Nasality In The Olu Dialect Of Igbo

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ABSTRACT
This paper strives to compare different scholars, especially Armstrong’s and Umeh’s description of nasality in the Olu dialect of Igbo. The study is a qualitative and descriptive one which discusses, compares and analyses the description of nasality in the language under study. Our major finding is that nasality is more a feature of the vowel than it is of the consonant because nasality in the consonants is phonologically conditioned. The present study is therefore in agreement with Umeh’s analysis.

Keywords: nasality, phonological, conditioning, qualitative, descriptive.

INTRODUCTION
The Igbo Basic Course by L. B. Swift with A Ahaghotu and E. Ugorji was based on a study of the speech of two speakers of the Ezinehitte dialect of Owere Igbo, which is a representation of central Igbo. In the course, they presented an orthographic inventory of all the possible consonant and vowel phonemes in the dialect under discussion. The alphabet reads:

A, b, b’, gb, d, d’, c, f, g, g’, gh, h, i, i’, j, j’, k, k’, l, m, n, η, o, o’, p, p’, r, s, sh, t, t’, u, u’, v, w, y, z, zh, c, c’, gw, gw’, hw, kw, kw’, njw, ny.

In the study, no chart was drawn; rather, the letters of the alphabet were presented like this as a kind of informal phonemic analysis.

Nasality
Nasal sounds are produced with the lung of the soft palate enabling air to pass through the nose Mathews (2005 p:237). According to Crystal (1989) the term “nasal” is used in “phonetic classification of speech sounds on the basis of manner of articulation. (Also see Roach 2010:46-48). It refers to sounds produced while the soft palate is lowered to allow an audible escape of air through the nose”. There are three nasal sounds in English and these are basically consonant sounds [m, n, η], English has no distinct nasal vowel but nasalization may be heard on English vowels “when they display the articulation influence of an adjacent nasal consonant, as in mat or hand.

In other words, when the nasality comes from other sounds, the sound may be referred to as a nasalized sound. The same may happen to other English consonant sounds, which are not nasal sounds. If followed by a nasal, may be produced in the same position and thereby released through the nose instead of the mouth.

Nasalization In The Analysis
When a syllable is nasalized, the tilde /~/ or nasalization mark is placed over the first phoneme of the nasalized syllable, to show that the whole syllable is nasalized e.g. /išà/ “to wash” /âžà/ “fish”
When, however, the nasalized syllable begins with a digraph or a consonant cluster, the tide is placed over the consonant that is lower, for example:

/kl/ as in /ǎkl/ ‘cloth’
/sibil as in /isbibil/ ‘six’
/hy/ as in /hydikà/ ‘about’

If both letters are low, then the mark is placed above the first letter as in /gəmən/.

On the other hand, if a nasalized syllable begins with a nasal consonant such as: / m, n, ny, nw/, they are left unmarked as in:

/Nūo/ ‘drink’
/mir/ ‘water’

From the study, it is observed that nasalization was not treated as a distinctive feature in the vowel for example, in the analysis of vowel phonemes, nothing was said about nasalized vowels although further in the work, a presentation was made of vowels which can take nasalization. Thus nasalization was seen as secondary in the description of vowel phonemes for example:

/e/ /e/ / ‘No’
/O̞b̞ y̞ a]/ ‘stranger’ or ‘guest’
/Nūo]/ ‘drink’

In the analyses of consonant phonemes, consonants in the dialect were also shown to take nasalization even though they were not presented as significantly distinctive in the inventory of consonants given for the dialect. Here again nasalization was depicted as a feature of the syllable in the dialect. For example:

/ i̞o/ ‘five;’
/ðhú/ ‘seeing’

This approach contrasts with Carnochan’s approach in his study of the phonology of an Igbo speaker from a dialect of Owere called Lorji.
In his analysis, Carnochan presented nasalization as a distinctive feature. For example in his consonant chart there is a contrast between the simple alveolar fricative /s/ which is oral and its nasal counterpart /s̞/.

Carnochan sees nasalization as a feature of syllables whose initial is: v, s, sy, h, hy, r which become V), s), sy), h), hy), r) when nasalized. These sounds took nasalization in swift and other’s work.

Carnochan like swift and others made no mention of nasalized vowels. Even though swift and the others gave examples, Carnochan gave none

Aspiration
Unlike their analysis of nasalization, swift and co presented aspiration as a distinctive feature of the plosive consonants in the dialect under discussion.
The aspiration symbol they adopted was the sign, / placed after an aspirated sound. For example:

/ibá/ ‘to grow rich’ (unaspirated /b/) /bá/ ‘to scold’ (aspirated /b/) All the sounds in the above words are similar including their tones. The only difference is that the plosive /b/ is aspirated in one word, bringing about a difference in meaning between the two words. Other examples are:
/ðè/ - ‘to cook soup’ (unaspirated)
/ðıè/ - ‘to wake up’ (aspirated)
/ícè/ - ‘to think’ (unaspirated)
/ícıè/ - different (aspirated)

Similarly, Carnochan presented aspiration as a feature of the syllable and as a distinctive feature among the plosive sounds. For example, these is a significant difference between /ph/ and /p/ and /bh/ and /b/. One difference between Carnochan’s analysis and swift and others’ analysis of aspiration is that while Carnochan used the phoneme /h/ to show aspiration, swift and others introduced a new symbol /ître/ to represent it.

An explanation that can be given for swift and others’ method is that aspiration does not necessarily imply an /h/ even though it creates the impression of being followed by an /h/ as Schane (1973:22) put it. Thus using the /h/ sound to represent it might be confusing.

DISCUSSION
From swift and others’ analysis, it can be observed that to some extent they adopted the prosodic approach especially in their analysis of nasalization since they showed concern with the nasalized syllable as a whole than the particular sound segment involved. Again, they treat both nasalization and aspiration as distinctive features. The difference is that nasalization is a distinctive feature of the syllable, while aspiration is a distinctive feature of the consonant for them. This contrasts with Carnochan’s approach of treating both as distinctive features of the syllable.

Nasality In Ọlụ By Umeh (1987)
Linguists who have studied Igbo have various ways of analysing nasalization in Igbo, Carrell (1970:104), cited in Umeh (1987:44), for example, claims that nasalization in Igbo is a feature of the syllable. She says that both the consonants and the vowels in Igbo are nasalized, and suggests that they should be marked in only one place within the syllable as morphophonemic rules would then distribute the feature of nasality throughout the syllable.

In his own study of five sub-dialects of Ọlụ, a dialect of Igbo, Umeh (1987:45), observed that [c√v], that is, nasalization of both consonant and vowel, is a possible occurrence in three sub-dialects of Ọlụ of the five he studied. [√cv] is only possible where the nasalized consonant is an approximant such as

[p, h, ] for example: [âpá] ‘breast’
[i]h(a)j - ‘to be equal’
[i]h(e)j - ‘to throw’

Nasalized vowels occur with fricatives such as [ s, z, ɻ, Z] as found in words like

[i̝aː] - ‘to wash’
[aɻ佐] - ‘back’
[iɻ] - to show’

Umeh observed that fricatives are normally not nasalized as in the above, although the vowels before and after them are nasalized. With regard to this, he noted the observation by Ladefoged that nasalization is not only a feature of the syllable and that made by Carrell who thinks nasalization should also be seen as a feature of the word.

The argument here is that when a word begins with a vowel, the nasal feature would start with the vowel but abates during the physical contact that is made for the production of the fricative. The nasalization continues with the next vowel, leaving the fricative unanalyzed. This Umeh terms non – contiguous nasalization.
Umeh also observed that nasalization can spread across whole words which have the structure [vcv] and [vcvcv] as found in words like

[ăvă] ‘breast’
[ăh]  ‘ant’

In such words, the Intervocalic consonants are approximants which unlike the fricatives can take nasalization.

From Umeh’s study, therefore we identify three cases of nasalization

1. Nasalization of vowels in the environment of fricatives.
2. Nasalization of the vowel before and after a nasal consonant.
3. Nasalization of the whole word where the intervocalic consonants is an approximant. This could be as a result of the vocalic quality of the liquid [r] which must have helped to sustain the effect of nasalization throughout the realization of the words as in [āpā] ‘breast’.

The only form of nasalization that exists in all the five sub-dialects of Olụ is the second observation. The others (1) and (3) apply only in three sub-dialects.

Clearly, Umeh (1987) attributes nasalization to the vowels as can be gathered from the above cases he identified. Vowels are nasalized in all three cases, consonants were only nasalized in one case, where nasalization spread across whole words and even then, only approximants could occur and only intervocically too. Thus from Umeh’s analysis, nasalization of consonants in Olụ is predictable.

Armstrong’s (1967) Analysis Of Nasality In Olụ

Armstrong’s study is basically a lexical comparison of five Igbo dialects where he collected wordlists on the five dialects, Olụ being one of them.

Armstrong presented all the phonemes of Olụ in a phonemic chart; he listed some nasalized consonants but no vowel in Olụ was marked with the nasalization mark.

The plosives are nasalized as in:

Nwoob)efē - ‘baby’ (bilabial plosive)
īg&ā - ‘chain’ (velar plosive)
mmmad)u - ‘person’ (alveolar plosive)

the glottal [h] could also be nasalized as in:
ōnwe ħ)a - ‘each other’
āh)u)h)u - ‘suffering’

Among the fricatives, the alveolar fricatives such as: s, sh, z, zh are nasalized as in
āz)u - ‘back’
iǐnyū ńς - ‘defecate’
is)ē - ‘five’

the bilabial and labio-dental fricative on the other hand are not nasalized. The lateral sound [l] does not take nasalization.

The approximants were not shown to take nasalization except where they were used to show palatalization or labialization as in:
ōzuahyā - ‘trade’
ogw)u - ‘thorn’

The vowels were presented in a phonemic vowel chart but the features nasality was not attributed to them and from the word list, no vowel was found to be nasalized.

Thus, Armstrong can be described as attributing nasality to the consonant in a nasalized syllable, that is, both consonant and vowels are nasalized. In accordance with Carrell’s (1970:104) suggestion that nasalization be marked in only one place within the syllable, Armstrong placed the mark on the consonant in the nasalized syllable. The morphophonemic rule would then distribute the feature throughout the syllable. This is also the convention adopted by Green and Igwe and Carnochan.

Consequently, Armstrong would write the word for breast and back:
This is different from the way Umeh presented it. Umeh attributed nasality to the vowel in a nasalized syllable and would write:

/ářá/- ‘breast’
/áž&ú/- ‘back’

The question then is: Is nasalization in Olu a feature of vowels or consonants?
Nasalization would be better analyzed as a feature of the vowel as described by Umeh (1987). This is because Umeh’s study is exhaustive since he examined five sub-dialects of the Olu dialect of Igbo. Being a native speaker of the language would also enhance his ability to describe and analyze what is going on in the language.

Armstrong’s study, on the other hand, is basically a lexical comparison based on wordlists he collected on five dialects of Igbo and just one sub dialect of Olu must have been used. Based on this, Umeh’s method of analysis would be more reliable.

Umeh analyzed the feature of nasalization as distinctive, primary and unpredictable, for example, it could cause meaningful difference between two words that are otherwise similar e.g.

[s], [z] unaspirated
[sh&], [zh] aspirated and nasalized

He cited several examples of this. According to Umeh, nasalization of consonants is limited to only three sub-dialects of Olu for example, the word for “madness” in the various sub-dialects would be:

D1  D2  D3  D4  D5
a)p)a) ápá ápá ápá ápá ‘madness’
ê·h)i) ê·h)i) ê·h)i) ê·f i) ‘cow’

Among the three cases of nasalization identified by Umeh, the only form of nasalization that exists in all the five sub-dialects studied is the second observation that has to do with the nasalization of vowels before and after a nasal consonant. The third case of nasalization where the consonant is nasalized can be found in only three sub-dialects.

CONCLUSION


We have tried to show so far how some linguists perceive nasalization in the Olu dialect of Igbo. Based on our observation, we may argue that nasalization of vowels is the more original form of nasalization in Olu. Thus we may conclude as Umeh did that nasalization is a feature of the vowels in Olu. When consonants are found to be nasalized, explanations of phonological conditioning could be given to them as [r] in [âpâ] is nasalized because of its phonological environment, being surrounded by nasalized vowels that affected its vocalic quality.
REFERENCES