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NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Àkùṅbá Journal of Linguistics and Literatures is published annually. However, the Editorial Board has decided that depending on the number of quality papers received, two issues may be published per year. Its focus is on the publication of recent findings in African Linguistics, Literatures & Culture. Papers could be written either in quality English or Yorùbá language.

Authors are encouraged to submit papers electronically to the managing Editors. The manuscripts should contain original material that has not been published in any form elsewhere. Manuscripts should be double spaced and on single sides, with ample margin with the title of the contribution and the name(s) of the author(s) on a separate page. The manuscript should be in 12 point Time New Roman. The contribution should be between ten (10) and fifteen (15) pages in length. Any paper grossly exceeding this guideline shall be subjected to an extra-charge. The manuscript should include an abstract of not more than 250 words. The journal uses footnotes but this should be very minimal. Papers should contain references at the end which should include all items cited in the paper. References should follow APA style. Contributions which do not adhere to these requirements may be rejected.

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PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION IN OWERRI DIALECT OF ÌGBÒ

¹C. C. EWEAMA

Abstract

This paper conducts an inquest into the phonological variation in Owerri dialect of Igbo. The aim is to identify the salient dialectal nuance between Standard Ìgbò and Owerri dialect. The family tree model was adopted as the theoretical framework for this paper. To guarantee reliability on the information generated from the data, the triangulation technique was used to garner data for the study. The Ìgbò 400 wordlist was equally consulted in addition to reviewing related literatures which sought the views and opinions of other scholars and researchers in related studies. Using qualitative analysis, the data were analyzed to determine the variation at the phonological level. It also affirmed that distinctions exist between Standard Ìgbò and Owerri dialect. It is the considered view of this paper that despite the identified phonological variations between Standard Ìgbò and Owerri dialect, comprehension of spoken or written Ìgbò is by no means impaired or distorted.

Key words: Owerri dialect, Standard Ìgbò, Variation, Phonology, Triangulation.

1. Introduction

One of the facts about linguistics is that although languages are systematic, Variation among speakers is normal. Thus, language varies from locality to locality. In other words, there is variation in the way people speak languages. This variation among speakers is demonstrated by linguistic differences in the areas of sound and structure. The variation however, might be very slight and minor that it does not inhibit inter-group communication.

Language variation, therefore, refers to differences in the language systems that result from historical, geographical, social and functional changes. These changes affect the language or dialect in question in one way or the other (Romaine, 2001 p. 239). Romaine opines that, language variation focuses on how language is used in different contexts. Language also varies according to uses and users. Language variation according to its users, involves regional and social dialect, while language variation according to uses, is based on the context of use which involves style, context, and register. Some factors that can cause language variation include geography, time, race, gender and class (Chukwu, 2019).

Variation is common in languages, from the way a sound is produced to the auditory processing of the linguistic signal. So persisted and pervasive is language variation that it has attracted the attention of scholars. Several researchers have worked on language variation at different levels in many languages, especially in English language. In fact, studies of language variation and its correlation with sociological categories led to the foundation of sociolinguistics as a subfield of linguistics. Language variation remains an important factor in the heart of sociolinguists.

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However, variations in dialects of some languages are hardly investigated, even though the mapping of dialect on regional basis has a long history in linguistics. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the extent at which variation takes place at the phonological level in Owerri dialect. The essence of this, is to ascertain if such variations have the potential of distorting the semantic content of Owerri dialect of Igbo.

2. Evolution of Standard Ìgbò

Igbo language is one of the three recognized major languages in Nigeria. It has about 27 million speakers and is made up of over 20 dialects (Blench and Williamson, 2013).

Because of the multiplicity of Ìgbò dialects, some of which are not mutually intelligible, the evolution of Standard Ìgbò thus became imperative. Standard Ìgbò therefore, was an upgrade or improvement on the hitherto used Central Ìgbò, and came into existence after Nigeria's independence (Chukwu, 2019).

Gutman and Avanzati (2018) aver that Standard Ìgbò, which replaced Central Ìgbò, was also based on the Owerri and Umuahia dialects, which are members of the Ezinihitte group of Ìgbò. They posit that Central Ìgbò was considered imperialistic and not broad-based; hence its replacement with Standard Ìgbò, pointing out that Standard Igbo is a cross-pollination of Central Ìgbò with words from Ìgbò dialects outside the central area. They explain that in an effort to standardize Ìgbò language, the central Ìgbò vocabulary was also expanded by incorporating loan words into Ìgbò language.

It is equally pertinent to stress that the Society for Promoting Ìgbò Language and Culture (SPILC) facilitated the standardization of Igbo language in 1972, by the setting up of the Standardization Committee. The aim was to make the comprehension of Ìgbò language easy by making the sounds of Ìgbò language better (Oraka, 1983).

It is also important to note that though all South Eastern States in Nigeria speak Igbo, there are different varieties amongst them. An appraisal of these varieties, however, shows that it is Imo State that speak the Standard Ìgbò. And in Imo, Owerri dialect is closely related to Standard Ìgbò, particularly, the Mbaitoli axis.

3. The Dialectal setting

Owerri dialect is spoken by Owerri people in Imo State. Owerri is located on the eastern axis of Imo State. Owerri is bounded in the north by Mbano Local Government Area, in the West by Oru East Local Government Area, in the South by Port Harcourt and in the East by Aba, in Abia State. Owerri dialect is a high variety mainly spoken in OwerriNchiIse town (Municipal). Other varieties of Owerri dialect include Owerri North variety, Owerri west variety, NgorOkpalavariety and lastly, Mbaitoli variety. The land mass of Owerri is about 10,317 square kilometers and this is about 30% of the total land mass of Imo State.

4. Theoretical Framework

Variation in language is demonstrated by linguistic differences in pronunciation (accent), word choice (Lexicon) or, even preference for particular grammatical patterns. There might be only

slight variations between forms of languages such as minor pronunciation of words or slight changes of grammatical structure that do not inhibit inter group communication. Languages vary in many ways. One way of characterizing certain variations is to say that speakers of a particular language sometimes speak different dialects (Wardhaugh, 2006). Similarly, Holmes (2013) says that, language varies according to its uses as well as its users, according to where it is used and to whom, as well as who is using it.

From the foregoing, different types of variation and the factors that govern it have been discussed in literature, namely, Regional variation (Trudgill and Chambers, 1980), (Britain, 1997), (Winkler, 2001); social variation (Gumperz, 1958), (Wardhaugh, 2006), (Holmes, 2013); Lexical variation (Reckford, 2002); Phonological variation (Wells, 1982); Grammatical variation, (Holyk, n.d), among others.

Language variation as an indispensable integral component of sociolinguistics highlights important things about languages and how they change. Language variation refers therefore, to the difference that exists in a particular language. These differences could result from historical, geographical, social and functional changes.

To understand language variation, we need to have an in-depth knowledge of what variety and variation are.

There are many ways of speaking and each way of speaking is a variety. In a more precise manner, a variety may be defined as a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution (Hudson, 1996). It should be emphasized that a variety is not necessarily a full-fledged language with a large vocabulary grammar.

Frankfurt (2014) avers that for the last 150 years, the ultimate representation of language change has been the family tree model which is closely linked to the comparative method developed by the Neogrammarians in 1860 – 1880 (Crownley and Browern, 2010). The comparative method allows us to establish relatedness with language that evolved from a common proto language. This is done based on regular sound correspondence between the languages that are examined. These languages are then presented in a family tree which shows how each of the languages belonging to the language family descended from the proto language.

Corroborating Frankfurt's assertion, Ferguson (1972), maintains that variety refers to anybody of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogenous to be analysed by any available technique of synchronic description and which has a large repertoire of elements and their arrangements or process with broad semantic scope to function in all formal contexts of communication.

In agreement with the above position, Groover (2008), contends that the terms "variety and dialect" can sometimes be used interchangeably as "every language of any geographic extent has regional varieties or dialect and every dialect as a variety of language".

This paper, therefore, adopts the family tree model in seeking to explain the existing phonological variation in Owerri dialect of Igbo. This approach facilitated an effective analysis of phonological variation in Owerri dialect of Igbo.

5. Methodology

This paper used the triangulation technique as a framework methodology. Triangulation is used to indicate that two or more methods are used in analyzing language variation. Triangulation is an effective technique that validates data through cross verification from two or more sources. It refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. Data were collected from more than one source.

The Igbo language 400 word list of basic items and a designed frame technique which includes library sources and interviews were used as well.

The frame technique was designed to get acceptable data for some linguistic levels like morphology and syntax which the word list could not account for. Owerri dialect is spoken in five Local Government Areas which are Owerri Municipal, Owerri North, Owerri West, Ngor Okpala and Mbaitolu. The data were collected using GSM mobile phone for recording. The researcher called out words from the list and the informants said their equivalent in their dialects. A qualitative analysis was adopted for this study. The linguistic elements in the study as well as speeches were compared, and the results and the findings were presented in tabular form.

5.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

The most significant variation within languages or dialects occur at the level of vocabulary (lexicon), phonology (pronunciation) grammar (Morphology and syntax). The data were however, presented and analysed on phonological level to examine variation in Owerri dialect. The data were presented in tables and the analysis was done through descriptive statistics.

5.1.1. Phonological Variation

Phonological variation is concerned with sound differences within and across dialects (Chambers and Trudgill, 1998).

According to Szczegielniak (2019), all the languages in the world sound so different because the way the languages use speech sounds to form patterns. In defining phonology as the study of how speech sounds form patterns, he argues that "phonology tells us what sounds are in a language, how they do and combine into words, and explains why certain phonetic features are important in identifying a word.

Bird (2017) agrees with Szczegielniak, and further explains that phonology is the systematic study of sounds used in language, their internal structure, and their composition into syllables, words and phrases, while Hornby (2000, p. 873) posits that "phonology is a branch of linguistics which studies sounds of a particular language".

In the words of Osuagwu, Nwaozuzu, Dike and Nwosu (1997, p.29) "in phonology sounds are grouped according to their relatedness. The different speech sounds that are functional are noted, while all non-functional and non-significant ones are disregarded". Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2001, p.30) agree with this assertion by stressing that "phonology is concerned with the exploitation of speech sounds to make meaningful contrasts. One of the things done in phonology is to be able to identify those meaningful sounds used to convey semantic import".

5.2. Sound System of Owerri Dialect

The sound system of Owerri dialect includes an inventory of sounds and their features. It includes rules that specify how sounds interact with one another. Below is the sound inventory of Owerri dialect. Owerri dialect operates the open syllable system (CV type). It has the same syllable structure with Standard Igbo and utilizes vowel harmony.

5.2.1. Consonants in Owerri Dialect

Owerri dialect has twenty three (23) consonant sounds as against the Standard Igbo that has twenty eight. (28). /ʒ/ does not exist in Standard Igbo but does exist in Owerri dialect.

Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labio Dental	Alveolar	Palato Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio Velar	Glottal
Stop	P b	f v	t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n			ŋ		
Fricative			ʃ z					h
Affricate				tʃ dʒ				
Lateral			l					
Trill			r					
Approximant					j		w	

5.2.2. Distribution of Consonants

According to normal convention, consonants occur in different positions like word initial, medial and final positions. However, consonants of Owerri dialect hardly occur in word final position as indicated below.

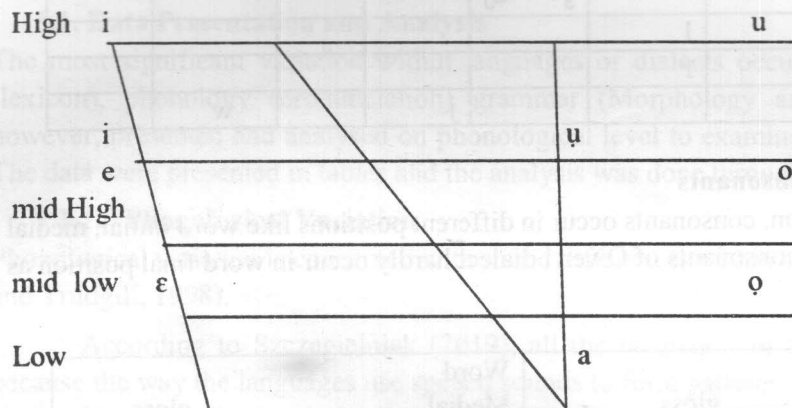
Consonant Sounds	Word Initial	- gloss	Word Medial	- gloss
/p/	para	- "carry"	japu	- "fufu"
/b/	biamā	- "come"	eberebe	- "sliced cassava"
/f/	fuo	- "go"	ufu	- "pain"
/v/	vuō	- "uproot"	ovuma	- "anger"
/t/	tutuma	- "pick"	mgboto	- "an unmarried lady"
/d/	doma	- "keep"	odu	- "last position"
/k/	kemkem	- "straight to point"	nkaramanya	- "boldness"
/g/	geregere	- "watery"	ogugu	- "long stick"
/kp/	kpema	- "pray"	mkipurumkpu	- "a heavy eater"
/gb/	gburumagbu	- "round"	ogbugbo	- "vomit"
/m/	mmii	- "alcoholic drink"	nkaramanya	- "boldness"
/n/	nrūro	- "play"	onumonū	- "condemnation"
/ŋ/	narinari	- "waywardness"	anumma	- "drunkenness"
/s/	suru	- "wear"	osukosu	- "fierce anger"

/z/	zuma - “buy”	uzere - “sneeze”
/ʃ/	shema - “draw”	ashisha - “back biting”
/ʒ/	zia - “lie down”	mazie - “advice”
/h/	horoma - “select”	ohuhu - “fastness”
/tʃ/	churuma - “fetch”	uchaka - “a very fair person”
/dʒ/	jema - “be going”	ojiji - “dressing”
/l/	lukuluku - “struggle”	olugbuo - “a brave fighter”
/r/	ririoma - “talk endlessly”	uro - “envy”
/w/	werema - “take”	awuruse - “dance performed by the youths during burial ceremony”

Note: The consonant sounds /z/ and /ʒ/ are represented by the same letter ‘z’.

5.3. Vowels in Owerri Dialect

Vowel Chart



5.3.1. Distribution of Vowels

Unlike the Standard Igbo that has eight vowel sounds, the Owerri dialect has nine vowel sounds. The mid low vowel “ε” does not exist in Owerri Dialect though recent findings show that some native speakers of Owerri dialect use /e/ and /ε/ interchangeably. Vowel sounds in Owerri dialect occur in word initially, medially and finally.

Vowel Sounds	Initial Position - gloss	Medial Position - gloss	Final Position - gloss
/i/	iyi - stream	inyinyoo - shadow	inyiri - charcoal
/i/	ibara - pride	biama - come	apari - stupidity
/u/	umune - blood relationship	evule - ram	vuru - carry
/ʊ/	ʊvʊrʊ - brain	ʊvʊma - anger	avʊvʊ - waste from palm nut
/e/	egbelegbe - tall	gere-gere - watery	eberebe - sliced cassava

/o/	ogugu - stick	ofoke - an irresponsible person	uro - envy
/ ɔ /	odu - last position	awom - farm	mgboto - a spinster
/a/	apari - stupidity	japu - fufu	nja - wrapper

It is noteworthy that only consonants are affected in phonological variation or change. The consonants /b/ in Standard Igbo /v/ in Owerri dialect, /l/ becomes /y/, /g/ becomes /n/ etc.

TABLE 1

5.4. Variations in Owerri Dialect

/b/

S.I	Owerri Municipal	Owerri North	Owerri West	Ngor Okpala	Mbaitolu	Gloss
uburu	uvuru	uvuru	uvuru	uvuru	uburu	brain
mbu	mvu	mvu	Mvu	mvu	mbu	toe/finger nail
bua	vua	vua	Vua	vua	bua	to grab

In the table above, the bilabial stop 'b' is realized as the labio dental in Owerri dialect apart from Mbaitolu that has 'b' as Standard Igbo.

/l/

S.I	Owerri Municipal	Owerri North	Owerri West	Ngor Okpala	Mbaitolu	Gloss
ulo	uyo	uyo	uyo	uyo	ulo	house
Lota	yoma	yoma	yoma	yoma	lota	come back

In the above table, the alveolar lateral 'l' changes to palatal approximant 'j' in Owerri dialect apart from Mbaitolu that has the same pronunciation with Standard Igbo.

/g/

S.I	Owerri Municipal	Owerri North	Owerri West	Ngor Okpala	Mbaitolu	Gloss
Gini	Nini	Nini	Nini	Nini	gini	what

In the above table, the velar stop 'g' is realized as the alveolar nasal 'n' in Owerri dialect with the exception of Mbaitolu.

Note: Looking at the tables above, Mbaitolu variation is closely related to Standard Igbo.

5.5. Sound Loss

In Owerri dialect, the nasal 'n' gets deleted when pronouncing the following names.

S.I	Owerri Municipal	Owerri North	Owerri West	Gloss
Chinemere	Chiemere	Chiemere	Chiemere	God does
Chinazo	Chiazoz	Chiazoz	Chiazoz	God saves
Chinenye	Chienye	Chienye	Chienye	God gives
Chinaza	Chiaza	Chiaza	Chiaza	God answers

A form of phonological variation observed in languages and dialects is sound change. All types of change in pronunciation are collectively known as phonological change (Miller, 2007, p. 65).

6. Summary of findings

1. In Owerri dialect (apart from Mbaitolu), the bilabial stop 'b' is realized as the labio dental, while in Standard Igbo, it is not so.
2. In Owerri dialect, the alveolar lateral 'l' changes to palatal approximant 'j', apart from Mbaitolu that has the same pronunciation with Standard Igbo.
3. The velar stop 'g' in Owerri dialect, changes to the alveolar nasal with the exception of Mbaitolu as is the case in Standard Igbo.
4. Distinctively, in sound loss, names such as "Chinemere" in Standard Igbo (S.I) and "Chimere" in Owerri dialect (O.D) as well as "Chinazo" in S.I and "Chiazo" in O.D, have the nasal 'n' in Standard Igbo seem deleted when pronouncing them in Owerri dialect (O.D).
5. The Mbaitolu variation of Owerri dialect is closely related to the Standard Igbo.

7. Conclusion

As shown in this paper, phonological variation do exist in the Owerri dialect of Igbo. To buttress this fact, this paper painstakingly appraised the dialectal nuance existing between Standard Igbo and Owerri dialect, as well as at the linguistic level these distinctions occur.

However, it is imperative to stress that despite the variation which occurs at the phonological level, it does not in any way depreciate the value of Owerri dialect among the speakers, neither does it impair the comprehension of Owerri dialect. It is also necessary to state that phonological variation does not just occur in Owerri dialect of Igbo, certain factors such as language contacts and geographical contacts are known to play major roles in this regard.

While it needs not be over-emphasized that this paper has considerably explicated through data presentation and analysis, that phonological variation do exist between Standard Igbo and Owerri dialect of Igbo, it nevertheless, forecloses any further on the dialect.

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