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The Influence of Ga Syntax on Ghanaian English: L1 Transfer in a Multilingual Context

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This study examines the influence of Ga syntax on the structure of Ghanaian English, focusing on how first-language transfer shapes sentence-level constructions. Although Ghanaian English has been studied as a distinct variety, most research has concentrated on phonological or lexical features, often using Akan as the primary reference point for indigenous language influence. This study shifts the focus to Ga, a Kwa language spoken in southern Ghana, which has received comparatively less attention. It explores how syntactic features of Ga—such as word order, coordination, and multi-verb structures—may be reflected in the grammatical patterns used in Ghanaian English.

The aim is to frame these syntactic features not as errors, but rather as meaningful outcomes of bilingual language use and structural transfer. In multilingual environments like Ghana, language contact plays a central role in shaping linguistic norms, including those found in formal varieties of English. My analysis draws on examples from naturally occurring Ghanaian English, including expressions found in media, public discourse, and everyday usage. By focusing on Ga, this research highlights an understudied source of influence that is both linguistically significant and socially relevant.

Introduction

Ghanaian English (GhE) exists in a complex multilingual ecology where English coexists with multiple indigenous languages, including languages of the Ga–Dangme family spoken in and around Accra (Kropp Dakubu, 1988). English is the official language used in education, government administration, professional life, and national media, while Ghanaian languages remain dominant in home and community interactions (Huber, 2013; Schneider, 2007). This coexistence means that bilingual and multilingual speakers repeatedly navigate different grammatical systems, often within the same day and sometimes within the same interaction. Such environments create conditions for contact-induced change: speakers may align structures across languages, extend the functions of familiar forms, and conventionalize patterns that become recognizable within the community (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988; Heine and Kuteva, 2005; Winford, 2003).

Ghana is home to more than seventy indigenous languages (Eberhard et al., 2024), most belonging to the Kwa and Gur branches of Niger-Congo. According to the

2021 Population and Housing Census, the largest ethnolinguistic groups are Akan (about 45.7% of the population), Mole-Dagbon (18.5%), Ewe (12.8%), and Ga-Adangbe (7.1%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Akan, and particularly its Twi dialect, functions as a widely used lingua franca well beyond its native-speaker base, which is one reason it has dominated substrate accounts of Ghanaian English. Ga, by contrast, is numerically smaller nationally, but it is the historical language of Accra, Ghana's capital and largest city, and consequently carries disproportionate media and institutional visibility relative to its population share (Huber, 2013). English itself is overwhelmingly a second language in Ghana: most Ghanaians acquire an indigenous language first at home and encounter English formally through schooling, and a substantial share of the adult population is functionally literate in both English and an indigenous language (Adika, 2012). This L2-dominant acquisition profile is precisely the sociolinguistic condition contact linguists identify as conducive to substrate transfer (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988).

Within World Englishes scholarship, Ghanaian English is described as a legitimate Outer Circle English— indigenized through prolonged use by non-native speakers in former colonies. Outer Circle Englishes undergo a process of nativization, whereby local linguistic elements become integrated into English (Lowenberg, 1986; Schneider, 2007). The "Outer Circle" label signals that English has a longstanding institutional presence and that localized norms can develop alongside external standards. In practical terms, this means Ghanaians have molded English to local use, incorporating indigenous linguistic features. Indeed, scholars observe that GhE has assimilated features from indigenous Ghanaian languages, resulting in distinctive phonological and syntactic characteristics, a claim that this study investigates in detail for one specific substrate language (Huber, 2004; Schneider, 2007). Earlier attitudes often stigmatized local features in English, viewing them as deviations. However, modern perspectives recognize GhE as a legitimate variety with its own norms. In line with this, researchers now document how indigenous languages shape GhE's structure. For example, Magnus Huber (2013) and others affirm that English in Ghana has developed its own systematic peculiarities, not just in accent but in grammar. These localized features are increasingly seen as markers of cultural identity rather than errors. They allow Ghanaians to, in Chinua Achebe's words, "make English carry [their] own African experience" (103). The recognition of GhE's status has led to efforts to describe its features systematically and even moves toward codifying an accepted local standard.

This perspective invites an empirical question: where do local norms live in the grammar? In popular discussions, localness is often associated with accent and vocabulary. Scholarship has likewise tended to focus on phonology and the lexicon in descriptions of Ghanaian English, often assuming the grammar remains close to Standard English (Huber, 2004). Syntactic transfer itself is not a new observation in this literature. Prior work has already established that indigenous Ghanaian languages leave traces in GhE grammar, and Akan-substrate effects in particular have been documented. What this analysis adds is not the discovery that substrate syntax exists in GhE, but rather (a) a sustained example-by-example syntactic account centered on Ga specifically, a language whose grammatical—as opposed to phonological or lexical—contribution to GhE has not received comparable treatment despite Ga's outsized visibility through Accra-based national media, and (b) a feature inventory that ties specific constructions to specific Ga structural templates, rather than a general claim of "indigenous influence." A central

claim of the present study is that syntax is also a key site of nativization and identity, and that recurrent "non-standard" structures can be systematic outcomes of bilingualism (Heine and Kuteva, 2005; Winford, 2003). For example, Emmanuel Quarcoo (1994) describes English in Ghana as a "modern Ghanaian artifact," underscoring how deeply English has been indigenized in local culture. One dominant indigenous influence is Akan, the most widely spoken language group in Ghana; as a result, Akan (especially Twi) has often been the reference point in describing GhE interference.

My analysis focuses on Ga (Gã) as a contact language influencing Ghanaian English syntax. Ga is a Kwa language spoken widely in Accra and southern Ghana. Two reasons motivate the selection of Ga as the focus substrate. First, Accra is Ghana's demographic, political and media hub, which means Ga-influenced usage circulates nationally through broadcast and social media at a rate disproportionate to the size of the Ga-speaking population, facilitating diffusion of linguistic patterns beyond native Ga speakers (Huber, 2013). Second, and more directly, existing syntactic descriptions of GhE have been built primarily around Akan as mentioned earlier; Ga-specific syntactic influence has been comparatively unexamined even though Ga's typological profile makes its transfer effects distinctive and analytically tractable. This study does not claim that Ga is the only or even primary substrate for every pattern discussed; some of the constructions identified are shared across the Kwa family, a point which is developed in the discussion section of this paper, but rather that a Ga-centered study fills a specific, identifiable gap in the literature. Typologically, Ga is broadly SVO like English, which makes transfer effects subtle and visible in predicate structure, modifier placement, clause linkage, and discourse organization (Kropp Dakubu, 1988; Ameka, 2006).

Contact Linguistics and L1 Transfer

From a contact-linguistic perspective, when speakers are bilingual, their languages inevitably influence each other's structures. Extended contact can produce stable structural innovations in a language, especially when large speaker communities share the same L1→L2 transfer patterns (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988; Winford, 2003). In the case of GhE, many bilingual Ghanaians often unconsciously import the grammatical patterns of their native languages into their English. When such patterns recur and spread, they become conventionalized features of the local English. Crucially, these transfers are not random; they tend to occur where the L1 and English have parallel structures or pragmatic functions (Heine and Kuteva, 2005). Contact linguists note that core grammatical patterns can indeed shift under intense bilingualism, despite earlier claims that grammar is resistant to change (Thomason and Kauffman, 1988; Winford, 2003). In West Africa, the influence of substrate languages on English is well-documented in creole and pidgin varieties. Loreto Todd (1984), for instance, showed that West African Pidgin English developed many substrate-driven features (such as serial verb sequences and reduplication) from local languages. Ghana's situation is one of language maintenance (English remains the official language) accompanied by gradual substrate influence. The result is a form of English that structurally echoes indigenous languages in specific ways without ceasing to be recognizable English. This process can be framed as transfer through code-switching, interference, or what Jonas N. A. Nartey (1982) called "faddism" in language use—essentially creative adaption of English to express local concepts. In summary, the theoretical lens assumes that when Ga and English come into sustained contact in bilingual minds, identifiable Ga syntactic rules will surface in English utterances. If

these innovations convey meaning effectively in context, they can spread and stabilize as part of Ghanaian English grammar. The following analysis applies this framework to actual data, illustrating how Ga grammar manifests in English sentences.

Methodology

The analysis is guided by two research questions: (1) How do Ga syntactic structures appear in Ghanaian English? and (2) What kinds of transfer can be observed? To answer these questions, the study identifies six Ga-driven syntactic patterns from targeted media-based data and interprets them using contact-linguistic mechanisms. Importantly, the goal is not to claim that all Ghanaian English syntax derives from Ga. Ghanaian English develops in contact with multiple Ghanaian languages and English, and different speaker communities will show different substrate pressures. Rather, the goal is to demonstrate that a Ga-centered lens reveals systematic patterns that are often overlooked when Ghanaian English is described primarily through pronunciation and vocabulary.

One of the six patterns discussed below is a multi-verb construction that resembles a serial verb construction (SVC), a sequence of verbs that together describe a single, complex event without an intervening conjunction of the kind English normally requires (Aikhenvald and Dixon, 2006; Ameka, 2006).

Data Sources

To capture authentic Ga-influenced structures, examples of Ghanaian English were drawn from natural contexts rather than elicited tests. The study targeted sampling of public media and everyday discourse where English is used by native Ga speakers. Key sources included a popular Ghanaian television drama series (*Yolo*, 2016) and a viral news interview clip (TV3 Ghana, 2023) among others. These sources provided real-life English sentences that were judged non-standard relative to Standard English grammar, based on the author's knowledge of Standard English usage as codified in Rodney Huddleston and Jeffrey K. Pullum's (2002) *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, rather than through independent rater judgements; this single analyst procedure is acknowledged as a limitation below. The analysis focuses on informal spoken data (dialogue, interviews, social media quotes) where local syntax is most likely to appear. Additionally, prior literature was consulted for documented examples. Notably, Nartey (1982), in a study of educated Ghanaians' spontaneous code-switching, documented several constructions in which Adangme grammatical structure—including post-nominal modifier ordering—was retained even where English lexical material was switched in. Adangme is Ga's closest linguistic relative within the Ga-Dangme branch of Kwa. This offers early independent evidence that the region's substrate syntax is resilient under contact pressure, even though Nartey's code-switching data (Adangme-matrix) differs from the L1-transfer-into-English-matrix pattern examined here. The present study's own data (see (5) below) extends this observation to contemporary GhE specifically. By combining modern media samples with earlier documented instances, the study ensures that the dataset reflects both current usage and continuity over time.

The current study adopts a qualitative, case-based approach to syntactic analysis with two main steps:

1. Identification and Description

The analysis first identifies sentences that deviate from Standard English syntax in systematic ways. For each, the structural pattern is clearly described (e.g. an adjective placed after the noun, use of like as a

conjunction, etc.). Similar examples were grouped together, which revealed a recurring set of patterns (six in total). Each pattern was labeled and illustrated with one or more example sentences from our data.

2. L1 Comparison (Ga Transfer Analysis)

Each English pattern was analyzed in relation to a corresponding rule or tendency in the Ga language that could have motivated it. To verify this, the analysis draws on descriptive materials on Ga, principally Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu's (1988) reference grammar, as well as the author's own intuition as a native Ga speaker. The analysis asks whether Ga employs the same structure, and if so, how? Ga equivalents or glosses are provided for the examples to demonstrate the parallel. For instance, an English sentence "I am going and come" was matched to its Ga counterpart *Miiya (ni) maba* (literally, "I am going (and) I will come"), showing a direct transfer of the serial verb construction strategy. By analyzing each pattern this way, the analysis confirms that all the anomalous English forms in our data have clear antecedents in Ga grammar.

Throughout the analysis, academic works are cross-referenced to support the interpretation of each of six patterns and to situate the findings within existing scholarship on Ghanaian English and contact linguistics.

Analysis: Six Ga-Driven Syntactic Patterns

Multi-Verb Constructions: Serial Verb Patterns in Ghanaian English

The first pattern involves multi-verb constructions that resemble serial verb constructions (SVCs). SVCs are widely discussed as a defining feature of many Kwa languages (Aikhenvald and Dixon, 2006; Ameka, 2006). In such constructions, verbs can be sequenced to express complex event structures—motion, transfer, aspectual relations—without requiring overt conjunctions that would split the event into separate clauses.

(1) I am going and come. (contemporary GhE usage)

Miiya maba. (Miiya – I am going, maba – I will come)

Standard English gloss: "I will be right back."

In Standard English, the intended meaning would typically be expressed with a periphrasis ("I will be right back") or with an explicit future-oriented construction ("I am going to come back"). The Ghanaian English form is striking because it presents two verbs—"go" and "come"—as a compact package. Although the string includes "and," the construction behaves like a single pragmatic unit: it signals a brief departure and a guaranteed return, often as a courteous discourse move to manage temporary absence.

A transfer-based account explains this packaging as mapping an L1 predicate-building template onto English. The speaker draws on a Ga/Kwa strategy where the sequence of verbs itself encodes a linked event chain. The English coordinator "and" can be treated as a surface accommodation that makes the verb sequence fit English morphosyntax, while differentiating it from the more informal pidgin equivalent (*I dey go come*). However, the underlying logic remains serialization: the two verbs are not presented as two independent propositions but as a unified complex predicate.

The key analytical payoff is that this construction is not random. It is interpretable and efficient. It also makes predictions. If multi-verb packaging is a transferable strategy, then Ghanaian English should show other compact verb sequences in rapid interaction, especially in informal registers. Moreover, such sequences may be favored in contexts where speakers want to minimize disruption and present a sequence of actions as a single social act (e.g., excusing

oneself, giving quick instructions, announcing a short task).

L1-Driven Intensification: Repetition for Emphasis

The second pattern involves repetition for emphasis, analyzed here as a form of L1-driven intensification. Repetition functions as intensification in many West African languages through reduplication (Childs, 2003). Repetition can appear in many languages and in many styles, but the analysis here treats it as systematic because it aligns with a clear Ga strategy: reduplication or repetition of a word to mark intensity and related pragmatic effects. Similar patterns are attested across Akan and related languages (Osam, Marfo, and Agyekum, 2022). In Standard English, intensity is often handled by adverbs ("very," "really") or by prosody. In the Ghanaian English examples, intensity is encoded by repeating the lexical material itself.

(2) She is behaving funny funny. (*Yolo*, 2016, 7:04)

Efee enii ŋməlɔ ŋməlɔ. (Efee –she/he is doing, enii–her/his thing, ŋməlɔ -funny/laughter)

Standard English gloss: Intended meaning: "She is behaving very funnily."

(3) As you are doing and you are doing, be careful. (*Yolo*, 2016, 3:26)

Ni ofeɔ ni ofeɔ nɛ, kwɛmɔ ojogbaa (Ni-as/while, ofeɔ - you do, nɛ - this, kwɛmɔ - look, ojogbaa – well/carefully)

Standard English gloss: Warning meaning achieved through clause repetition, roughly "Be careful with what you are doing," which implies that an ongoing action might cause retaliation or a punishment.

In (2), adjective repetition ("funny funny") functions as an intensifier. Importantly, the effect is not simply more words, but rather a recognizable semantic shift: it expresses a higher degree of evaluation, similar to "very funny" or "extremely funny." In (3), repetition of a clause frame builds a warning structure. The repeated segment anchors the listener's attention and increases urgency; the repetition creates a pragmatic force that is difficult to achieve with a single clause, especially in fast-paced interaction.

The presence of repetition in scripted television dialogue—a curated representation of speech—is analytically relevant. If writers employ repetition as a Ghanaian English resource, they rely on audience familiarity with its meaning. This suggests that repetition is part of a publicly recognized Ghanaian English style, supporting the claim that it is systematic and community shared.

This transfer analysis also suggests predictions. If repetition functions as intensification, it may be more frequent with short evaluative adjectives and with expressive vocabulary. It may also be used as an alternative to English degree modifiers or in combination with them. A larger corpus could test whether repetition is restricted to particular semantic domains (evaluation, warnings, insults, praise) and whether it patterns with prosodic emphasis in speech.

Reduplication for intensification is pervasive in West African languages; it serves grammatical functions such as intensifying qualities or actions (Osam, Marfo, and Agyekum, 2022). Solomon Dansieh (2011) notes that in African languages, repeating a word can convey a heightened evaluative or intensifying effect. Thus, when a Ghanaian English speaker says "fast fast" to mean "very fast" or "plenty plenty" to mean "an abundance," they are following a legitimate grammatical process from Ga (and other Ghanaian languages), rather than randomly breaking English rules. This pattern has become an accepted stylistic feature in GhE and is readily understood in context.

Post-Nominal Modification: Word Order in the Noun Phrase

The third pattern involves noun phrase word order where modifiers appear after the noun. Standard English typically places numerals and adjectives before the noun, especially in neutral attributive contexts. In the Ghanaian English examples, the noun appears first and descriptive or quantitative material follows. This pattern can be attributed to Ga syntax, in which adjectives and numerals commonly follow the head noun in attributive position.

(4) He gave me shoes three. (contemporary GhE usage)

Ehami aspaatrɛi etɛ. (E-ha-mi – he/she-gave-me, aspaatrɛi – shoes, etɛ - three)

Standard English gloss: "He gave me three pairs of shoes."

(5) I bought tyres new two. (contemporary GhE usage)

Mi he tai ehee (nii) enyɔ. Mi – I, he – bought, tai – tyre, ehee – new, nii – thing(s),enyɔ – two.

The parentheses around (*nii*) indicate that this classifier-like element is optional and may be absent in some speakers' usage.

Standard English gloss: "I bought two new tyres."

In (4), the numeral "three" occurs after "shoes." In (5), both the adjective "new" and numeral "two" follow "tyres." A Standard English listener can recover the intended meaning, but the ordering differs systematically from the canonical English template. Under a transfer account, bilingual speakers replicate a Ga noun phrase template: state the head noun first and then add modifiers. This ordering can be understood as discourse-driven as well. By stating the noun first, the speaker establishes the referent and then supplies details, which can be advantageous in rapid speech or when the listener needs the referent anchor early.

The pattern's systematicity is reinforced by the fact that it can stack multiple modifiers post-nominally, as in *tyres new two*. And, at least anecdotally, the fixed ordering of adjective before the numeral in this post nominal position (rather than the reverse, "tyres two new") mirrors the modifier-ordering tendencies described for Ga in Kropp Dakubu (1988), though a systematic acceptability study of alternate orderings is left for future work. These examples suggest that the construction is not merely a single fixed expression but a broader ordering preference. It also suggests a research agenda: if post-nominal modifiers are part of Ghanaian English, we should expect other modifier types (quantifiers, certain adjectives) to appear post-nominally in similar contexts, especially in informal registers.

Finally, it is worth noting that this pattern links syntax to identity. Post-nominal modification is one of the features that can make Ghanaian English immediately recognizable to Ghanaian listeners, even when the vocabulary is fully English. In this way, noun phrase ordering contributes to the sound of a variety at the level of grammar, not only at the level of accent.

Kropp Dakubu's reference grammar confirms that adjectives occur post-nominally in Ga, and even English adjectives borrowed into Ga obey this order. Thus, when a Ga speaker is speaking English, it is natural for them to sometimes transfer this structure, saying "shoes three" rather than "three shoes." English normally requires adjective-noun order, but the bilingual brain sometimes maps Ga order onto English words. The result, while non-standard to outsiders, is perfectly clear to Ghanaian listeners (who often unconsciously interpret it correctly). This pattern is less frequent in formal GhE writing but quite common in speech. Its persistence again highlights that GhE's grammar is influenced by substrate rules.

Predicate Structure: Clause-Final Intensification with "Like That"

The fourth pattern concerns predicate structure and intensification. Ga employs

clause-final particles for emphasis and evaluation. The relevant construction is clause-final "like that", used to intensify an evaluation. In Standard English, "like that" is typically restricted to manner or comparison meanings ("in that way"). The Ghanaian English use of "like that" can be analyzed as a functional extension, whereby the expression is recruited as a clause-final intensifier.

(6) That is why your dancing is *basaa* like that. (TV3 Ghana, 6:37)

No hewɔ ni ojoo lɛ yɔɔ basaa nakai. (No – that, hewɔ - because of, ni – that, o-joo – your-dance, lɛ - (definite article), yɔɔ - is, basaa - awkward/messy, nakai -that)

Standard English gloss: That is why your dance is so awkward. ("Like that" in the GhE sentence functions as intensification.)

In (6), the speaker's goal is not primarily to specify manner. Instead, the construction strengthens the evaluation: the dancing is not just awkward; it is awkward to a salient degree. This is a classic context for intensification, and in Ghanaian English the intensification is achieved by a clause-final element. Clause-final emphasis strategies are common in many languages and can be part of broader discourse organization. Under the analysis, the English form "like that" is extended to fill this discourse slot.

Functional extension is an especially important mechanism for describing postcolonial Englishes because it explains how local meanings can develop without borrowing new lexical material (Bamiro, 1997; Heine and Kuteva, 2005). Instead of importing a Ga particle into English, the speaker repurposes an English expression. Over time, repeated repurposing can conventionalize a new constructional meaning. If the clause-final "like that" is widely used as an intensifier, it may behave increasingly like a degree modifier rather than a comparison phrase in Ghanaian English.

This analysis also suggests empirical tests. If "like that" is an intensifier in Ghanaian English, it should occur more frequently with evaluative adjectives (positive or negative) than with neutral descriptions. It should also be sensitive to discourse conditions: it may be favored in confrontational or teasing interactions, where speakers want to heighten evaluation. Corpus data and pragmatic annotation would allow these predictions to be tested.

Conditional Linking: "Like" as a Clause Connector

The fifth pattern concerns clause linkage. In this variety, "like" functions as a clause connector used to mark conditional or inferential relations. Standard English typically links such relations through if-clauses (If X, then Y) or through contextual inference without a dedicated particle. In the Ghanaian English example, "like" appears between a stance frame and a consequence clause.

(7) Me like I'll cry. (TV3 Ghana, 2023, 0:45)

Mi kulɛ mafo (Mi – I, kulɛ - then, mafo – I will/would cry)

Standard English gloss: Interpretable as "If I were the one, I would have cried." / "In that case, I would have cried."

In (7), "like" does not carry its usual Standard English comparison meaning. Instead, it functions as a linker that signals consequence or stance escalation. One plausible interpretation is that the particle is inserted to satisfy an L1-linked requirement for explicit conditional marking of cause-consequence relations of a kind Ga expresses more overtly than English does in casual registers. This logic is consistent with broader contact phenomena: bilingual speakers may prefer overt markers of clause relation, especially in spontaneous speech, and may recruit a readily available English item to serve that function (Heine and Kuteva, 2005).

As with clause-final "like that," this pattern is plausibly analyzed as functional

extension. "Like" is a highly flexible form in many varieties of global English, where it commonly serves as a general discourse marker (quotative, hedge, filler) rather than a dedicated clause connector. In Ghanaian English, however, there is a specific, structured use: "like" functions as "then"/"in that case." If this function is stable, it would represent a localized grammaticalization pathway in which "like" becomes a clause-linking particle, a use not otherwise reported for other global varieties in which "like" is primarily a discourse marker.

A key research question concerns the range of contexts. Does linking "like" appear mainly in first-person stance frames ("Me like …"), where speakers dramatize consequence? Or does it generalize to other conditional frames? Do speakers alternate between "like" and "then" or "if," and if so, is the choice register-sensitive? These questions require larger datasets, but they show how even a single token can motivate a concrete research agenda grounded in the transfer analysis.

Topic–Comment Structure: Topic Fronting and Object Preposing

The sixth pattern involves information structure. Topic–comment structure and topic fronting emerge as Ga-driven patterns reflected in Ghanaian English. In topic–comment organization, a discourse topic is established first, and then the clause provides a comment about that topic. Standard English can also topicalize, but the distribution and pragmatics are different, and topicalization is often more restricted or marked.

(8) That one too you don't know. (TV3 Ghana, 2023)

No hu ole (No - that one, hu – too, ole – you don't know)

Standard English gloss: "You don't know that one either."

In (8), the object "that one" appears at the beginning of the clause, creating a topic frame. The additive particle too follows immediately, signaling that the topic belongs to a set of relevant referents. The remainder of the clause provides the comment ("you don't know"). The structure is natural in a discourse context where the speaker is tracking multiple items and is correcting or challenging the addressee's knowledge.

The transfer account treats this as replication of a Ga/Kwa discourse template. If topic fronting is a pervasive strategy in Ga, bilingual speakers may carry over that template into English, especially in interactive contexts where managing common ground is crucial. This can influence English word order in systematic ways: objects are fronted not randomly but to mark discourse status and to anchor the listener's attention.

This pattern also connects to the claim that transfer phenomena are pervasive across registers. Topic-fronting constructions often appear in public speech and media because they are effective for emphasis and for structuring arguments. If Ghanaian English has conventional topic–comment resources, they may be especially visible in debate-like or evaluative contexts, where speakers actively manage contrast and additivity.

This pattern— topic fronting with an additive particle such as "too"—is so common in informal GhE that it has almost become a grammatical signature of Ghanaian speech. It occurs not only with "too" but with other particles like "even": e.g., "Me self I don't understand" (for "I myself don't understand"), fronting "me" for emphasis. All these reflect Ga's topic–comment pragmatics influencing English word order.

Discussion

Not Errors, but Systematic Variation

A central claim of this article is that these patterns represent systematic variation rather than performance errors, a framing that runs against prescriptive expectations about English. Three kinds of evidence support this framing. First, the patterns are structurally coherent: each one can be described as a consistent form–function pairing. Second, the patterns align with plausible Ga templates in predicate building, modifier placement, and topic–comment organization as documented in Kropp Dakubu (1988). Third, the patterns appear in contexts that suggest social circulation, including broadcast media and scripted entertainment.

Systematicity does not imply that Ghanaian English speakers reject Standard English norms. It implies that speakers have multiple grammatical resources and can select among them depending on context. In formal writing contexts, many speakers will follow school-taught standards. In informal speech and in styles that index Ghanaian identity, speakers may use local constructions that are meaningful and effective; this register-sensitivity is itself an empirical claim that future corpus-based research using systematically collected samples of Ghanaian English can test directly by comparing formal and informal samples from the same speakers. A World Englishes approach treats this as normal variation, not deficiency.

The recurrence of these patterns in everyday usage suggests the emergence of internal norms and indicates that such structures are not limited to any single educational register. While the present dataset cannot quantify frequency, the claim is plausible in principle because Ghanaian English is widely used across education levels. If a construction circulates through mass media, it can become available to speakers with diverse educational backgrounds. This is precisely the kind of pathway through which local norms can spread beyond small bilingual networks.

While Ga serves as the focal contact language in this study, the patterns identified should not be interpreted as uniquely Ga-derived. Several of the constructions discussed, most notably SVCs, like predicate structures, repetition for intensification, post-nominal modification, and topic–comment organization are characteristic of the broader Kwa language family. As a result, similar transfer effects could plausibly emerge in Ghanaian English through contact with other Kwa languages spoken in Ghana, such as Akan or Ewe, depending on speakers' linguistic backgrounds; the present dataset does not include systematic speaker-background metadata, as indicated in the Limitations section below, and so cannot itself adjudicate between a Ga-specific and broader Kwa-areal source for any individual token. The Ga-based analysis presented here is therefore best understood as an analytically grounded case study that illustrates how Kwa-type grammatical resources can be mapped onto English in contact settings, and as a demonstration that Ga specifically—despite prior descriptions of GhE syntax having centered on Akan— patterns the same way, rather than as a claim about exclusive Ga influence—a syntactic account of Ga's specific contribution, not a claim that Ga uniquely causes these patterns.

This perspective aligns with contact-linguistic approaches that emphasize typological and areal convergence over one-to-one substrate attribution. By foregrounding Ga, the analysis makes visible structural mechanisms of transfer that may otherwise remain obscured; however, the broader implication is that Ghanaian English syntax reflects layered contact pressures from multiple indigenous languages. Recognizing this broader Kwa context strengthens the interpretation of the findings and situates Ga influence within a more general areal pattern of grammatical nativization in Ghanaian English.

Implications for World Englishes: Syntax as a Marker of Identity

The broader theoretical contribution of this study lies in highlighting syntax as a marker of variety identity within World Englishes. When a variety develops distinctive strategies for packaging events, placing modifiers, linking clauses, and organizing discourse, it demonstrates nativization at the level of grammar. Such nativization is comparable to how any language evolves internally: speakers conventionalize constructions that work for their communicative needs.

A syntax-centered view also has descriptive value. If Ghanaian English descriptions emphasize only accent and vocabulary, as much of the existing literature has (Huber, 2004), they risk under-describing the grammatical resources that speakers actually use. The feature inventory offered here provides a starting point for more systematic grammatical descriptions and for corpus-driven studies of Ghanaian English syntax.

Implications for Language Ideology and Education

This study further argues that Ga and other African languages should be recognized as active shaping forces in the evolution of English in multilingual postcolonial contexts. This has practical implications. Ghana's language-in-education policy has mandated Ghanaian-language medium of instruction in Kindergarten through Primary 3, with a transition to English from Primary 4 onward—a principle established in 1951 and reaffirmed in 1974, briefly reversed by an English-only policy between 2002 and 2007, and restored since 2007 (Owu-Ewie, 2006). From upper primary school onward, however, English is not only the medium of instruction but also the variety formally taught and assessed, including in national examinations; Standard English norms are the explicit target, and constructions like the ones examined here are treated as errors to be corrected by teachers and marked as such by examiners, rather than described as a systematic local variety. This is the concrete mechanism behind the tension a World Englishes perspective raises: it is not that GhE speakers are judged as using "incorrect English" in the abstract, but that the country's own institutions enforce an external non-Ghanaian standard as the only correct one, even when GhE constructions are systematic and communicatively effective. A World Englishes perspective suggests a more nuanced approach: external standards may be appropriate in certain institutional contexts, but local norms are legitimate objects of linguistic description and can be valued in cultural and identity-oriented settings.

For education, this perspective supports an additive model rather than a deficit model. Students can learn to write in standardized registers while also understanding the structure of local Ghanaian English. Teaching that distinguishes register expectations from linguistic competence can reduce stigma and improve metalinguistic awareness. The constructions described in this paper can be used pedagogically to show how bilingualism shapes grammar and how contact-induced change produces systematic patterns.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the size and nature of the dataset. Targeted sampling is useful for identifying candidate patterns, but it does not support strong claims about frequency, distribution, or social conditioning. A second limitation is that media sources provide minimal speaker metadata. Without detailed information about speakers' language backgrounds, it is difficult to isolate Ga influence from other

substrate pressures or from general West African areal tendencies.

A third limitation concerns the use of scripted entertainment. Scripted speech is a representation of language ideology and style; it may exaggerate certain features for comedic or identity effects. This does not make the data useless, but it changes its interpretation: a feature's presence in scripted dialogue supports recognizability and social meaning more than it supports claims about spontaneous everyday frequency.

A fourth limitation concerns the judgment that the target constructions are "non-standard." This judgment, and the Ga-transfer comparisons that follow it, rest on a single analyst's competence—the author's own knowledge of Standard English usage as codified in Huddleston and Pullum (2002), and the author's own intuition as a native Ga speaker—rather than on independent rater confirmation or a formal panel of consultants. Future work using multiple independent raters for the non-standardness judgments, and additional Ga consultants for the transfer comparisons, would strengthen confidence in the findings and help separate idiolectal judgment from community-wide patterns.

Future Work: Toward a Targeted Ghanaian English Syntax Corpus

Future research can pursue a concrete direction by expanding data collection to build a targeted Ghanaian English syntax corpus that includes multiple sources such as YouTube interviews, scripted television series, online comments/blogs, and academic texts. Such a corpus would allow researchers to quantify each feature type and test hypotheses about register sensitivity. For example, multi-verb constructions might cluster in informal spoken interaction, while topic fronting might be common in argumentative discourse. Repetition might show strong pragmatic conditioning, increasing in emotionally charged or evaluative contexts.

Future work should also incorporate comparative sampling. Because Ghana is multilingual, speakers' substrate backgrounds vary, and Ghanaian English features may reflect multiple influences. A Ga-centered hypothesis can be tested most strongly by comparing speakers with strong Ga backgrounds to speakers with other dominant Ghanaian languages. Elicitation and acceptability tasks can complement corpus work by probing whether speakers assign stable meanings to constructions like clause-final "like that" and linking "like," and whether speakers perceive them as informal, humorous, or neutral.

Finally, future scholarship can explore diffusion and enregisterment. If a construction appears frequently in Accra-centered media, it may spread as part of a national Ghanaian English style even among speakers who are not Ga-dominant. Tracking diffusion requires time and data, but the feature inventory in this study provides a starting set of constructions that can be monitored across new datasets.

Conclusion

This article examines the influence of Ga syntax on Ghanaian English through a feature inventory of six Ga-driven syntactic patterns. The analysis demonstrates that these patterns are systematic and linguistically predictable outcomes of transfer and functional extension rather than random errors.

The broader contribution is to place syntax at the center of Ghanaian English description within World Englishes. Ghanaian English is not only a matter of local pronunciation and vocabulary; it also involves distinctive grammatical resources for structuring clauses and discourse. By foregrounding Ga as a socially salient and typologically relevant contact language, this study also promotes a view of African

languages as active contributors to English evolution in multilingual postcolonial contexts. Future corpus-based and comparative work can test the hypotheses raised here and can strengthen our understanding of how bilingualism shapes the grammar of established languages.

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