

Some Speech Sounds in Igbo Dialects; A Case of Phonological Process

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ABSTRACT

Phonological processes which are alterations that sounds undergo when juxtaposed within larger units are of different types. Some of them like labialization, nasalization, and aspiration cause realization of phonemic consonantal sounds in some dialects of Igbo. The paper is concerned with the use of minimal pairs to find out those phonemes that are caused by the above mentioned phonological processes. A list of words from Ibadan 400 words was used to generate the data from two native speakers of Igbo (Amiyi-Aguata and Qhafia dialect speakers). The research revealed that these phonemes: / kh, kwh, dh, th / are aspirated sounds, / dw, rw, lw, / are labialized and / ɲ, ɳ, ɶ / are nasalized and that these sounds are phonemic in the dialects where they are found.

Keywords: Speech, sounds, Igbo, dialect, Phonological, process.

INTRODUCTION

The investigation of speech sounds has always been a major concern of phonologists. Since this topic involves dialect and phonological processes, there is a need to explain what dialect and phonological processes are. Languages all over the world are noted for the variations pervasiveness. English for example, has as many variations which include British English, American English, Australian English, South African English, Nigerian English, etc. when speaker of a particular language speak different varieties of the language, they are said to be speaking different dialects of the language. A dialect is a distinct form of a language, it is associated with a recognizable regional, social or ethnic group and is different from other forms of the language by specific linguistic features such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or any combination of these. [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]; [5] as cited in [6]. A dialect could be defined as any speech pattern of a given language that differs in features such as phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary from the literary official form of the language without being unintelligible to the members of the speech community. [7] as cited in [8]

defines a dialect as a specific branch or form of language spoken in a geographical area differing sufficiently from the official standard or literary form of the language in one or all levels of the language: (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic use of words). The difference existing in the specific branch or form of the language makes it to be viewed as a distinct entity, yet not sufficiently different from other dialects of the language to be regarded as separate languages. Phonological process according to [9], is defined as "sound modifications motivated by the need to maintain euphony in a language or to rectify violations of well- formedness constraints in the production of an utterance. Phonological processes are alternations that sound undergo when juxtaposed within large units such as morphemes or morpheme boundaries. As words and morphemes are combined, sounds are influenced by their environments thereby undergoing some adjustments. Some phonological processes occur to maintain the musical quality of the utterance or to make its production smooth and easy to release the articulatory contents in the

production of one sound and to initiate a different articulatory contact for a contiguous sound. This type of phonological process includes assimilation and vowel harmony.

[10] observes that the major aim of some phonological processes is simplification of pronunciation with a view to making it easier and pleasing to the ear. There are different types of processes, some are universal and some are language-specific [11]. Phonological processes such as labialization and nasalization play a role in causing the realization of some consonantal phonemes in some dialects of Igbo language [12].

Realization of some speech sounds in Igbo dialects

[10] lamented that there are many sounds that are in use in different varieties of Igbo that are not represented in the official orthography. This is why this study is relevant as it contributes to the solution of the problem of which letters to use to write down those sounds that are not represented in the standard Igbo orthography. Phonological processes that are relevant to this study include the following: nasalization, labialization, aspiration and palatalization. Some consonantal sounds which are specific phonemes in some Igbo dialects are realized through these processes. It is pertinent to note that phonemes discussed here are according to the definition of the classical phonemics which defines phoneme as "the smallest unit of speech, which makes a difference in meaning [2]. This means that the phoneme is the minimum unit of phonemic analysis which brings about a change in a set of words, example;

Igbo/English

- 1a. oké - rat
- b. olé - how many?
- c. ákwú - palm nut
- d. ánú - meat

In the above examples, (a) has two different words. Both words have everything in common except on the sound in the middle, this also applies to (b). Therefore, that which brings about a different meaning in the above examples

are: 'k' and 'l' in example (a) and 'kw' and 'n' in example (b). By doing this, we have been able to identify four (4) speech sounds in the language. One can go on with these phenomenon called minimal pairs to identify the speech sounds that are obtainable in a language. This is the method being applied in this study to bring out the consonantal sounds in some Igbo dialects which are realized through some phonological processes.

Nasalization

[3] asserts that the nasal vowels and consonants are those nasal sounds in which the nasality forms part of the distinctive sounds of the languages while nasalized sounds are those that derive their nasality from contiguous nasal segments through the oral and nasal cavities. [5] define nasalization as the superimposition of the lowering of the velum on the primary place of articulation. In other words, if during the production of speech sound, there is no closure in the oral cavity and there is the lowering of the soft palate, this allows air to escape through the oral and nasal cavities. The sound produced this way is called nasalized sound. The IPA symbol for nasalization is a tilde (~) above the segments that is nasalized. [6] illustrates that segments especially vowels become nasalized before or after a nasal consonant, example.

English:

Input/output

- 2a. can - [kæ̃n]
- b. and - [ãnd]

In some dialects of Igbo, the alveolar trill [r] is nasalized and is phonemic in such dialects, but it is not reflected in standard Igbo, e.g.

- 3a. ara - / árá/ - madness
- b. ara - / ářá/ - breast

The nasalized alveolar trill can be found in Amiyi- Aguata and Ohafia dialects of Igbo to be specific. These phonemes thus: alveolar trill and nasalized alveolar trill '[r]' and '[ř]' are distinctive in the dialects. The difference in meaning in the pair of words is due to the presence of nasality. Other examples of nasalized sounds are;

- 4a. v̥uɔ - /v̥uɔ/ - uproot
 b. v̥ɔ - /v̥ɔ/ - hatch
 c. s̥uɔ - /s̥uɔ/ - pound
 d. s̥ɔ - /s̥ɔ/ - cut grass
 e. shie - /jie'/ - cook
 f. sh̥ie - /ʃie'/ - warn

The above illustrations show that the following sounds /v/, /s/, /j/ and /r/ as earlier illustrated are nasalized in these dialects and are phonemic. This is due to the fact that the pair of each words are similar in form but different in meaning. The difference in each pair of the words is caused by the presence of nasality which is marked with a tilde above the segments that are nasalized.

Labialization

Labialization is a type of secondary articulation in which there is a super in position of lip rounding on the primary place of articulation. Labialization is usually represented with a raised [w] on the labialized phoneme [7], [8], [9]. The following examples below are seen in [4]:

- 5a. agwa - /agwā/- bean
 b. ɔnwa - /ɔ̃nwa/- moon
 c. nkɔ - /̃nkɔ/ - palm tree

In the above examples, the primary place of articulation of the phonemes /g, n, k/ is the velar. There is a super imposition of lip rounding on the primary place of articulation. This is why a superscript w is used to represent the phoneme that is labialized. The above sounds and other labialized sounds that are not reflected in the standard Igbo are phonemic in the dialects that they occur. The following words are paired to show the major phonemic contrast in some Igbo dialects [5].

Aspiration

[3] defines aspiration as a brief period of voicelessness during and immediately after the release of an articulatory stricture. He stressed that aspiration is mostly restricted to voiceless stops. In some dialects of Igbo, aspiration is not restricted to only voiceless stops. Aspiration is represented with a superscript [h] after the segments that is aspirated. In Amiyi-Aguata dialect of Igbo, the following segments are aspirated /bh

/, / kh /, /dh /kh , and / kwh /. These segments are aspirated and are distinctive in the dialect; for example;

Unaspirated Aspirated

- 7a. be / bē/ - cut bhe /bhe/ - peel
 b. ke /ké/ - shine khe /khé/ - tie
 c. de /dē/ - write dhe /dhé/ - wet
 d. te /té/ - rub the /thé/ - limp
 e. kwa /kwá/ - sow kwha /kwhá/ - crow/mourn
 f. t̥u /t̥ú/ - throw th̥u /th̥ó/ - sort
 g. ba /bá/ - become rich bha /bhá/ - peel yam
 h. ka /kà/ - draw a line kha /khá/ - pluck leaf
 I. da /dà/ - roast dha /dhà/ - fall
 J. ta /tá/ - chew tah /thá/ - blame
 k. kwe /kwé/ - sing kwh /kwhe - set trap
 l. k̥u /k̥ó/ = beat kh̥u /kh̥ó/ - sow

Palatalization

Palatalization according to [6] is the superimposition of the tongue raising towards the hard palate on the primary place of articulation. The primary place of articulation of the sound [t] is the alveolar ridge, but if during its production, the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate, it is said to be palatalized. In phonetic transcription, Palatalization is represented with a superscript 'j' as follows [tj] showing that the phoneme [t] is palatalized.

Examples of palatalization in Igbo are;

- 8a. rya /rjá/ suffer
 b. pya /pjá/ flog
 c. hya /hjá/ twist

(Adopted from [7] the phonemes /r,p,h/ are palatalized in the above examples. The underlying form of the words rya, pya and hya are r̥ja, p̥ja and h̥ja respectively. Though whether palatalization is a distinctive phoneme in any dialect of Igbo or not, is not yet known.

Findings

It is obvious from the foregoing that some consonantal sounds in some dialects of Igbo are caused by phonological processes. These phonological processes includes the following; labialization, aspiration, nasalization and palatalization. The findings also show

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that the following sounds caused by phonological processes are phonemic in the sense that they bring about a change in the meaning of two words placed in minimal pairs. The sounds from the findings are;

- 9a. /ʋ/ - voiced labiodental fricative
- b. /ɲ/ - voiceless nasalized alveolar fricative
- c. /ɾ/ - voiced nasalized alveolar trill
- d. /rw/ - voiced labialized alveolar roll

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- e. /dw / - voiced labialized alveolar plosive
- f. /lw/ - voiced labialized alveolar lateral
- g. /bh / - voiced aspirated bilabial plosive
- h. /kh / - voiceless aspirated velar plosive
- i. /dh - voiced aspirated dental plosive
- j. /kwh/ - voiceless labialized aspirated velar plosive
- k. /th / - voiceless aspirated alveolar plosive

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated how some consonantal sounds in some dialects of Igbo are caused by some phonological processes; labialization, nasalization, aspiration and palatalization to be specific. These sounds are not reflected in the standard Igbo dialect and a good

number of them are phonemic in those dialects where they are found. This paper illustrated with the use of minimal pairs, the sounds caused by phonological processes, to show that they are distinctive phonemes.

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