same sounds in their respective vowel inventories but differ significantly in the way these phonemes are distributed in the language, speakers of different languages are forced to modify the phonologies of the loan words into their languages so as to achieve fluency in their speech. Languages like Korean and Yoruba testify to this. For example Shim (1994:23) reports that Korean speakers also add a paragogic vowel at word final position in order to open up the close English syllables especially in nouns as in [ledü, löpü and laiphü] *red, love and life* for English [rɛd, lʌv and laɪf]. Ajolore (1982:147) also reports a similar phenomenon in Yoruba, one of the major lingua francas in Nigeria. For example, the two English borrowings, *bank* and *bread* are rendered as [bɔŋki and bredi] for RP [bæŋk and brɛd]. While Awing dominantly employs the schwa [ə] and Korean the [ü], Yoruba mostly makes use of [i] to resolve the closed syllable problem. One would have expected that of the three languages, Korean would have been the exception considering its geographical position vis-à-vis Awing and Yoruba, but it tends to exhibit almost the same patterns as these two languages.

### 3.9 Discussion and concluding remarks

From our discussion, it is clear that schwa is a weak sound that appears dominantly in Awing and English. The sound is so dominant in the two languages that at first sight one would be tempted to postulate that the two languages share more similarities than differences. This mid central vowel is attested in all environments in the two languages, that is, in the initial, medial and final environments in words. A closer look at the relationship between the two reveals that they share some similarities as well as differences but the points of divergence tend to outweigh convergence.

Regarding the similarities between English and Awing, both languages make utmost use of the schwa in all phonological contexts, that is, at word initial, medial and final positions, for example, in Awing we have, əfo (fon) mətɛ:nə, (market) mo:nə (child) and in English, [ə]bout el[ə] fant alt[ ə ]. Also the schwa tends to be the most frequently used sound in the two languages, especially in Awing wherein almost every word is peppered with the sound. However, while in English [ə] appears uniquely in unstressed contexts, in Awing the schwa takes tone in some cases thereby making it a high vowel as seen below:

#### English

[pənɪnsjələ] peninsula      **Awing:** [ə'se':nə] to break  
[pətɪkjʊləɪ] particularly      [ə'fu'gə] to remove  
[bənənə] banana      [ə'sha'abə] to comb.

It follows from the examples above that although the schwa appears in all environments in both languages, there are differences at the level of the quality of the vowel. While the quality of the vowel in English remains low, it can be high and low in Awing. This is why the schwa is so prone to deletion in English but not in Awing.

Awing is a syllable-timed language while English is a stress-timed language. Although schwa is attested in both languages in all contexts, the distribution in both languages is quite different as the graphemes that attract the schwa in English attract different sounds in Awing as in the following examples, *er, or, ar* which attract the schwa in *teacher, altar, doctor*, in English would rather be rendered as /a, ə, o/ respectively. In Awing as in Cameroon English, *er* and *ar* are systematically replaced by /a/ and *or* by /o/ at word final position. In Awing it appears the sound that substitutes the schwa is dictated by the spelling or the orthography of the grapheme concerned.

Again, Awing does not respect the pattern of full and reduced vowels that determine the rhythmic pattern of English as seen in the following English loans into Awing:

Word	English	Awing
television	[tɛlɪvɪʒən]	[tɛləvɪʒənə]
station	[steɪʃn]	[atəʃnə]
punishment	[pʌnɪʃmənt]	[pʌnəsəmənə]



In the data above we discover that in the word *television* English has a schwa in the last syllable but Awing borrows this word and decides to replace the schwa with [ɔ] and equally opens the close syllable by appending a schwa to it. In the word, *punishment*, Awing violates the only phonological contexts of the schwa in English but decides to pepper the whole word with up to three schwas. Still from the data above we discover that syllabic consonants are not attested in Awing but occur in English as a result of schwa deletion.

From the analysis in this section on similarities and differences between Awing and English, it is quite germane to assert that two languages may have the same phonetic charts but differ significantly at the phonological level given that the dominant presence of the mid central vowel, [ə] in Awing and English has turned out to reveal that the two languages share very little similarities with regard to the distribution of this vowel in the two languages. Awing remains a syllable-timed, grassfields Bantu language while English remains a stress-timed, Indo-European language.

The new generation of Awing speakers make use of both code mixing and code switching techniques in their speech. They are inclined to using English words even where Awing has the equivalents. This is due to their exposure to English especially in school and motivated by the fact that they want to sound more prestigious or 'civilised' in the way they speak. The tendency is for some of these characteristics which set the two languages apart to begin to disappear in favour of a more English-like realisation especially with regard to the loanwords.

From the foregoing we can conclude that the manifestation of the schwa in English and Awing does not seem to suggest any close relationship between Awing and English. My suspicion at the outset of this investigation was that since English and Awing were replete with this sound, there may be an intrinsic relationship between them, somehow. But our analysis has shown that such a relationship is unlikely and thus that two languages may share the same phonetic inventory but vary significantly in respect of the way the phonemes are

arranged into morphemes and words. This process seems to be the most consistent so far with regard to new phonological adjustments regarding English loans into Awing. The use of the schwa to open up English closed syllables seems to be very resistant to change because, evidently, no schwa has been dropped at word final position even by the younger generation of speakers in a bid to conform to, or move towards a more English-like pronunciation. So long as they are speaking in Awing, they would always make use of this sound in this environment because it is the most significant marker of the Awingness of the borrowed word. This revelation is different from what Ajolore (1982:147) found out in Yoruba. He reports that most of these endings are being dropped to conform to more English-like endings. Some examples cited are *gold*, *watch*, and *pan*. This finding is equally confirmed by Ufomata's (1991) findings on the Englishization of Yoruba phonology. The process of nativization of English loanwords in Awing shares some similarities with Yoruba and Korean. All in all, the phenomenon of adding a vowel at word final position to open the final syllable in English loanwords is characteristic of not only Awing, but also of Yoruba and Korean as mentioned above.

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