

Assimilation in Úwù Language

Charles Olanrewaju Boyede

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
Ekiti State University, Ado- Ekiti, Nigeria
lanreboyede@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Many scholarly works have been published on the phonology of the Nigerian languages. We discovered that of all the publications, little have been published on the phonology of Úwù especially, the assimilatory process in the language. This paper aims at investigating the phonological process of assimilation in the language as it examines the structures where assimilation occurs in the language. In the Niger-Congo languages, assimilation mostly applies to noun-noun structures. However, it is a different case in Úwù language as an associative morpheme usually prevents assimilation from applying. This paper therefore unravels the phenomenon of assimilation in Úwù language.

Keywords: full assimilation, partial assimilation, non-linear phonology, associative morpheme

INTRODUCTION

Úwù is a language under the Ahanoid language family as grouped by Akanbi (2014). The language is spoken by the Àyèré people of Àyèré community in Kogi State precisely in Ijùmú Local Government Area. Assimilation, a phonological process in the language is not robust and the process of assimilation is often prevented by Associative Morpheme in the language.

Abiodun (2007:61) describes assimilation as the process whereby a segment takes on the features of a neighboring segment thereby becoming alike, sometimes totally, sometimes partially. Oyebade (2008:62) says assimilation takes place when two contiguous sounds which have different modes of production becomes identical in some or all of the features of their production. If we think of the physical production of speech, we realize that this regular process happens simply because it is quicker, easier and more efficient for our articulators as they do their job. Assimilation can be total (when a segment copies all the features of a neighboring segment) and it can be partial (when a segment copies some of the features of a neighboring segment; though they are not totally alike, but they have some features in common than when the process has not taken place). Assimilation may be anticipatory, that is the first segment changes to become like the second. It can also be perseverative, when the second changes to become like the first.

Purpose of the study

This paper contributes to the ongoing research on dialectology. It is not strange that languages have similarities and differences at all levels of grammar. Be it, phonology, morphology, syntax etc. It is not a gain-saying that scholars have published little works on the areas of grammar so identified in Úwù language. However, no work has been published on assimilatory process in Úwù language. This paper therefore intends to fill the academic gap and to further document assimilation in the language for posterity.

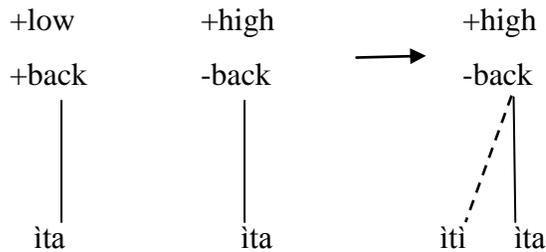
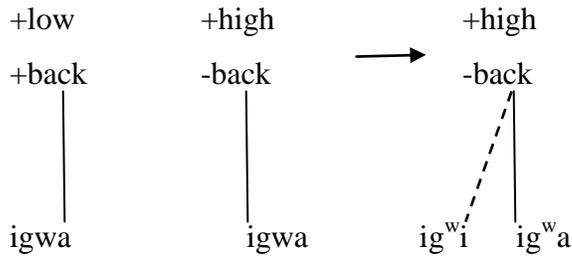
From the data presented above, it is obvious that the associative morpheme “ni” prevented assimilation from taking place between a noun and vowel initial noun construction. It is also observed that the high front vowel [i] of the associative morpheme is deleted when it collocates with the vowel initial noun.

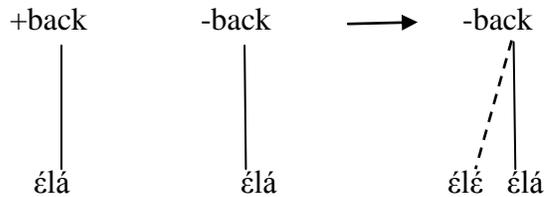
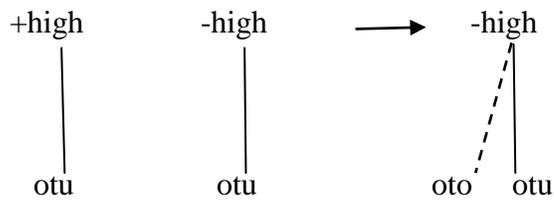
(i) Full Assimilation

Full assimilation occurs when all the features of a sound is copied by the adjacent segment. Full assimilation is not robust in the Úwù language due to the occurrence of the associative morpheme discussed above. However, assimilation is observed when a noun whose initial and final vowels are non-identical. Simply said, that assimilation usually applies when a noun is fully reduplicated. Examples of this are presented below:

- i. ig^wá + ig^wá → ig^wiig^wà ‘ten each’
 ten
- ii. ita + ita → itiita ‘three each’
 three
- iii. otu + otu → otootu ‘every night’
 night
- iv. éíá + éíá → éíéíá ‘big ones’
 big

From the data above, we observed that the nouns are fully reduplicated thereby causing two non-identical vowels to occur contiguously. However, the V₁ totally assimilated the features of the V₂ thereby becoming totally identical. The derivation of the above examples is presented autosegmentally below:





It is observed in the above that the final vowels of the first morphemes take the feature of the first vowels of the second morphemes i.e. Vowel-Vowel Assimilation.

This type of assimilation can only occur as anticipatory but not perseverative in Úwù language.

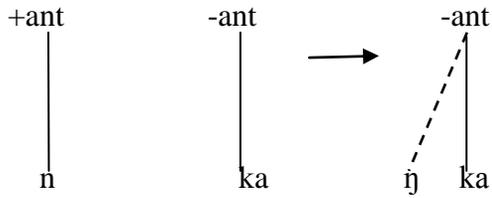
(ii) Partial Assimilation

This process applies to the homorganic nasals in Úwù language. The nasal consonants copy the place of articulation feature of the consonant succeeding them. This process is not strange in languages as the nasal consonants mostly copy the place of articulation feature of the consonant after them. Consider the pieces of data below in Úwù:

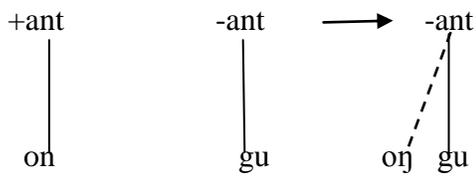
1. ñká → ñká 'one'
2. ongu → oŋgu 'tree'
3. ñfá → ñfá 'rope'
4. àngbà → àŋ^mgbà 'chin'
5. npákì → mpákì 'to take off cloth'

The above data are analyzed autosegmentally below. Observe that the assimilation spreads from right to left.

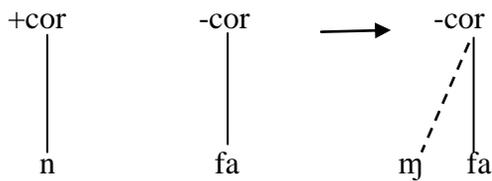
1. ñká → ñká 'one'



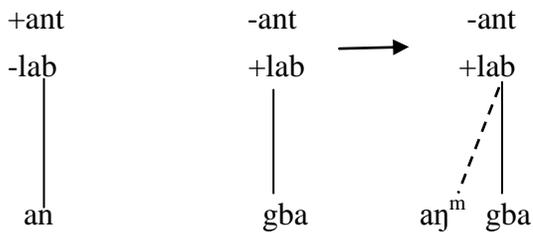
2. ongu → oŋgu 'tree'



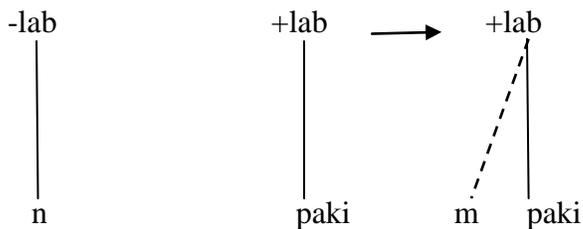
3. ñfá → ñfá 'rope'



4. àngbà → àŋ^mgbà 'chin'



5. npáki → mpáki 'to take off cloth'



In the above examples, we discovered that the homorganic nasals copy the place of articulation of the adjacent consonants. This process is formally called Homorganic Nasal Assimilation.

CONCLUSION

It is observed that assimilation is not a robust phonological process in Úwù language unlike assimilatory process in other Benue-Congo languages as this paper has established. It is also crucial to note that assimilation in Úwù is anticipatory; the first segment changes to become like the second segment. Associative morpheme –ni- in the language prevents assimilation from applying in noun-noun construction.

REFERENCES

- Abiodun, M.A. (2007). *Phonology in Yusuf Ore (ed.) Basic Linguistics. Ilorin: Unilorin Press.*
- Akanbi, T. A. (2014). *The Pronouns of Àhàn. A PhD Seminar: Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.*
- Allison, I. O. (2015). *Phonology of Úwù: M.A Thesis. Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti.*
- Durand, J. (1990). *Generative and Non-linear Phonology. New York: Longman.*
- Goldsmith, J. (1976). *Autosegmental Phonology. Indiana University Linguistic Club. (published by Garland Press, 1979).*
- Oyebade, F.O. (2008). *A Course in Phonology (2nd ed.). Shebiotimo Publications. Ijebu-Ode Nigeria.*