

**DECENTRALIZING THE RP CENTRAL VOWELS: A CASE STUDY**

**BY**

**ELOHO NAOMI UVWIAMA (MISS)**

**ART2000272**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,  
FACULTY OF ARTS,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,  
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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
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**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by **Eloho Naomi Uvwiana (Miss)** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin city under my supervision.

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Dr Jancita Benjamin Ohwodede.  
**(Project Supervisor)**

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Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicated this work to GOD ALMIGHTY, JEHOVAH EL-CHECED, THE GOD OF LOVING-KINDNESS, who has been my greatest support. By the leading of His Holy Spirit, He has ordered and guided my path in this essay, and I say that I am extremely and forever thankful to God for his presence and support. I also want to dedicate this work to my family, my parents to be exact. I thank God for keeping them alive and healthy till this time to see their first child progress this far in my academic life. I am grateful to them for their showers of love, care, blessings and guidance since I gained admission into this incredible institution. Thank you, Lord for preserving them. To my family, Mr. Lucky Edirin Uvwiana, Mrs. Grace Onome Uvwiana, Ashley Iroro Uvwiana, Anita Orevaoghene Uvwiana, Perfect Gift Omena Uvwiana, thank you all. To my supportive friends who I love and cherish dearly, Adesuwa, Cherish, Precious, Emmanuella, Tariela and Chioma. Thank God for bringing you my way.

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My greatest and most heartfelt gratitude goes to God in Heaven who has never failed me since the day I gained admission into this great institution. The Lord has been my guide all through my life in school; in my academics, sports, my friends, my foes, and lecturers. By the help of the Holy Spirit, He has ordered and directed my steps because honestly, I have no strength of my own and I am grateful for his presence. I express my gratitude, Lord for you have been FAITHFUL.

I'd also like to dedicate this work to my project supervisor, Dr. (Mrs.) Jacinta Benjamin-Ohwodede, I'd like to say a big thank you. You have been an inspiration to me since 100lvl and I must say, when you taught us Enl 120 I was deeply marvelled and impressed by your accent and use of words. Your mode of communication in Phonetics made me love British English more than I originally did. It inspired me and I followed your teachings and that's part of the reason I chose to work on Phonetics for my long essay. I am truly grateful for your corrections and guidance on my work.

This work is dedicated to my family. My father, My mother and my three siblings. I am so thankful to God for bringing me to this world through you. Thank you, Lord for I am grateful for keeping and preserving their lives till today.

Special gratitude also go to the HOD, Prof. (Mrs.) H.O. Okolocha, and my lecturers Prof. Adeleke, DR. (Mrs). D.L. Efobi, Dr. I. A. Ebga and Prof. A. P. Mamudu for their teachings and support through my four years in the University of Benin.







## ABSTRACT

The study investigates how the speakers of different dialects, accents shift from the standard pronunciation of the RP to challenge the norms of speech production and foster understanding for diverse language and accents. The aim of this study is in two folds: 1) To document the specific phonetic changes occurring in RP central vowels including mergers, shifts in vowel space, and increased variability, 2) To investigate the sociolinguistic factors contributing to decentralization, exploring the influence in regional accents, and social class.

This research is done through Qualitative Research Methodology, guided by David Stampe and Patricia Jane Donegan's Natural Phonology, as it addresses the central idea that phonological phenomena are best understood as Natural responses to the challenges of speech production and perception.

The collection of data is done by recording, critically viewing, and analysing the decentralised vowels in words used by student speakers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to challenge the traditional view of RP as fixed and unchanging standard. It also demonstrates how different accents are subject to change and variation.

#### **1.2 Scope of Study**

The scope of this study investigates how vowel pronunciation can reflect on diverse identities and linguistic backgrounds of student speakers or non-native speakers of English. By decentralizing these vowels, we get to challenge the traditions norms of speech and encourage a wider understanding of diversity in different accents.

#### **1.3 Methodology**

This study will adopt the use of qualitative research method for data collection and data analysis. This type of research helps understand and interpret social phenomenon like beliefs, attitudes, human behaviour, experiences etc. This method allows in depth and further questioning of respondents based on their responses in the speech production of students. The collection of data will be done through the gathering of speech from students; how they articulate their words and its transcription. In this section, we provide

the methodology to be employed to carry out this research to understand the decentralization the RP central vowels.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

This study uses Natural Phonology as the theory of phonological structure, acquisition and change. This evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century studies of phonetics and phonetic change, dialect variation, child speech and synchronic alternation, and phonological perception.

The important aspect of it is that the living sound patterns of languages in each individual are ruled by forces implicit in human vocalisation and perception. This theory was proposed by prominent linguists and phonologists David Stampe and Patricia Jane Donegan in the 1960s.

According to Stampe, the implicit phonetic forces are made manifest through processes, in the sense of mental substitution which enables us to perceive in others' speech the intentions underlying these superficial phonetic adaptations. It means that we can identify and understand the intentions of their utterance given their phonetic disabilities.

David Stampe introduced the concept of "naturalness" with a clear theoretical foundation into modern linguistic discussion (Hurch & Nathan, 231). Natural phonology focuses on explaining and answering the "why" questions rather than on precise description. This study attempts to explore the basic tenets of significant approaches to deal with the sound

system of a language. Natural Phonology basic thesis is that phonetical systems are phonetically motivated. Natural Phonology was also an alternative to both structural approaches and generative approaches i.e. terms of the structural approach, it is called “phonotactics” and “morphine structure” while in generative phonology, it is called “restrictions”.

The main tenet of modern natural phonology has remained valid where its interpretations may vary. This is because it has a wider perspective that reaches far into the parts of external evidence and rely on a solid functional and semiotic foundation.

Dongan and Stampe advocates the idea of this theory is a natural reflection of the needs and capacities of users rather than mere conventional institutions. Natural phonology intends to explain that its subject matter follows naturally from the nature of things. It is devised and developed by Stampe and Dongan proposing genetically inhibited set of phonetically natural processes as required by a specific language. Thus, they can be derived from the most general laws of human interaction with nature.

The theory also operates with phonological processes, which create natural responses of the human vocal and perceptual systems to the challenges or difficulties faced in the production and perception of speech. For example, it is easy to produce a voiced stop than a voiceless stop, as well as voiced velar stop than an alveolar one, while a bilabial one is the easiest of the three. Processes perform substitutions in order to adapt the

speaker's phonological intentions to his/her phonetic capacities as well as enable the listener to decode the intentions from the flow of speech. They are either context sensitive: Assimilatory substitutions (Lenitions) or context free: dissimilatory ones (fortitions). Processes account for all these types of behaviour (normal performance, child language, second language acquisition, casual speech, aphasia and other disorders, errors, etc). Some natural processes are limited by the addition of contextual restrictions. In English, there is a process that deletes [h] before sonorants affecting the sequences [hn], [hl], [hr], [hw]. The context free process is ordered first and governs the lexicon giving an underlying vowel non-nasal. The context sensitivity process provides surface structure for the nasalization of the vowels on a nasal context.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship.**

Decentralising the RP central vowels has attracted many scholars of which they have written extensively on. A good number of them are mentioned below and reviewed in this section. Decentralising the RP central vowels is an interesting topic that touches various aspects of linguistics and social identity that helps enhance communication among different accents and dialects.

John Wells' work titled "Accents of English" examines the phonetic and sociolinguistic aspects of English accents. Wells also discussed the characteristics of RP, including its vowels sounds, and contrast with other regional accents. His works indirectly supports

the idea of decentralising RP vowels through the examination of different English accents. He argues that no single accents including RP, should be viewed as the standard this book also looks at how different accents carry social meanings and implication.

Akamo O Princewill in his journal titled “Phonological Accuracy, Approximation, and Substitution of English Central Vowels by Educated Yoruba English Speakers” among university students in Nigeria: A Study on the RP central vowels is important to the intelligibility of the Educated Yoruba English speakers (EYEs). Previous linguistic studies on EYE focused massively on the general description of English central vowels and the geo-tribal peculiarities of the realisation of the English central vowels. However, not much attention was paid to the English Central vowels on achieving standard Nigerian English pronunciation that will be recognised globally. Therefore, this study was proposed to examine the change in the English central vowels by the Educated Yoruba English speakers, with a view to determine the nature of their articulatory accuracy, approximation, and substitution of the English central vowels.

Dr. Shazia Kousar, Abbas, and Abrar in their study undertook “An Acoustic Study of the Role of Consistency or Input in Acquisition of English Central Vowels in Pakistan “, and his study aims at observing the consistency of input on the acquisition of English central vowels /ə, ɜ:, ʌ/ in regards to jaw opening, tongue fronting, and duration of vowels. The researchers took three groups, A, B, and C, from the middle level of school girls and

allocated them to experiment groups. After the test, the data shows that central vowels from group A, particularly vowel / ʌ /, are affected by the consistent exposure to RP vowels contrary to that of group B and group C.

This article's by a well-known linguist named Peter Roach, and he argues that those central RP vowels, [ɜ:], [ə], and [ʌ], have definitely been shifting downwards over the past few decades. He uses some really interesting acoustic data to back it up.

Another interesting one is by a researcher named Jenny Cheshire. She looked at how those central vowels are pronounced in different regions of England, and found some major differences that point to decentralization happening, Jenny Cheshire's research found some really interesting examples. She noticed that in some northern English cities, the vowel in words like "put" is starting to sound much more like the "u" in "luck". That's definitely a shift away from the classic RP pronunciation.

Another example from Cheshire's research is the vowel in words like "up" or "cup". She found that it's becoming less centralized and more like the vowel in "hut" in some dialects. Also, the vowel in words like "bird" or "word" is becoming less centralized too. It's moving closer to the vowel in "bud".

Another interesting study comes from a team of researchers at University College London. They found evidence that the way those central vowels are pronounced can

actually change depending on who you're talking to and the social situation. This suggests that the traditional RP pronunciation might not be as fixed as we once thought.

Let's look at one more. There's a paper by two linguists, called Hawkins and Midgley, that focused on the history of English pronunciation. They trace the decentralization of those central vowels back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing it's a long-term trend. Hawkins and Midgley's research shows that the decentralization of those central RP vowels isn't something new. They found evidence that the vowels in words like "put", "bird", and "cup" have been gradually shifting downwards since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This means that the centralization we associate with classic RP is actually a relatively recent development. From the reviewed collection of literature above, it is plain to see that a lot has been done by scholars on RP central vowels from the academic aspect to other fields of study.

While previous research has focused on the RP central vowels, this research focuses on decentralizing the RP central vowels as it takes a different avenue by analysing the change and how the RP central vowels can be less centralised. In other words, gradually shifting the RP central vowels from the traditional norms of pronunciation to a more simpler way of pronunciation.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This study demonstrates that decentralizing the RP central vowels number 10, 11, and 12 exemplifies the dynamic nature of change, reflecting both internal phonetic pressures and external sociolinguistic influences on a different accent.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION IN CENTRAL VOWEL 10/Λ/.

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the evolution of English pronunciation in central vowels in English-speaking students who have different dialectal backgrounds, and the idea of moving away from a single standard pronunciation towards a more inclusive view of language variation. This is what we mean by Decentralization. By decentralizing the central RP vowels (/ə/, /ɜ:/, /ʌ/), we tend to simplify the strict rules of the RP in order to improve the students' overall pronunciation. Here, we will look at instances where vowel 10 will be decentralised in the sense that words in vowel 10 will be replaced or substituted with a more simpler version or the nearest vowel to produce such sounds.

## 2.2 Decentralised words by Students in Vowel 10 and their transcription

### 2.2.1 Data Presentation

The table below shows a selected number of words that is used among students and how they have been decentralised in vowel 10 along side their transcription.

<b>WORDS</b>	<b>CENTRAL VOWELS</b>	<b>DECENTRALISED VOWELS</b>
But	/bʌt/	/bɒt/
Hut	/hʌt/	/hɒt/
Duck	/dʌk/	/dɒk/
Jump	/dʒʌmp/	/dʒɒmp/
Suck	/sʌk/	/sɒk/
Pop	/pʌp/	/pɒp/
Among	/ə'mʌŋ/	/æmɒŋ/
Luck	/lʌk/	/lɒk/
Muck	/mʌk/	/mɒk/

Thumb	/θʌm/	/tʊmb/
Crush	/krʌʃ/	/krʊʃ/
Cut	/kʌt/	/kʊt/
Fuss	/fʌs/	/fʊs/
Run	/rʌn/	/rʊn/
Fun	/fʌn/	/fʊn/
Tuck	/tʌk/	/tʊk/
Wonderful	/'wʌn.də.fl/	/wʊdəfʊl/
Sudden	/'sʌdən/	/sʊdn/
Become	/bɪ'kʌm/	/bɪkʊm/
Around	/ə'raʊnd/	/əɾænd/
Murder	/'mɜ:.dər/	/mʊdə/
Cluck	/klʌk/	/klʊk/
Gush	/gʌʃ/	/gʊʃ/

Above	/ə' bʌv/	/æbəʊv/
Cup	/kʌp/	/kɒp/
Dusk	/dʌk/	/dɒk/
Young	/jʌŋ/	/jɒŋ/
Hug	/hʌg/	/hɒg/
Blush	/blʌʃ/	/blɒʃ/
Sun	/sʌn/	/sɒn/

### 2.2.2 Data Analysis

The table above shows a representation of how words used by students are decentralised in vowel 10. Studies have shown that students, particularly those who are non-native speakers of English, often have difficulty accurately producing the central vowels of RP accent of English. Most students have challenges in pronouncing words that includes the central vowels. In the case of vowel 10, it is seen in the table above where most of the words were replaced or substituted by vowel 6 and vowel 4. The table likely illustrates how students often mispronounce English words, especially those with the central vowels.

The phenomenon of decentralisation in vowel 10, as observed in the table, refers to a shift in the pronunciation of certain words by students, particularly non-native English speakers. Below is the analysis of the decentralised words used by students;

*'But'*- The first word 'but' is a conjunction used in sentences. But in this case, it is being pronounced as /bʊt/ instead of /bʌt/. For instance, 'I went to the lecturers' office (bot) he wasn't there. The 'but' here is now decentralised from 'but' /bʌt/ to 'bot' /bʊt/.

*'Hut'*- A hut is a small crude shelter used for dwelling. It is being pronounced as /hʊt/ instead of /hʌt/. For instance, 'my classmate, Tega, lives in a (hot)'. This example shows the shift from the standard pronunciation to the decentralised form. That is from 'hut' /hʌt/ to 'hot' /hʊt/.

*'Duck'*- The word 'duck' refers to a small wide or domesticated web-footed broad-billed bird usually having a depressed body and small feet. Some students with poor pronunciation skills tend to mispronounce or decentralise the word 'duck' /dʌk/ as 'doc' /dʊk/ in their speech.

*'Jump'*- the term 'jump' means movement forward by leaps and bounce. Students tend to shift the central vowel 'jump' /dʒʌmp/ to 'jomp' /dʒɔmp/. For example, 'Peter can (jomp) well', where 'jump' is pronounced as 'jomp'.

*'Suck'*- the term 'suck' means to draw something in by or as if by a vacuum. This word tend to decentralise from 'suck' /sʌk/ to 'sock' /sɒk/. Example, 'He likes to (sock) his juice loudly'.

*'Pop'*- 'Pop' means to bulge outward. It also refers to an informal term for a father. In addition, it also means a term or type of art or music used commonly among the young people. Students tend to decentralise 'pop' /pʌp/ for 'pop' /pɒp/.

*'Among'*- 'Among' means being a part of something or a group of things. This is likely to decentralise from 'among' /ə'mʌŋ/ to among /æmɔŋ/ in terms of pronunciation. For example, 'Sonia isn't among the team', 'Who among you took the cake?'

*'Luck'*- the term 'luck' means an unknown or an unpredictable phenomenon that leads to a favourable outcome. This word is decentralised when the pronunciation shifts from 'luck' lʌk to 'lock' /lɒk/. For instance, 'you are in (lock), I was about to close my shop.'

*'Muck'*- This means soil with mud, muck or mire. This word tend to decentralise when pronounced wrongly. Instead of it to be pronounced as /mʌk/, its been pronounced as /mɒk/. For example, 'the child had (mock) on his shirt when he was playing in the garden'.

*'Thumb'*- This is the thick short innermost digit of the forelimb. This tend to decentralise not only in the central vowel but also on the thither sound, thereby substituting it with a consonant sound, 't' and changing the voiceless bilabial plosive /b/ to a voiced bilabial plosive . For example, 'the dog bit my (tomb)'. Here, the word 'thumb' /θʌm/ is now replaced with / tɒmb/.

*'Crush'*- This term 'crush' means to compress with violence, out of natural shape. It also means a temporary love of adolescence. This term is often decentralised when pronounced by students from /krʌʃ/ to /krɔʃ/. For example, 'He used the hammer to crush the ice', 'Arnold is my crush from high school'. These examples show how the word 'crush' has been replaced or substituted with /krʌʃ/.

*'Cut'* – The word 'cut' refers to a share of profit, to make an incision or separation. This word tend to decentralise where it may be mispronounced from 'cut' /kʌt/ to 'cot' /kɔt/. For example, 'She cut her hair short', 'Where's my cut from the last gig'. This shows the replacement/ decentralization of the central vowel in cut.

*'Wonderful'*- The term 'wonderful' can be used as intensifiers. It means extraordinarily good or great. The word is decentralised when replaced with vowel 4 from 'wonderful' /'wʌn.də.fl/ to 'wondafu' /wɔdæfʊ/. For instance, 'the movie was wondafu'.

*'Blush'* - The term 'blush' the sudden reddening, as in embarrassment or shame or some form of shyness or modesty. Students often mispronounce 'blush'/blʌʃ/ for blosh/blɔʃ/. In other words, replacing vowel 10 to vowel 6. Example, 'Omena likes to (blos)h'.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has successfully examined the decentralization of vowel 10 in the speech production of students, particularly those who are non-native speakers of English. From the above research, it displays the detailed transcription of each word provided and it distinguishes the subtle differences in vowel quality can be challenging especially for learners who are still developing their skills in pronunciation. It shows how students simplify the central vowels to aid fluency in their speech production without following the rules.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DECENTRALIZING THE USAGE OF DIFFERENT ACCENTS IN CENTRAL VOWEL 11 /ɜ:/

#### 3.1 Introduction

Decentralization, in the context of phonetics, refers to the process where a single vowel sound becomes more variable and less distinct within a language or dialect. Vowel 11, typically seen as /ɜ:/ represents the mid-front unrounded vowel in words like “bed, met, pen, etc.”. This study aims to focus on decentralising the RP central vowel number 11 among students. It also tends to explore how the changing pronunciation of vowel 11 might affect intelligibility in the speech production of student speakers of different dialects. We will now illustrate with examples and discuss the potential changes that lead to further shifts in the vowel system.

#### 3.2 Data Presentation

The table below shows a list of selected number of words used by students to clarify the decentralization of vowel 11

<b>WORDS</b>	<b>CENTRAL VOWELS</b>	<b>DECENTRALISED VOWELS</b>
First	/fɜ:st/	/fest/
Work	/wɜ:k/	/wɔ:k/

World	/wɜːld/	/wɔːd/
Service	/'sɜːvɪs/	/sevis/
Early	/'ɜːli/	/eli/
Research	/rɪə'sɜːtʃ/ /'riː.sɜːtʃ/	/reseʃ/ /resæʃ/
Person	/'pɜːsən/ /'pɜːsn/	/pesin/
Certain	/'sɜːtn/	/setin/
Third	/θɜː(ɹ)d/	/ted/ /tɔːd/
Church	/tʃɜːtʃ/	/tʃɔːʃ/ /ʃɔːʃ/
Word	/wɜːd/	/wɔːd/
Sir	/'sɜː(ɹ)/	/sæ/
Certainly	/'sɜːtnli/	/setinli/
Personal	/'pɜː.sən.əl/	/pesinæl/
University	/'juːnɪ'vɜːsətiː/	/juːnivesiti/ /juːnivæsitei/
Herself	/hɜː'self/	/haːsef/
Girl	/'gɜːl/	/'gel/

Turn	/tɜ:n/	/tɔ:n/
Term	/tɜ:m/	/tem/
Chairman	/'tʃɛ:mən/	/tʃæman/
Concern	/kən'sɜ:n/	/kʌnsen/
Purpose	/'pɜ:pəs/	/pʌpəʊz/
Surface	/'sɜ:fɪs/	/sɔ:feɪs/
Firm	/fɜ:m/ /fɜ-m/	/fem/
Learn	/lɜ:n/	/len/
Search	/sɜ:tʃ/	/sæʃ/
Perfect	/'pɜ:fɪkt/	/pɛfet/ /pæet/
Birth	/bɜ:θ/	/bet/
Bird	/bɜ:d/	/bed/

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The table above shows the representation of how vowel 11 are decentralised by Students.

Below is the analysis of those words.

- *'First'*- This means indicating the beginning unit of a series. It also means the initial time something is supposed to begin. Students tend to decentralise the word

‘first’ /fɜːst/ and replace it with /fest/ in their pronunciation. Example, I was here first.

Where First is bring pronounced as /fest/.

- *‘Work’*- This means the activity directed towards making or doing something.

The occupation for which you are paid. In this case, students tend to decentralise

where the word ‘work’ /wɜːk/ now shifts to /wɔːk/ in its pronunciation. For

instance, The boy can work hard. Where work is been pronounced as /wɔːk/.

- *‘World’*- This means all of your experiences that determines how things appear to

you. It is also the third planet from the sun we live on. Students tend to

decentralise where the pronunciation of world changes from /wɜːld/ to /wɔːd/.

For example, My dad is the best in the whole world. Where ‘world’ is pronounced

as /wɔːd/.

- *‘Service’*- This means a work done by one person or group that benefits another.

This also means an act of help or assistance. This word tend to decentralise when

the word shifts from /ˈsɜːvɪs/ to /sævis/. For example, Chika went to service his car

at the mechanic workshop. Where service is pronounced as /sævis/.

- *'Early'* - This means before the usual time or expected period. It also means an expectation in the near future. This can decentralise when students pronounce it as /eli/ instead /'ɜ:li/. For example, I woke up early today. Where 'early' is pronounced as /eli/.
- *'Research'* - This means a systematic investigation to establish facts. It also means a search for knowledge. The word 'research' tend to decentralise from /rɪ'sɜ:tʃ/ or /'i:.sɜ:tʃ/ to /reseʃ/ or /resæsʃ/. Example, I did a research on the assignment. Where 'research' is pronounced as /reseʃ/ or /resæsʃ/.
- *'Person'* - This means a human being( usually with clothing). This word can be decentralise by students if there is a shift in the pronunciation from /'pɜ:sən/ /'pɜ:sn/ to /pesin/. For example, That person just left. Where 'person is being pronounced as /pesin/.
- *'Certain'* - This word means having or feeling no doubt; confidence and assured. Reliable in effect or operation. The word 'certain' tend to decentralise when there is a shift in the pronunciation from /'sɜ:tn/ to /setin/. For example, I am

certain that the rain would fall today. Where ‘certain’ is pronounced as /setɪn/.

- *‘Third’*- This means one of the three equal parts of a divisible whole. It also means coming next after second and just before forth in position. The word tend to decentralise by students from /θɜ:(ɹ)d/ to /tɔ:d/ or /ted/. For example, Meet me on the third floor. Where ‘third’ is pronounced as either /tɔ:d/ or /ted/.
- *‘Church’*- This means one of the groups of Christians who have their own beliefs and forms of worship. It also means a service conducted in a house of worship. The word can decentralise when there is a shift in the pronunciation from /tʃɜ:tʃ/ to /tʃɔ:f/ or /ʃɔ:f/. For example, we are all going to church on Wednesday. Where ‘church’ is being pronounced as either /tʃɔ:f/ or /ʃɔ:f/.
- *‘Word’*- This means a unit of language that native speakers can identify. This can be decentralise by students when changing the pronunciation from ‘word’ /wɜ:d/ to /wɔd/. For example, can I have a word with you? With this example, the term ‘word’ can be pronounced as /wɔd/.
- *‘Sir’*- This term refers to address a man. Students tend to decentralise the word

‘sir’ especially in their school environment. For example, excuse me, sir. ‘Sir’ in this context, is being decentralised from /'sɜ:(ɹ)/ to /sæ/.

- *‘Certainly’*- This term means definitely or positively. This word tends to decentralise from /'sɜ:tn̩li/ to /setinli/. For example, I certainly think this plan will work. Where ‘certainly’ is pronounced as /setinli/.
- *‘Personal’*- This means concerning or affecting a particular person or his or her private life. The word ‘personal’ tends to decentralise from /'pɜ:.sən.əl/ to /pesinæl/. For example, I have personal matters to attend to. Where ‘personal’ is pronounced as /pesinæl/.
- *‘Firm’*- The term ‘firm’ refers to the members of a business organisation that owns or operates one or more establishments. This word tend to decentralise from /fɜ:ɪm/ or /fɜ:m/ to /fem/. For example, let’s go to the consulting firm for help. This example shows where ‘firm’ is pronounced as /fem/.
- *‘Learn’*- This means to gain knowledge or skills. This word can likely decentralise

from /lɜ:n/ to /len/. For instance, I want to learn how to play volleyball. This word is pronounced as /len/

- *'Perfect'*- This word means being complete of its kind without defect or blemish.

The word 'perfect' can likely decentralise from /'pɜ:.fɪkt/ to /pefet/ or /pæet/. For example, her dress looks perfect. Where 'perfect' is being pronounced as either /pefet/ or /pæet/.

- *'Birth'*- This refers to the time when something begins. It also means a cause to be born or the event of being born. This tends to decentralise from 'birth' /bɜ:θ/ to /bet/. For instance, Linda gave birth yesterday. Where 'birth' is pronounced as /bet/.

- *'Bird'*- This refers a warm-blooded vertebrates characterised by feathers and forelimbs to form their wings. This word can be decentralised by Students from 'bird' /bɜ:d/ to /bed/. For instance, I saw a beautiful blue bird this morning. Where 'bird' is pronounced as /bed/.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has successfully examined the implications of decentralising the central vowel 11 in the speech production of students speakers. The study has shown potential changes for communication and language understanding among speakers of different accents or dialects. For instance, the word 'perfect' is replaced with either /pɛfɛt/ or /pæfɛt/ by student speakers or non-native speakers of English accents. Here, they completely delete and ignore the rules guiding the central vowel in the word, and it is observed that in the analysis of the data, that the vowel used in the decentralization of the words were mostly used by vowel 3 with a few occurrence of vowel 6 and 7. The data provided helps to show the different pronunciation method of non-native speakers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE IMPACT OF LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND ON THE ACQUISITION OF RP(RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION) CENTRAL VOWELS BY NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS /ə/.

#### 4.1 Introduction

Linguistic background can indeed play a significant role in how individuals perceive and produce central vowels in the RP. However, these linguistic backgrounds have factors that can lead to challenges for speakers with non-rp when learning or using it. This will now take us to where the non-native speakers will substitute central vowels in vowel 12 /ə/with their native language that are perceived as similar.

Linguistic background can also be a great asset where speakers with diverse linguistic backgrounds can bring unique perspectives to the study and teaching of the RP, helping to broaden our understanding of how it is learned, used and perceived. This impact will help the non-native speakers to explore other means of pronunciation and communicate effectively without being bothered by the strict rules guiding the RP.

#### 4.2 Data Presentation

Below is a table that illustrate how native speakers substitute central vowels with their native tongue in vowel 12 /ə/.

<b>WORDS</b>	<b>CENTRAL VOWELS</b>	<b>DECENTRALISED VOWELS</b>
About	/ə'baʊt/	/æbəʊt/
Other	/'ʌðə(ɪ)/ or /'eðə(ɪ)/	/ɔdæ/
Know	/nəʊ/	/nou/
Go	/gəʊ/	/gou/
There	/ðeə(ɪ)/ /ðe:(ɪ)/	/de(ɪ)/
Year	/Jɪə/	/Je/
Here	/hɪə(ɪ)/ or /hɪ:(ɪ)/	/hɜ:(ɪ)/
Oh	/əʊ/	/ou/

Government	<i>/ˈgʌvə(n)mənt/</i>	<i>/ˈgɒv(n)ment/</i>
However	<i>/haʊˈevə/</i>	<i>/aʊˈeə/</i>
Again	<i>/əˈgeɪn/</i> or <i>/əˈgen/</i>	<i>/eɪgeɪn/</i>
Against	<i>/əˈgeɪnst/</i> or <i>/əˈgeɪnst/</i>	<i>/eɪgeɪnst/</i>
Under	<i>/ˈʌn.də(ɪ)/</i>	<i>/ɔ:n. dæ/</i>
Never	<i>/ˈne.və(ɪ)/</i>	<i>/ˈne.væ/</i>
Old	<i>/ˈəʊld/</i>	<i>/ˈɔʊld /</i>
Little	<i>/ˈlɪtəl/</i>	<i>/ˈlɪtəl/</i>
Different	<i>/ˈdɪf.ɪənt/</i>	<i>/ˈdɪf.ɪənt/</i>

Away	/ə'weɪ/	/æ'weɪ/
Really	/'ri:li/	/'rɪli/
Where	/weə/ or /we:/	/weə/
System	/'sɪstəm/	/'sɪstem/
Local	/'ləʊkl/	/'ləkæl/
During	/'dʒʊəɪn/	/'dʒʊəɪn/
Although	/ɔ:l'dəʊ/	/ɔ:l'dəʊ/
Rather	/'ɪɑ:ðə/	/'ɪɑ:dæ/
Company	/kʌmp(ə)ni/	/kɒmpɪni/

Important	/ɪm'pɔ:tənt/	/ɪm'pɔ:tənt/
Information	/,ɪnfə'meɪʃən/	/,ɪnfə'meɪʃən/
National	/'næʃ(ə)nəl/	/'næʃnəl/
Example	/ɪg'zɑ:mpəl/	/ɪg'zɑ:mpəl/

### 4.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data above shows how native speakers substitute the central vowel

12 /ə/ to their native language.

- *'About'*- The word 'about' means movement to or among many places. Non-native speakers tend to substitute the central vowel ,in this case, to the phonetic structure of their own language where 'about' /ə'baʊt/ is being pronounced as /æbəʊt/.

- *'Other'* - Meaning not the same one or ones mentioned or implied. Speakers tend to decentralise this word from /'ʌðə(ɪ)/ to /ɔdæ/. For instance, there was order in the court room. Where order is pronounced as /ɔdæ/.
- *'Know'* - Meaning the fact of being aware of information that is known to a few people. Students tend to shift from the standard pronunciation from /nəʊ/ to /noʊ/. For instance, I don't know who you are. Where know is pronounced as /nnoʊ/.
- *'Go'* - this means to change location, move or travel. Speakers of diverse language and accents tend to decentralise the word 'go' from /gəʊ/ to /goʊ/. For example, I need to go to work. Where the pronunciation shifts from /gəʊ/ to /goʊ/.
- *'There'* - Meaning a location other than here. Students speakers often decentralise the word 'there' from /ðeə(ɪ)/ to /de(ɪ)/. For example, look over there, there is a path nearby. These sentences show where the word shifts from /ðeə(ɪ)/ to /de(ɪ)/.
- *'Oh'* - this word is used to show an expression either happy, excited, sad, surprised, angry etc. This word can be decentralised by student speakers from /əʊ/

to /oo/. For instance, oh! I forgot my keys.

- *'Government'* —This refers to the organisation that is a governing authority within a political unit. The word tends to decentralise from /'gʌvə(n)mənt/ to /'gʌv(n)ment/. For example, He works for the federal government body.
- *'However'* - This means despite anything on the contrary. Speakers tend to decentralise this word from /haʊ'evə/ to /aʊ'ɛæ/. For example, however the case may be, we are going regardless.
- *'Again'* - this means anew. Students speakers often decentralise this word from /ə'geɪn/ to /eɪgeɪn/. For example, Can we go to be beach again, I don't want to eat rice again, they rehearsed the scene again.
- *'Year'* - Meaning a period of time containing 356 days or 366 days. The word 'year' is often decentralised where /Jɪə/ is being pronounced as /Je/. For instance, We travelled to England for Christmas last year.
- *'Under'* - Located below or beneath something else. The word 'under' tend to decentralise from /'ʌn.də(ɪ)/ to /ɔ:n. dæ/. For example, The stool is under the table, The boy was under pressure. These examples illustrate the how the speakers change

from standard pronunciation.

- *'Never'* - at no time in the past or near future. This word tend to decentralise

when the pronunciation shifts from /'ne.və(ɪ)/ to /'ne.væ/. For example, Jesus never sinned on earth. The devil never repented of his sin. He can never hit rock bottom.

These examples shows the change of pronunciation from /'ne.və(ɪ)/ to /'ne.væ/.

- *'Old'* - This term is used especially for people, having living for a very long time.

This word tend to ne decentralised by students when the substitute the

pronunciation of 'old' /'əʊld/ for /'ɔld/. For instance, That textbook looks old. Don't wear that dress, it's too old. Some old men like to bring beer.

- *'Little'* - This term means something small that is relatively to something else.

This word tends to decentralise when the pronunciation changes from /'lɪtəl/. For in

stance , He is such a little boy. Add a little water to the dough. Just cut his hair a little more.

- *'Different'* – This means differing from others ; not ordinary. This word tend to

change in pronunciation from /'dɪf.ɪənt/ to /'dɪf.ɪent/. For example, Jeremiah is

acting different today. My dress looks different from hers.

- *'Away'*- The word 'away' means at distance in space or time. It also means out of existence or out of the way. This word can decentralise when the student speaker substitute the central vowel for a closer and suitable vowel sound. Thereby, shifting it from /ə'weɪ/ to /æ'weɪ/. For example, Go away from here. He ran away from the swarm of bees.

- *'Really'*- The word 'really' means in accordance with truth, actual fact or reality. It can be used as sentence modifiers or intensifiers . The word can decentralise when the word is substituted from /'rɪəli/ to /'rɪli/. For examples, I really don't like this idea. The food tastes really good.

- *'Where'*- The word 'where' means making reference to something or someone. The word tend to decentralise when the pronunciation changes from /weə/ or /we:/ to /weə/. For example, where are we going tomorrow

- *'System'*- A group of independent but interrelated elements that comprise of a unified whole. This word tend to decentralise when student speakers shift the

pronunciation from /'sɪstəm/ to /'sɪstem/. For example, the political system is bias.

- *'Rather'* - This means on the contrary. This word tend to change from the standard pronunciation from 'rather' /'ɪɑːðə/ to /'ɪɑːdæ/. For instance, I'd rather wait on the Lord than to rely on man. Why don't you just go to his office rather than waiting for a call.

- *'Company'* – this is an institution created to conduct business. The word can decentralise when students shift the pronunciation from /kʌmp(ə)ni/ to /kɔmpɪni/. For instance, He works in Shell Petroleum Company in Ogunu, Delta State. My company deals on the production and sales of hair care products.

- *'Information'* – this means a message received and well understood. This word tend to decentralise when speakers substitute the pronunciation from /,ɪnfə'meɪʃən/ to /,ɪnfə'meɪʃən/. For instance, I need ypibto understand that this information is top secret.

- *'Example'* – meaning a representative form or pattern. This word to tends to decentralise when the student speakers shift the pronunciation from /ɪg'zɑːmpəl/ to

/ɪŋ'zɑ:mpəl/. For instance, I will use him as an example in class. Can you give me an example of indoor sports.?

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The decentralization of the RP (Received Pronunciation) central vowels play an important role in the aspect of the linguistic background of non-native speakers.

They are used to create a sense of simplicity among the non-native speakers of English.

This chapter successfully shows the challenges students face on the grounds of being non-native speakers of English because of their linguistic backgrounds. They include their pronunciations, accents, vowel sounds, consonant sounds, grammar, sentence structure, lack of exposure, cultural differences etc. All these factors contribute to the decentralization of the RP central vowels in the aspect of student speakers.

Finally, it is important to note that these challenges can vary depending on the accent of the student's native language, accent, learning style and level of motivation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This research has provided an intensive overview and practical analysis of the decentralization of the RP central vowels /ʌ/ /ɜ:/ /ə/ . It has identified as well as examined the impact of dialectal variation in the speech production of students speakers (also known as non-native speakers of English) in vowel 10 /ʌ/ who often have difficulty accurately producing the central vowels of the RP due to their different dialects.

This study has also identified the implication of vowel decentralization in central vowels 11/ɜ:/. It focuses on changing the pronunciation of vowel 11 and how it affects student speakers in their speech. It poses that the decentralised vowels were greatly affected by the context in which it was used. For example, ‘birth’ /bɜ:θ/ to /bet/.

For instance, Linda gave birth yesterday. Where ‘birth’ is pronounced as /bet/.It also looked at the linguistic background on the acquisition of RP vowels by non-native speakers in vowel 12 /ʌ/, as it shows the challenges student go through in the aspect of pronunciation, grammar, accents, and so on.

The decentralization of RP central vowels poses a unique set of challenges for non-native English speakers. These vowels, characterized by subtle articulatory differences, are often difficult to distinguish and produce accurately, particularly for

learners whose native languages lack close equivalents. This can lead to miscommunication and frustration, hindering fluency and confidence in spoken English.

Furthermore, the on-going evolution of RP itself, with regional variations and social influences, adds another layer of complexity. Learners may encounter a diverse range of pronunciations, making it difficult to establish a consistent and accurate target. However, these challenges can be addressed through a combination of effective pedagogical strategies.

The decentralization of the RP central vowels represents a significant shift in Received Pronunciation, reflecting broader trends in English phonology. This process involves changes in the articulation and acoustics of these vowels, often leading to shifts in vowel space and increased variability in pronunciation. While RP historically served as a prestige accent and a standard for Pronunciation, its central vowels are evolving, influenced by factors such as regional dialects, social pressures and ongoing language change.

The decentralization doesn't necessarily signal the demise of RP, but rather it's diversification and adaptation to contemporary linguistic landscapes. The ongoing evolution of these central vowels highlights the dynamic nature of language and the constant interplay between standardization and variation.

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