

Bringing the ‘Fuzzy’ into Focus: Analysing Some Morphosyntactic Features of Tanzanian English

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Abstract

The paper presents a pioneering pilot study on Tanzanian English (TznE) used in higher education. It addresses a gap in research on contemporary TznE, a variety that has been described as ‘instable and fuzzy’, particularly in its grammatical system. This field study aims to analyse some morphosyntactic structures commonly used in TznE, while recognising Tanzania’s linguistic landscape, which includes English, Swahili, and numerous minority languages. Using primarily acceptability judgment data in the form of questionnaire responses, supported by focus group discussions and interviews with university students and lecturers, the study explores 14 morphosyntactic features of TznE contrasted with Standard British English, providing insights into linguistic patterns and user perceptions. The findings indicate that over 50% of the participants would use non-standard forms in speech, and 30% in writing, with some showing a preference for non-standard forms even when aware of the standard ones. The study concludes that TznE exhibits some distinct grammatical features, challenging the notion that it is merely ‘fuzzy’. We move on to claim that certain grammatical constructions have become grammaticalised in TznE and that TznE is moving into Schneider’s *nativisation* stage of development, where it acquires constructions unique to the country while being adopted by a majority of the speakers.

Keywords: World Englishes; Tanzanian English; Swahili; acceptability judgement; morphosyntactic traits; grammaticalised constructions

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1. Introduction

This paper describes a field study that explores Tanzanian English (TznE) as used in higher education. By combining questionnaire responses with focus group discussions and interviews with university students and lecturers, this first-of-its-kind study provides insight into some morphosyntactic features of TznE. The findings reflect both linguistic patterns observed in TznE and the perceptions of its users.

Much of the research on English in East Africa dates back some 20 years or more (e.g., Schmied 1991). Previous studies have primarily given insight into lexis and phonology (Schmied 2012; Schmied 2015) and, to a much lesser extent, grammar and syntax. In addition, there is a lack of research on contemporary, present-day TznE (Schmied 2015) and how it can be characterised in relation to Standard English (SE) and possibly to neighbouring varieties (Buregeya 2021: 131). TznE is claimed to be 'instable and fuzzy at least in its grammar system, maybe more than most other national systems' (Schmied 2012: 462).

With the overall aim of bringing the 'fuzzy' into focus by analysing selected morphosyntactic structures of TznE as used in higher education, this pilot study offers a glimpse of current uses and recent developments of this English variety in comparison with Standard British English. The term *Standard English* has been defined as a variety that is found in grammar books and dictionaries, often signalling what is correct or acceptable (Jenkins 2014: 21; Schneider 2020: 16).

Tanzania has a triglossic situation, which involves English, Swahili, and a large number of minority languages¹. Although English is an official language and occupies a significant position in the country's linguistic landscape (Legère and Rosendal 2015: 75), it is not the first language (L1) of Tanzanians. It is learnt as a second language (L2) or a third language (L3); it is used in a limited number of contexts, including some primary schools, all secondary and higher education, the High Court, and international business. Next, Swahili is also an official language and is the dominant language used in everyday life (Languages of Tanzania (LOT) 2009: 2). Swahili is the L2 of most Tanzanians, since about 90% speak a minority language as their first language. This minority language, used in

¹ This term does not necessarily mean a numerical minority. Rather, it means that the languages are 'restricted to a few non-formal domains and are subordinate to Swahili and English' (Petzell and Kühl 2017: 36).

the local community, is the L1 of most speakers (see for example Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2023; Petzell 2012a), but it is not supported in public domains or schools. Most of the minority languages, as well as Swahili, belong to the Bantu language family.

Because of the perceived fuzziness of TznE, there is no unified description of what this English variety is. The present study follows Schmied (2012: 455) in his definition: ‘TznE is what is frequently used and accepted by educated Tanzanians themselves [...]’. This entails that the main domain where English is pervasively used in society is higher education, which is also the domain that is the focus of the current study.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes English in Tanzania and its historical influence due to British colonialism, the dual official status of English and Swahili, and the ongoing debate on English as the medium of instruction. Section 3 positions TznE within World Englishes by considering Kachru’s Three Circles model and Schneider’s Dynamic Model, focusing on postcolonial linguistic phases. Previous research on African Englishes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is reviewed in section 4, noting the shared colonial history and the official status of English in many regions. Section 5 outlines the study design, comprising questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews with university students and lecturers. The results in section 6 reveal trends in using non-standard forms (that is, forms that are not found in SE), with the interviews corroborating common usage. Finally, section 7 summarises findings and implications for an understanding of the position of TznE and suggests areas for future research.

2. English in Tanzania

English has been a language of administration and education in Tanzania since the British colonial administration. The country’s current linguistic landscape has been remarkably influenced by the higher position of English compared to other languages. English occupies a crucial position in both public and private institutions, and it links the country to the outside world. Hence, Tanzanians use English side by side with Swahili as an official language in domains such as education and administration (Petzell 2012b; Rubagumya 1990).

In particular, Tanzania’s Education and Training Policy (MoEST 2023) recognises Swahili as the national language and a medium of

instruction in primary education; in contrast, English dominates from secondary onwards. The policy also allows some public primary schools to use English in teaching and learning under special arrangements. This is a step towards meeting parental and teacher preferences for English because they believe that it guarantees opportunities for further education and better employment options (Hilliard 2015; Rubagumya 2010). Conversely, research has consistently demonstrated that forcing students and teachers to use SE hampers learning in Tanzania (Brock-Utne 2007; Rubagumya 1994).

Despite this controversy, higher education is still the most consistent domain that uses English, although English–Swahili codeswitching dominates in teaching and learning. Beyond education, English has strengthened its growing presence in everyday life by spreading into the media, urban signage, and government websites (Legère and Rosendal 2015). Younger speakers demonstrate positive attitudes towards English (Mohr 2018), and their usage signals that TznE is at the early stage of nativisation, as section 3 explains further.

3. Positioning Tanzanian English within World Englishes

The status of English in Tanzania will be categorised based on Kachru's (1985) Three Circles model and analysed following Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes (PCEs). These models focus on different aspects.

Firstly, Kachru's (1985) model uses three concentric circles based on historical, sociolinguistic, and functional considerations. The first is the Inner Circle, which includes countries such as the UK, the USA, and Canada where English is a native language. The second is the Outer Circle, containing countries such as Tanzania and Nigeria where English serves as a second or official language due to colonialism and institutionalisation. The third is the Expanding Circle, which covers countries such as Japan and China where English is not linked to colonialism. Overall, the model describes the sociolinguistic status of English in different countries and its historical and political spread via colonialism. While Kachru did not intend his model to be static (see Kachru 1965), it has often been interpreted as such in the literature, particularly when compared to dynamic models of postcolonial Englishes, such as Schneider's model (2007). The latter focuses on evolutionary stages and change over time.

Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model suggests a process of five phases in the evolution of postcolonial Englishes: *foundation*, *exonormative stabilisation*, *nativisation*, *endonormative stabilisation*, and *differentiation*. The *foundation* phase is the first stage in which settlers bring English to a new territory, marking initial contact between the settlers and the region's speakers. Second, in the *exonormative stabilisation* phase, English becomes a language of education and administration. Thus, the population develops some degree of bilingualism, involving familiarity with English and their language. They rely on SE as a norm to determine the correct usage of their L2. In the third phase, *nativisation*, speakers move away from accepting the foreign country as the source of linguistic guidance. At this stage, new varieties start going their own way (Schneider 2007). New Englishes go through structural nativisation by developing morphosyntactic traits unique to the respective regions. Fourth, the *endonormative stabilisation* phase involves self-reliance, especially when the new English variety no longer relies on SE for correctness. A new, homogeneous variety of English evolves at this stage. Finally, a new national variety evolves during the *differentiation* phase. Schneider (2007) emphasises that the differentiation phase is not the end point but the beginning of new varieties of the new variety.

Concerning Tanzania, British colonialists introduced English as the language of education and administration in Tanganyika in the foundation stage. This stage occurred after Tanganyika had become a UN trust territory following the First World War. In the exonormative stabilisation stage, English in Tanzania still uses the colonisers' variety (namely Standard British English) as a norm. This variety is primarily used in education, law, and international affairs. According to Schneider (2007: 199), the development of English in Tanzania has 'got stuck' somewhere between the second and third phases. By this Schneider means that while English in Tanzania has already passed through the foundation phase and the exonormative stabilisation phase, it has not fully gone through the nativisation phase. Instead, it remains heavily controlled by its colonial roots and under the influence of SE. During the nativisation stage, the variety undergoes notable structural and lexical modifications due to contact with local languages, which is starting to show in the present data.

4. Previous research on African Englishes

This section reviews studies on Englishes used in sub-Saharan Africa. It focuses on eastern and southern Africa, before positioning TznE within this wider setting. At the outset, distinguishing the terms *World Englishes* and *Global Englishes* is essential, since they greatly overlap in acknowledging the pluricentricity of English but differ in emphasis (Matsuda 2019: 146). The term *World Englishes* includes English varieties across the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. Our focus is on Outer Circle varieties, which are regionally adapted varieties, particularly where English is a second or foreign language, such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania (Kachru 1985, 1992). These localised varieties are referred to as South African, Nigerian, and Tanzanian English respectively, because of their localised pronunciation, morphosyntactic features, and lexical features. In contrast, the term *Global Englishes* refers to English as a lingua franca for international communication. This viewpoint prioritises cross-cultural intelligibility and fluidity but not codified individual regional varieties (Jenkins 2014; Sadeghpour and D'Angelo 2022). This review of literature focuses on Outer Circle varieties in southern and eastern Africa because these regions share a history of British colonial influence, and English has maintained its official status in these regions since then.

Literature on Southern African Englishes offers relevant comparison points. For example, Chapwanya and Nel (2024) compared Zimbabwean English (ZE) with British English using the International Corpus of English – British English (ICE-GB). They found significant variation between the ZE corpus and ICE-GB in indefinite and zero article usage, attributing the latter to Shona influence. In Swazi English, Arua (1998: 50) reported that the modal auxiliary *must*, the use of *as to*, the conflation of emphatic *do* with the simple past, and dangling modifiers are stable traits. In contrast to Zimbabwean English, Arua (1998) does not link these Swazi English traits to Swazi, except for idiomatic expressions translated from Swazi. Both Zimbabwean English and Swazi English show how southern African Englishes differ in the degrees of substrate influence: Shona's influence is noted in Zimbabwean English, whereas Swazi English appears more internally stabilised. Another well-documented Southern African variety is Black South African English (BSAE) (De Klerk 1999; Gough 1996; Van Rooy 2006; Van Rooy 2013). It exhibits several stable features, such as preference for the progressive aspect (Van Rooy 2006) and modal

expressions such as *can be able to* (Gough 1996: 63; Van Rooy 2013: 12). Other features involve frequent use of resumptive pronouns and left dislocations, as well as the insertion of dummy *it* in contexts where SE would omit it (Mesthrie 2006). Mesthrie, in particular, links the insertion of dummy *it* to Nguni² influence. Most of these features exhibit cross-varietal parallels to other World Englishes in the Outer Circle, such as East African English (EAF_E) (Schmied 1991). Notably, these are stable features of BSAE (Mesthrie 2006; Van Rooy 2013). The relative stability of BSAE contrasts with the more ‘fuzzy’ state of TznE (Schmied 2012). Hence, English varieties in Africa differ in the degree of standardisation and documentation.

Research on EAF_E has also revealed both shared morphosyntactic features across the region and variety-specific ones due to contact with the respective African languages, although TznE remains underexplored. For instance, Kenyan English (KenE) shows similarities with British English and American English in some features. The omission of *the*, the prevalence of non-standard comparative constructions, and plural uncountables are predominant in KenE (Buregeya 2021). Another variety in East Africa is Ugandan English (UgE), which is highly regionally variable due to contact with Luganda³ and Acholi⁴ (Isingoma 2014; Nassenstein 2016). More specifically, Isingoma (2014: 55) notes that calques in UgE emanate from its contact with Luganda, while Nassenstein (2016: 409) attributes the conflation of reflexives and reciprocals in UgE to its contact with Lwo-Acholi. Across EAF_E, some traits are commonly found in other World Englishes in the Outer Circle. Examples of these traits include the more frequent use of continuous verb forms in BSAE (Van Rooy 2006) and article omission in Zimbabwean English (Chapwanya and Nel 2024). Taken together, the literature reviewed suggests that while EAF_E shares many common features with other World Englishes in the Outer Circle, each national variety also bears distinct imprints of its local language ecology.

Although most EAF_E data come from Kenya and Uganda (Buregeya 2021; Nassenstein 2016; Schmied 2006), Schmied (2012) remains a

² The Nguni languages are a group of Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa. They are related to Shona and, more distantly, to Swahili. The previously mentioned Swazi is a Nguni language.

³ Luganda is a Bantu language and the largest language in Uganda.

⁴ Acholi is a Nilotic language spoken primarily in Uganda.

seminal reference on TznE. Schmied (2012) comprehensively analysed EAfE based on the East African component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-EA). He identified several recurrent morphosyntactic features, such as article omission, wider use of progressive forms, under-differentiation of pronouns, and plural overgeneralisation. Schmied also reported that, although these features are similar to those in other World Englishes, some features stem from the influence of local languages, such as Swahili and Luganda. Crucially, he draws his findings from Kenyan and Ugandan English. As pointed out earlier, TznE is less well-documented. In addition, the ICE-EA material used is now over three decades old. While Schmied's work establishes the foundational profile of EAfE, it leaves open questions about the current status and development of TznE. The present study addresses this gap by examining contemporary morphosyntactic usage in TznE and comparing it with Standard British English.

5. Methods

The overall aim of this pilot study is to find morphosyntactic features typical of TznE. The study is based on acceptability judgement data in the form of a questionnaire, supplemented by focus group discussions and interviews with university students and lecturers, with the aim of eliciting respondents' opinions on what grammatical constructions they would use (or not use) in speech and writing. This choice of study design aligns with our understanding of Schmied's (2012: 455) definition of TznE and is one type of methodology he suggested for exploring TznE. However, this is a small-scale study using limited material, and for a more comprehensive picture, we recommend further research (described in our conclusions).

Before starting to collect data, we informed the participants about the scope and purpose of the study and asked for their informed consent in writing. All participants gave their consent for the information they would provide to be used in the study. The participants were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any negative consequences, and they were assured that the information would then be removed from our records. During data collection, complete anonymity was observed to protect the identity of the participants, who were referred to using pseudonyms. In addition, the audio-recorded data were safely stored on a password-protected computer, and the key for the pseudonyms was stored on another computer. Research clearance was obtained

(described below under Ethical Approval). Although the gender aspect was not relevant for this type of research, it was taken into consideration when selecting the participants.

5.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised 32 near-identical sentence pairs or groups representing 14 grammatical features (Table 2). The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix. One sentence in each pair/group was in SE, while the others were in TznE, here referred to as *non-standard forms*. The non-standard forms were based on Schmied's (2006: 197–199) traits of EAFé, adapted to reflect Tanzanian linguistic usage. The data Schmied used were sourced from the ICE-EA, and the features he identified are not necessarily exclusive to EAFé but are found in various World Englishes (2006: 197).

Nine students were given the questionnaire and asked to answer the questions individually. As shown in Table 1, the respondents could choose whether they would say, write, or both say and write a chosen statement. The instructions given to the respondents were as follows: 'Please read the sentences and choose the one that you would prefer from each pair. You can also tick both if you find both acceptable. Also, you can choose if you would use the sentence when speaking or when writing (or both).'

We also asked if they would NOT say or write something in order to verify their answers and obtain negative evidence, instead of only having the absence of an affirmative answer. By and large, the answers to 'would NOT say or write' a certain phrase corroborate the affirmative answers, meaning that if all nine respondents said they would not write the non-standard form, there were zero who ticked that they would write it.

Table 1: An example of sentence pairs from the questionnaire

Sentences	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>That is a lot of money.</i>	yes (tick)	no (X)
<i>That are a lot of money.</i>	yes (tick)	yes (tick)

We selected nine out of Schmied's (2006) 12 features for this study. Two features were excluded, and another two were merged into one feature primarily because they were difficult to assess using the method chosen. Some of Schmied's features are common in both TznE and World

Englishes, which means that they would not help differentiate TznE from other varieties. Additionally, given that some features were not binary, they did not lend themselves to forming identical sentence pairs. See, for instance, the claim that ‘complex tenses tend to be avoided’ (Schmied 2006: 197), which was not suitable for this type of elicitation since it could not be elicited using a binary sentence pair. Schmied’s feature ‘adjective forms tend to be used as adverbs’ (2006: 199) was also excluded since it seemed unlikely that the respondents would use the non-standard form (e.g., **plays good* instead of *plays well*). Finally, the feature that inflectional endings are not always added (e.g., **T.sh. 100.000 are a lot.*) and that the plural marker *-s* is sometimes used for collective units (cf. **luggages*) were merged into the feature plural uncountables, viz. the plural usage of mass nouns or uncountable nouns.

In addition to Schmied’s features, we incorporated five features based on our own observations from over 20 years of linguistic research and teaching in Tanzania, as well as insights from neighbouring KenE (Buregeya 2021). The following are the features added:

- negation + *any*
- pro-drop (i.e., subject omission)
- *that* omission after certain constructions
- under-differentiation of *all* (instead of *both*)
- verb + prep. phrase complement

All 14 features used in this study are found in Table 2.

Table 2: Features, their definitions, and examples

Feature	Definition
article omission	The omission of the definite article in certain constructions, as in <i>*I am learning English language.</i>
gender variation	A lack of gender distinction in the pronouns <i>s/he</i> and <i>her/him</i> , e.g., <i>*My mother, he’s a primary school teacher</i> (Kortmann, Lunkenheimer, and Ehret 2020).
negation + <i>any</i>	The usage of the negation <i>no</i> combined with the indefinite pronoun <i>any</i> , e.g., <i>*There are no any people here.</i>

invariant tag questions	The overgeneralisation of the invariant tag <i>isn't it</i> where SE would use plural or past forms, e.g., <i>*The results are really good, isn't it?</i>
omission of particle/prep in phr/prep.verbs	The omission of a particle or a preposition, as in <i>*The Bajaj will pick you tomorrow.</i>
pro-drop (i.e., subject omission)	Omitting subjects from sentences when they can be inferred pragmatically or grammatically, e.g., <i>*When occurs with conditions, it gives the same result.</i>
wider range of uses for the progressive	Assigning the progressive form even to stative verbs, e.g., <i>*I am seeing different colours in that kanga.</i>
resumptive pron. overuse	Using pronouns that refer back to previously realised items within the same syntactic structure, e.g., <i>*The students in the school they found that they were hungry.</i>
plural uncountables	Assigning the regular -s marker to uncountable nouns, e.g., <i>*firewoods</i> and <i>*furnitures.</i>
<i>that</i> omission	The subjunction <i>that</i> is omitted after certain constructions, e.g., <i>*Another issue is some people keep driving.</i>
under-differentiation of <i>all</i>	The usage of <i>all</i> where SE would use <i>both</i> , e.g., <i>*I will come with Rose and Mary. All are my sisters.</i>
under-differentiation of prepositions	Using prepositions interchangeably, e.g., <i>*Tourists are coming in our country.</i>
verb complement variation	Using the infinitive where SE would use -ing form, e.g., <i>*She wants to stop to clean houses for a living.</i>
verb + prep.phrase complement	Using PP complements instead of NP complements after certain verbs, e.g., <i>*We will discuss about this problem tomorrow.</i>

5.2 Participants

The data collection took place at the College of Humanities at the University of Dar es Salaam in August 2024. A total of 15 respondents participated in the pilot study (nine students and six lecturers). A participant request was distributed to Master's students in Linguistics, which resulted in nine students (three female and six male) volunteering to participate. According to the background information they reported, their ages ranged between 23 and 37, and they started studying English when they were between four and nine years old. All but one student had a minority language as L1, that is, only one student listed Swahili as their L1, which is representative of the population in Tanzania (see section 1 above). The majority reported using English daily, mostly in relation to their studies but occasionally also with family and friends, in which case they used it for talking about more personal and/or societal matters.

Lecturers in various departments were approached for participation in the study. This resulted in six participants (three female and three male lecturers) from the departments of History, Literature, Philosophy, Creative Arts, and the Centre for Communication Studies at the College of Humanities being included as respondents. All lecturers were fluent in Swahili, but most did not consider it their L1.

5.3 Focus group discussions and interviews

After collecting and briefly analysing the completed questionnaires, the researchers held recorded focus group discussions with the students, divided into groups of three. The questions during the focus group sessions were follow-up prompts based on the students' questionnaire responses. The key questions for the students included, for example: 'Would you use the sentences given?', 'Why is this grammatical form not a good option?' 'Why would you say/write or not say/write this?'. The students were encouraged to elaborate on their answers, to discuss written and spoken language in relation to style, and to discuss the possible influence of Swahili.

The lecturers were also given the questionnaire but did not fill it in. Instead, the questionnaire was used as a basis for recorded semi-structured interviews aiming to find out the lecturers' assumptions about how the students would have answered. The respondents were allowed to comment freely on their assumptions and discuss their observations of students' language use. The key questions for the lecturers included: 'What do you

think the students would answer?', 'What linguistic constructions have you noticed your students using?', and 'Why do you think the students would opt for a certain grammatical construction?'.

The recordings of the semi-structured interviews and discussions serve to complement and verify the written data collected through the questionnaires.

5.4 Data analysis

The questionnaire results were entered into an Excel sheet with information on the frequencies of the options chosen for each feature, along with deviations from standard forms. The results were categorised into three groups: non-divergence, including speakers preferring SE forms over non-standard forms; inconclusiveness, showing mixed patterns; and divergence, in which TznE and SE show clearly different patterns in acceptance. The audio recordings of the focus group discussions and interviews were listened to by the researchers twice to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Students' and lecturers' discussions of each feature were summarised and entered into the Excel spreadsheet.

5.5 Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval (Ref. No: AB3/12(B)) from the University of Dar es Salaam through the Office of the Vice Chancellor, which, in accordance with circular letter Ref. No. MPEC/R/10/1, dated 4 July 1980, has been empowered to issue research clearances to staff members of the University of Dar es Salaam and their research collaborators on behalf of the Government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH).

6. Results and discussion

Although the limited material does not allow us to draw any statistically valid conclusions, some trends can be observed. Not surprisingly, over 50% of the participants reported that they would use non-standard forms when speaking, and over 30% reported using non-standard forms when writing. Interestingly, about 17% of the students reported that they would not say or even write the standard forms provided. This is noteworthy

since, overall, the students showed high awareness of which features were considered standard.

The interviews with the students and lecturers corroborate our findings in that both groups confirmed that the features asked about were commonly used. A few respondents even came up with additional examples of the features asked about; the students, especially, used the non-standard features themselves during the interviews.

The features were compared with those in the electronic Word Atlas of Varieties of English [eWAVE], which is 'an interactive database on morphosyntactic variation in spontaneous spoken English mapping 235 features from a dozen domains of grammar in now 51 varieties of English' (Kortmann, Lunkenheimer, and Ehret 2020). To our surprise, only three of the 14 features tested were found in eWAVE, where they were categorised as 'B', which means that the 'feature is neither pervasive nor extremely rare' (Kortmann, Lunkenheimer, and Ehret 2020). This pattern is in line with our findings, which show mixed patterns.

In the following sections, the answers are grouped according to whether they converge with SE features, namely non-divergence from the standard form, whether they are inconclusive and show mixed patterns, or whether they diverge from SE features.

6.1 Non-divergence

For a small number of features, students showed a high preference for the SE form. These include invariant tag questions, *that*-omission, and verb complement variation. One of the most notable findings was the high acceptance of the standard form for resumptive pronouns, with 85% (52 answers when adding up all sentence pairs) indicating they would use the standard, compared to only 15% (9 answers) who would use the non-standard form (see Table 3 for an example). It should be pointed out, though, that the examples adapted from Schmied (2006) are slightly odd and that some of the reluctance to use the non-standard forms could be due to that. For instance, the two phrases **The students in the school they found that they were hungry* and **One student, as well as the teachers, she went to eat* would not be written by anyone. Resumptive pronouns are common in other World Englishes and are mentioned in Buregeya, who describes their usage in KenE in dependent clauses, primarily relatives (2021: 115). Even so, the usage in TznE could also be due to Bantu influence, since subject markers are obligatorily marked on the verb even when a subject

noun phrase (NP) is present (Swahili: *Mwanafunzi mmoja, pamoja na walimu, wa-li-enda [they-PAST-go] kula. *One student, as well as the teachers, she went to eat.*).

Table 3: Frequencies for one sentence pair for the feature ‘resumptive pronoun overuse’ (SE variant in boldface)

	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>*The students in the school they found that they were hungry.</i>	3 yes	0 yes
<i>The students in the school found that they were hungry.</i>	9 yes	9 yes

The highest number of responses in favour of the standard form was for gender variation, meaning that the respondents claimed never to conflate gender (*he* and *she*, or *her* and *his*). Interestingly enough, many students and lecturers commented on this in the interviews. For instance, one of the lecturers remarked, ‘Especially my literature students, when they are stating characters [...] even in citations, one is using *he* for *she*’ (ML1⁵). Both lecturers and students say that pronouns are commonly used interchangeably in Tanzania and referred to the absence of masculine/feminine gender in Swahili. This potential interference from their L1/L2 is a possible explanation, but it could also be a case of simplification, as seen in other World Englishes (Schmied 2006: 198). This does not mean that people would not conflate gender in TznE, but we think this relates to the difference between performance and competence. A performance error is what people make when they are tired, hurried, or distracted, while a competence error is when they do not understand the underlying rules of the language. Many people would make a performance error and conflate, for instance, *he* and *she* in speech, even though they understand the underlying rule and would never mix the pronouns up in writing.

⁵ In this paper, respondent anonymisation uses a mix of letters and numbers. For example, ML1 refers to a male (M) lecturer (L), with the number 1 indicating his identification in the interviews. Likewise, for students we use FS1, for example, to refer to a female (F) student (S), with her number.

6.2 Inconclusiveness

For some of the 14 features checked, the answers could not clearly be separated into acceptable and unacceptable forms. In other words, the results did not clearly favour one form over the other. The features that showed inconclusive results include pro-drop (subject omission), a wider range of uses for the progressive, and under-differentiation of prepositions. Note that even though these features received mixed answers, specific questions/phrases could receive clear answers in favour of one phrase. The following discussion focuses on the latter two features in more detail since they illustrate this inconclusiveness particularly well.

Responses showing a wider range of uses for the progressive were particularly scattered. MS2 said, '*I see [...]* vs. *I'm seeing [...]*. I would say them all but also write them all. In Tanzania, one can find no problem with them in all contexts of writing as well as spoken'. This variation may be due to the phrasing of the test sentences, the specific lexical item used, or even idiolectal preferences. Notably, the non-standard *I am seeing [...]* was accepted twice as often as *Women are having [...]*. One of the lecturers said, 'When [students] speak, they will use, maybe, *Women have [...]* and when they write, they use *Women are having [...]*' (FL2). Another lecturer added, 'I ticked both' (FL3). Thus, while we cannot conclude that TznE consistently displays a wider range of uses for the progressive, it appears that constructions such as *I am seeing [...]* are more acceptable in TznE than in SE. When combining all responses for the three test sentences involving the progressive, there were 51 responses in favour of using the standard form, while there were 26 for the non-standard form. All in all, the progressive form deviating from SE occurred less frequently than expected. The phrase **They are going to school every morning* would be said or written half as many times as the standard *They go to school every morning*. A wider range of uses for the progressive form is reported for several other varieties of World Englishes, including UgE (Ssempuuma et al. 2016). This use has often been explained by a lack of distinction between the simple present and the progressive in the speakers' L1 (cf. Kisubika-Musoke 1986: 9, on Luganda). This explanation also seems plausible for the respondents in the present study, whose Swahili marks both meanings with the portmanteau morph *-na-*. In the data, the progressive was even extended to stative verbs, as in **I am seeing different colours in that kanga*, accepted by two-thirds of the respondents. A similar tendency has been observed in Maltese English, where verbs such as have

and be also appear in progressive forms (Hilbert and Krug 2012: 123–129), as seen in our study’s example **Women are having a lot of things to do at home*.

Another feature showing inconclusive results is the under-differentiation of *all* instead of *both* (see Table 4). In this case, both the non-standard and the standard forms received high acceptance rates. We attribute this pattern to transfer from Swahili, in which *both* is translated as *vyote viwili*, literally meaning **all two*. Consequently, the Swahili constructions *lete vyote* ‘bring all’ and *lete vyote viwili* ‘bring both’ are equally acceptable, which probably influences English usage. One participant (MS4) explained, ‘In Swahili, *both* and *all* share the same form. So, a native Swahili would opt for *all* ... because *wote* can [refer to] two or more participants, which translates to *all*’. Interestingly, this feature is not listed in eWAVE, nor is it reported for KenE.

Table 4: Frequencies for the feature ‘under-differentiation of *all*’ (SE variant in boldface)

[Context: Someone is holding two cups and you want them to bring them.]	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Please bring both!</i>	7 yes	5 yes
<i>*Please bring all!</i>	7 yes	5 yes

6.3 Divergence

Even though most of the answers converged with SE, some features stood out. The divergence was clearly shown in the following features, which will each be discussed below:

- article omission
- negation + *any*
- omission of particle/preposition in phrasal/prepositional verbs
- plural uncountables
- verb + prepositional phrase complement

The omission of the definite article emerges as the most widely accepted non-standard feature among the speakers in our survey, which was also corroborated by the lecturers in the interviews. The omission is so

prevalent in certain constructions that we believe it has become grammaticalised in TznE. Eight students (out of nine) would write, and all nine would say, **The conference was held in Dar es Salaam region* (see also Kimambo 2020). Similar trends of grammaticalising certain expressions are reported for KenE, where Buregeya (2021: 71) claims that **Nairobi area* is widely accepted. The tendency to omit articles extends to language names, as evidenced in our survey and supported by Buregeya (2021: 74–75), although his findings predominantly pertain to the expression **English language*. Our observations indicate that articles are omitted not only in such expressions but also when referencing lesser-known languages. Data from the focus group discussions on 12 August 2024 revealed the phrase **in Sukuma language*⁶. The lecturers in our survey attribute this feature to the absence of articles in Swahili. Nevertheless, this characteristic is a common feature of other World Englishes and is not necessarily a linguistic transfer from Swahili, which, like all Bantu languages, does not employ any articles.

A feature that we had observed and thus added to the survey was the negation *no* plus the indefinite pronoun *any* (Table 5). This was not included in any previous study nor mentioned in the literature. Both students and lecturers attested to using the non-standard form **no any*, and it was also heard during the interviews. One-third of the respondents even rejected the most common standard form *There is no food left*, both in speech and in writing. When asked about the reason for using **no any*, both students and lecturers explained that it serves to emphasise the negation in the statement. Several did not seem to know that **no any* is ungrammatical in SE. In fact, all nine students said that they would use it (see Table 5).

Table 5: Frequencies for the feature ‘negation + *any*’ (SE variants in boldface)

	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>*There is no any food left.</i>	9 yes	6 yes
<i>There is not any food left.</i>	2 yes	1 yes
<i>There is no food left.</i>	7 yes	5 yes

⁶ Sukuma is a Bantu language and the largest language in Tanzania after Swahili.

The omission of particles/prepositions in phrasal/prepositional verbs is another feature we added. We observed phrases like **The bajaji will pick you tomorrow morning*, which would be used in speaking by many respondents, albeit not written. Furthermore, the phrase **It cropped in conversation* would be said by over half of the respondents. In our experience, this phenomenon is widespread in TznE, even though it has not been reported for KenE or EAfE. The omission was also confirmed by the lecturers in the interviews and explained as Swahili transfer, since there are no equivalent particles/prepositions in Swahili. This is only partly true, since Swahili usually does not make use of particles/prepositions, as seen in the Swahili phrase *alinidanganya*, which translates literally as ‘*he lied me’, but can instead make use of an applicative morpheme (verbal derivation).

The fourth feature that had high numbers for the non-standard forms is when the verb takes a prepositional phrase complement instead of a noun phrase complement, as seen in **We will discuss about this problem tomorrow*. In Schmied’s survey (2006), this falls under variation in patterns and particles of phrasal/prepositional verbs. Buregeya, investigating KenE, has these two features as NP complements used after certain verbs instead of prepositional phrase (PP) ones, and PP complements used after certain verbs instead of NP ones. According to Buregeya (2021: 93), adding a preposition to certain verbs, including *discuss*, is a widespread phenomenon in many varieties of English (not only in Africa). When asked why they would use *discuss about* in both speaking and writing, MS2 said, ‘Yeah, because it feels to me like we may talk about something. We use a preposition like *talk about*. Although the first option was plausible, I felt *discuss about* was more appropriate’. That said, this particular addition could be due to transfer from Swahili, where *kujadili*, corresponding to ‘to discuss’, exists but is often replaced by *kuongea kuhusu* ‘to talk about’.

Finally, a feature where many respondents favoured the non-standard form, albeit with some internal variation, is plural uncountables. This feature concerns the plural usage of mass or uncountable nouns. According to Schmied (2006: 198), there is a strong tendency in EAfE to disregard ‘the grammatical distinction of countable vs. uncountable nouns’, and in the eWAVE survey, plurals such as *furnitures*, *equipments*, and *advices* showed high frequency in many English L2 varieties (Buregeya 2021: 68). Buregeya suggests that usage of the plural for mass or uncountable nouns

is lexically dependent in KenE, which is also supported by our data. For instance, certain lexemes such as **furnitures* got scattered responses, while the lexemes **evidences* and **firewoods* stood out in that the non-standard was preferred. Especially for **Gather as many firewoods as you can*, all of the respondents preferred the non-standard form, even in writing. The lecturers added, in the interviews, '**Firewoods* is the Tanzanian way of referring to many pieces of firewood'. Note that *kuni* 'firewood (pl)' is plural in Swahili and is usually used as a mass noun (cf. *ukuni* 'a stick of firewood'), which may have influenced TznE.

An interesting case is the word *importance*, which scored fairly high for the standard form in the questionnaire, while in the interviews, the students said that both *importance* and **importances* are acceptable. The usage of *importance* in the singular plus a plural verb was tested, but not the plural ending on the noun itself. One of the lecturers (ML2) volunteered the form **What are the importances of water?*. The usage of the uncountable noun in the singular plus a plural-marked verb also appears to be fairly common in Tanzanian steering documents and the like. In the steering documents of The National Examinations Council of Tanzania, one finds phrases such as *six importance of...* and *are the importance of...* (see, e.g. NECTA 2021: 45; NECTA 2016: 42). Finally, turning to Swahili does not give us clues as to the usage. In Swahili, *umuhimu* 'importance' is an uncountable noun, with no plural form.

7. Conclusions

Using acceptability judgement data contrasting Standard British English with non-standard forms, the overall aim of this pilot study was to identify some morphosyntactic features typical of contemporary TznE to be used as a starting point for future comprehensive analysis. Both university students and lecturers participated in the study. The findings show that over half of the participants reported that they would use non-standard forms when speaking, and a third reported using non-standard forms when writing. For some of the features, the answers were not clearly in favour of one feature over another, but on the level of specific questions/phrases, the answers were remarkably similar. For instance, the feature plural uncountables received inconclusive answers in general, while the specific non-standard phrase **Gather as many firewoods as you can* was, surprisingly, given by all respondents. Overall, the participants clearly showed high awareness of which features are non-standard and

commented on how most ‘other people’ use them. The interviews, by and large, confirmed the responses to the questionnaires. If anything, even more non-standard forms were used in and accepted during the dialogues.

When the divergence from the standard was analysed further, it became clear that the approximately 17% who reported that they would not say or write the standard forms follow a pattern. The deviation from the standard was not random and was clearly tied to a limited number of features. The most used non-standard features were article omission, negation *no* + *any*, omission of particle/prepositions in phrasal/prepositional verbs, plural uncountables, and verb + prepositional phrase complement. Some of these features have not, to our knowledge, been documented in previous studies, and they occur in certain settings and expressions that we believe are becoming grammaticalised in TznE. These findings stand in contrast to Schneider’s (2007) claim that TznE was stuck. They seem to suggest that TznE is in the process of moving further into the nativisation stage, indicating more stability. Judging from these few selected constructions, we can reasonably argue that grammaticalisation merits further research. Other directions for the future include describing the entire variety of TznE and continuing to explore whether TznE shares traits with other New Englishes rather than displaying contact-induced influence from neighbouring Bantu languages, including Swahili. Finally, using corpora of both spoken and written materials would be fruitful.

Although this is a pilot study, it shows that there are major features in TznE that differ from SE, and even features that differ from other EAFEs. According to Schmied, the most notable aspect of TznE morphosyntax is its ‘fuzziness’ and that it is not a distinct national variety (Schmied 2012: 456). We disagree. Our results show that there is such a thing as a grammaticalising TznE variety with its own (albeit developing) rules.

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Authors’ contributions

Anna-Lena Fredriksson (ORCID 0009-0000-9340-5506) and Malin Petzell conceived the idea, developed tools, and analysed findings.

Fredriksson (ORCID 0000-0002-0774-5131) and Gerald Kimambo (ORCID 0000-0002-5859-5356) collected and analysed data. All three authors verified analytical methods, discussed results, and contributed to the final manuscript.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for English in Tanzania

We are investigating the usage of English in Tanzania and we have noticed that there are some things that people say (or write) that are different from the English used in say the UK or the States. We are trying to find the linguistic traits (grammar) that are typical of ‘Tanzanian English’.

Please read the sentences and choose the one that you would prefer from each pair. You can also tick both if you find both acceptable. Also, you can choose if you would use the sentence when speaking or when writing (or both).

Example: The ticks and X’s below mean you would say both sentences, but you would only use the second one in writing.

Sentences	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>That is a lot of money.</i>	yes (tick)	no (X)
<i>That are a lot of money.</i>	yes (tick)	yes (tick)

Which sentence would you use?

1	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Women have a lot of things to do at home.</i>		
<i>Women are having a lot of things to do at home.</i>		

2	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The name cropped up in conversation.</i>		
<i>The name cropped in conversation.</i>		

3	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The fact is that the economic situation is desperate.</i>		
<i>The fact is the economic situation is desperate.</i>		

4	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>We will discuss this problem tomorrow.</i>		
<i>We will discuss about this problem tomorrow.</i>		

5	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Vital evidences were destroyed.</i>		
<i>Vital evidence was destroyed.</i>		

6	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Another issue is some people keep driving.</i>		
<i>Another issue is that some people keep driving.</i>		

7	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>She took the boat over the lake.</i>		
<i>She took the boat across the lake.</i>		

8	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>I will come with Rose and Mary. All are my sisters.</i>		
<i>I will come with Rose and Mary. Both are my sisters.</i>		

9	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>They are going to school every morning.</i>		
<i>They go to school every morning.</i>		

10	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>I am going to the supermarket now.</i>		
<i>I am going to supermarket now.</i>		

11	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>There are not any people here.</i>		
<i>There are no people here.</i>		
<i>There are no any people here.</i>		

12	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Gather as many firewoods as you can!</i>		
<i>Gather as much firewood as you can!</i>		

13	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Tourists are coming into our country.</i>		
<i>Tourists are coming in our country.</i>		

14	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The students in the school found that they were hungry.</i>		
<i>The students in the school they found that they were hungry.</i>		

15 [Context: Someone is holding two cups and you want them to bring them.]	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Please bring both!</i>		
<i>Please bring all!</i>		

16	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>What are the importance of water?</i>		
<i>What is the importance of water?</i>		

17	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>That was good, wasn't it?</i>		
<i>That was good, isn't it?</i>		

18	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>One student, as well as the teachers, she went to eat.</i>		
<i>One student, as well as the teachers, went to eat.</i>		

19	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>When occurs with conditions, it gives the same result.</i>		
<i>When it occurs with conditions, it gives the same result.</i>		

20	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>I am learning English language.</i>		
<i>I am learning the English language.</i>		

21	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The results are really good, isn't it?</i>		
<i>The results are really good, aren't they?</i>		

22	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>I have several new furniture in my house.</i>		
<i>I have several new furnitures in my house.</i>		

23	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>There is no any food left.</i>		
<i>There is not any food left.</i>		
<i>There is no food left.</i>		

24	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The bajaji will pick you tomorrow morning.</i>		
<i>The bajaji will pick you up tomorrow morning.</i>		

25	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>I see different colours in that kanga.</i>		
<i>I am seeing different colours in that kanga.</i>		

26	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The signs which indicating progress are increasing.</i>		
<i>The signs which indicate progress are increasing.</i>		

27	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>She wants to stop cleaning houses for a living.</i>		
<i>She wants to stop to clean houses for a living.</i>		

28	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>The conference was held in the Dar es Salaam region.</i>		
<i>The conference was held in Dar es Salaam region.</i>		

29 [Context: Amina is talking with her husband who is grateful for the dinner she cooked.]	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>She liked his cooking.</i>		
<i>She liked her cooking.</i>		
<i>He liked his cooking.</i>		
<i>He liked her cooking.</i>		

30	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>Me and my friend were walking to university.</i>		
<i>Me and my friend we were walking to university.</i>		

31	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>T.sh. 100.000 is a lot.</i>		
<i>T.sh. 100.000 are a lot</i>		

32	I would say it.	I would write it.
<i>He lied me.</i>		
<i>He lied to me.</i>		

Date and signature by interviewer