

Word Formation in Nnewi Dialect: A Generative Phonology Approach

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Abstract

This paper deliberated on the process of word formation with reference to the function of rule of vowel harmony and syllabic nasal in one of the dialects of Igbo which is spoken in Nnewi, Nigeria. The study examined the collaboration of types of vowels and the syllabic nasals of Igbo to form words in Nnewi dialect of Igbo language using Generative Phonology (GP). The GP analysis establishes that the rule of vowel harmony and that of syllabic nasal usage are important indices in word formation process in Nnewi dialect. Explicitly, words like nma, mdu, okwute, osijsi, are not acceptable forms in Nnewi dialect. The data used for the study were collected through reading of books, articles, journals and through internet. Introspective method was also employed in the study in the sense that the researcher served as part of the tools used for the supply of the data being a proficient native speaker of Nnewi dialect. The study is descriptive and the theoretical framework adopted for the study is Generative phonology. The data analysed for the study discovered that until the rules of grammar of Igbo language are applied in the day to day word formation and usage in Nnewi dialect of Igbo, those words formed or used arbitrarily or subjectively (without following the acceptable convention) remain alienable to Nnewi dialect and in fact to Igbo language generally. The study noticed that some words

exist that did not agree with the rules of Igbo language. Such words may have been formed or used by those (either as Igbo L2 learners or native speakers) who do not recognize nor understood the rules of Igbo grammar and as a result, made modifications that are not in accord with the rule of word formation in the language. Furthermore, it was equally found out that even though some Igbo scholars may have believed that Igbo language attest only total vowel harmony, this paper wants to argue that Nnewi dialect of Igbo and indeed Igbo language allows partial vowel harmony in the formation of its words even though examples of such words may be minute .

Key Words: Word formation, Nnewi, Dialect, Vowel harmony, Generative phonology.

Introduction

Language is a universal phenomenon that distinguishes man from other creatures. It is universal in the sense that every man from whatever tribe and tongue exercise his or her speech apparatus to produce utterances that yields to communication. Universality of all human endeavours could be seen in the obvious fact that basically every language across the world possesses form classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and the like. Languages possess universal quality when it is targeted towards achieving interpersonal relationships. Language could also be termed a universal phenomenon because all languages worldwide are made up of consonants and vowels. All things being equal, the universality of language does not deny the fact that every individual language in the world possesses its specific characteristics that in a way separate it from other human languages. Such specific features could be seen when the formation of words as well as the grammatical construction in that language have to conform to the rule of grammar of that

language. It is these unique qualities that qualify a language as an independent language. Part of such peculiarities is embedded on the accepted convention as agreed by the native speakers of the language. For example it is obvious that all languages have consonants and vowels that are combined to form words in the language, yet every individual language has its irreplaceable way of combining these sounds (consonants and vowels) to form its words. It is on this premise that this paper poised to look at those qualities that single out a particular language from the other as it pertain to Nnewi dialect of Igbo language to find out whether all the words used by the Nnewi dialect speakers of Igbo conform to the rules of Igbo grammar or if there are nonconforming words in use in day to day interaction among the Nnewi dialect speaker of Igbo.

Nnewi is the second largest city in Anambra State in south-eastern Nigeria. Nnewi as a metropolitan city encompasses two local government areas, Nnewi North and Nnewi South; Nnewi North is commonly referred to as Nnewi central, and comprises four autonomous quarters: Otolu, Uruagu, Umudim, and Nnewi-ichi. Nnewi North also includes Ichi, an autonomous neighbouring town. Nnewi has an estimated population of 391,227 according to 2006 Nigeria census. The city spans over 1,076.9 square miles (2,789 km²) in Anambra State. Nnewi dialect is recognized as one of the full-fledged dialects of Igbo language. The dialect is used by all Nnewi indigenes in their day to day social, educational, judicial, economic and political interactions both home and abroad (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nnewi>). In forming Igbo words especially in Nnewi dialect for instance, there is every tendency for language user to observe the rule of vowel harmony as well as keeping in mind the rules that guide the use of syllabic nasals (semi-vowels) in forming words in the dialect in which case morphology of Igbo language spelt out the dos

and don'ts of Igbo grammar as it pertains to Nnewi dialect
(<http://www.nairaland.com/1829096/brief-history-nnewi>).

Literature Review

Morphology according to Crystal (1980, p. 225), is the branch of grammar which studies the structure of words, primarily through the use of morpheme constructs. Fromkin and Rodman (1998, p.69) are of the view that the study of the internal structure of words, and the rules by which words are formed is called morphology. Aronoff and Fudeman (2005, p. 1) posit that morphology, in linguistics, refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed. Similarly, Malkjaer (1991, p. 314) affirms that morphology is the study of the meaningful parts of words. Spencer (1991, p. 4) also opines that morphology is the branch of linguistics that is concerned with the knowledge of word structure. In the same vein, Tomori (1999, p. 21) included that morphology is the study of the structure of word, meaning – the study of the rules governing the formation of linguistic words in a language. Atkinson et al. (1982, p. 19) argues that Morphology received an appraisal in the 1970s to re-evaluate the long held perception that morphology is just the study of the structure of words. This is because words operate both on a syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship within and outside the conceptual words. Asher (1994, p. 72) equally adds that no meaningful consideration of what the word is, will be complete without a clear consideration of the morpheme. The morpheme, in itself, could be seen therefore as the hard-core of any morphological process.

Matthews (1974, p. 47) intoned that morphology is relevant to any language because it explicates the rules governing the transformational patterns of the words of that language. This view is supported by Tomori (1977, p. 21), who

states how the words in a language should be modified to reflect changes in gender, number, case, aspect and tense. Linguists agree that such laws on morphological transformations vary from one language to another, and that prompted Tomori to add that if those rules are not recognized and understood by the foreign learner of the language, he may make modifications that are not in accord with the rule of word formation in that language and, in that particular instance, he may coin wrong forms by analogy.

Having gone through the contributions of some scholars pertaining to morphology, this paper targets to examine the modus operandi of word formation in Nnewi dialect based on Tomori's (1977, p. 21) assumption that if the rules governing word formation are not well recognized and understood by either the native speaker or the learner of a language, he may make modifications that are not in accord with the rule of word formation in that language. This paper also worked to investigate some words in Nnewi dialect to showcase the importance of mastering the rules of grammar of language both by the native language users and the language learners. This paper assumes that it is not only the language learners that need to recognize and understand the rules of grammar of a language in order not to deviate from the acceptable norms guiding word formation in the language but the native speakers also who do not know their onus in the right application of rules of grammar and their usage in their language with particular reference to Nnewi dialect.

Word Formation

Matthews (1991, p. 37) defines word formation as that branch of morphology which deals with relations between a complex lexeme and a simple (r) lexeme. Marchand (1969) complements that word formation is that branch of the sciences of language which studies the pattern on which a language forms new lexical units. Rubba (2004) views word formation

as the processes that deal with the ways new words are created in English. Rufa'i (1979, p.1) augmented that word formation encompasses with formally and semantically analysable composite forms in language.

Vowel Harmony

Ikekonwu et al. (1999, p. 14) observe that there is no coming together of the organs of speech and as such there is no constriction at the oral cavity at the production of vowel sounds. They further stress that the description of vowel sounds poses more difficulty because their places of articulation are not as obvious as those of the consonant sounds. Igbo vowels according to Ikekonwu et al. (1999, p. 15) are eight in number. They include, a, e, i, ɪ, o, ɔ, u, ʊ. Based on the phonology of Igbo language, vowels of Igbo are divided into two (heavy vowels and light vowels). This division is as a result of a phonological process called vowel harmony. In a language that observes vowel harmony, some vowels co-occur in words because those vowels that occur together to form words share similar characteristics. In Igbo for instance, we have group 'A' and group 'E' vowels. Under group 'A' we have ɪ, a, ʊ, ɔ and e, i, u, o, under group 'E'. When producing group 'E' (i, e, u, o) vowels, there is no closure at the pharyngeal cavity and that is why they are referred to as ɪ-ATR̥ vowels but during the production of group 'A' (ɪ, a, ʊ, ɔ), there use to be closure of the pharyngeal cavity as a result of the retraction of the tongue root and that is why they are also referred to as ɪ+ATR̥ vowels (Ikekonwu 1999, p. 16). Owolabi (1989, 41) argues that vowel harmony is an example of co-occurrence restriction among vowels such that all vowels that occur in a defined domain share one phonetic feature in common. Vowel harmony can be total or partial. In total harmony, the vowels in the vowel system of a language are split into two and are constrained to occur with each other. Partial vowel harmony includes that the vowels in the language fall into two or more harmonic sets with

overlaps. Similarly, Crystal (1992, p. 168) puts it that vowel harmony involves the type of assimilation which takes place when vowels come to share certain features with contrastive vowels elsewhere in a word or phrase. Crystal's assertion was exemplified with a situation where a front vowel in the first syllable of a word would require the presence of a front vowel in the second syllable. Nnewi dialect of Igbo conventionally attests total vowel harmony in accordance to the phonology of Igbo language. The light vowels $i+ATR\grave{n}$ in the dialect as well as in Igbo language as a whole are a, i, o, u and the heavy vowels $i-ATR\grave{n}$ on the other hand are e, i, o, u. The light vowels co-occur to form words in the dialect; in the same vein, heavy vowels come together to form words in the dialect. This means to say that there should be no co-occurrence of $i+ATR\grave{n}$ and $i-ATR\grave{n}$ vowels in Nnewi Igbo words. Allocates

Theoretical Framework

The data for this study was analysed according to the perspective of Generative Phonology. Chomsky and Halle (1968, p.5) sees generative phonology as a phenomenon that views speech as sequences of discrete segments which are complexes of a particular set of phonetic features and the simultaneous and sequential combination of these features and constraints. Generative phonology accounts for some language phenomena such as foreign accent, speech error, linguistic intuition and others. Generative phonology is a rule of grammar that tells when the correct representation of utterances has been carried out by the native language speaker based on his internalized grammar. Generative phonology also throws more light on the underlying aspects of a language from which the surface representations are derived. Generative phonology further illuminates how the surface structures are related as well as describes the forms and functions of the phonological rules which relate them.

Analysis of Word Formation in Nnewi Dialect

One of the peculiarities of Nnewi dialect and Igbo words as a whole among other things is that it follows the rule of Igbo grammar (rule of vowel harmony and that of syllabic nasal). This is achieved by making sure that the letters of Igbo alphabet that co-join to form each word belong to the same group of vowel and the semi-vowel. In this case it is either the sounds of Igbo language join either light vowel (Group A) or heavy vowel (Group E) or that they join semi-vowel /m/ or /n/ to form acceptable Igbo words in the dialect.

Words formed in combination of light vowels (Group A vowels) include:

<u>Words</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
ókpà	leg
àzùzù	catarrh
ójí	kola
ábúbō	vegetable
ákúkó	story
ókú	fire
òkù	wooden plate or wooden pot

ìgbà	drum
ákú	palm kernel
ákwú	palm fruit
ùmí accumulate to	well(a place dug for water to be fetched)
òkpùkpòkū	hearth
ákùkù	side
ósísō	quickly
òkúkò	fowl
úgū	pumpkin
úzò	door
ókwùrù	okra
ákpùrū	eūcreta of animals
àlà	ground
ódū	pestle
òdù	tail
ógwù	medicine
òkpúkúpú	bone
útàrà	pounded food(for swallow)

ùdò	rope
ányàsì	night
ónū	mouth
àzù	back
ázù	fish
àkwúkwù	epilepsy
átúrū	sheep
òsísó	sweat
ákpì	scorpion
óbā	barn
àgbúgbō	pen(for animals)
àgbákúrú	centipede
òmú	palm frond
àgbúsì	black ant
ùkó	ceiling
ájù	dizziness
ògòdò	wrapper

Words formed with Heavy vowel (Group E vowels)

<u>Nnewi Dialect</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
ójókō	plantain

ùdènè	vulture
ófē	soup
òbèjìrì	machete
úgbènè	feather
ùnèrè	banana
úté	mat
óché	chair
ùchíchì	night
ékú	wooden spoon
égbè	hawk
ùgò	eagle
ùdíde	spider
ùkwù	heap
úkwù	hip
úzè	squirrel
ígwè	iron
íkwè	mortar
úrùkpù	cloud
úbè	spear
ùbé	pear

òsú	outcast
íbì	elephantiasis of the scrotum
éjù	pan (made of clay)
óbē	an object used for climbing
ígbègìrì frond	the beginning of the stem of palm (that contains thorns)
éwú	goat
ósò	pepper
ídìdè	earthworm
òkpò	worms (in the stomach)
ìtè	pot
ìkó	cup
úkwùisò	pillar (of the house)
óbóró sitting	a bed like object made with clay (for or sleeping)
óníkē	aye

Language grows just as living things grow. In a bid for language to grow, phenomenon of word borrowing comes into play. One language tends to borrow certain words from another to add to her lexical items in order to survive or to develop. Nnewi dialect of Igbo language is not an exception in the race of language survival and development. According to the principles that guide the grammatical construction in Igbo, words that are borrowed from other languages are usually

formed, spelt or written and phonologically processed (such as involving the rule of vowel insertion) to suit the rules and principles Igbo grammar. The following are examples of borrowed words in Nnewi dialect which their formation and spelling have to agree with rules of word formation in Igbo:

<u>Borrowed Words in Nnewi Dialect</u>	<u>Source</u>
<u>Language (English)</u>	

simenti	cement
pomupu	pump
tebulu	table
televishonu	television
boketi	bucket
botuļu	bottle
fanu	fan
turenu	train
moto	motor
gulasị	glass
bedi	bed
radio	radio
sutovu	stove
komputa	computer

shu	shoe
fonu	phone
kalinda	calendar
foto	photo
buloḱu	block
buredi	bread
sukulu	school
fatalaiḱa	fertilizer
waya	wire
ketulu	kettle
fulakisi	flask
supageti	spaghetti
oganu	organ
igini	engine
popo	pawpaw
mburoda	umbrella

Nnewi dialect of Igbo is known to have open ended syllable structure, nonetheless; some words are noticed to begin with consonants. Pertinent to note that such words that start with consonants do not have their initial sounds as ordinary consonants but syllabic nasals which otherwise are called semi-vowels in Igbo language (which in Nnewi dialect can stand by itself as a syllable because it is also a tone bearing unit in Igbo

which means that it does not need a supporting vowel sound to stand as a syllable). As a result therefore, they are regarded as original Igbo words because their usage in word formation in the dialect adapt to the rule of Igbo grammar (otherwise called rule of syllabic harmonization) when combining with other sounds to produce words in Nnewi dialect of Igbo. The following are examples of words in Nnewi dialect that are formed with the combination of syllabic nasal /m/ with other sounds (consonants and vowels):

<u>Igbo Word</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
m̀gbúnyò	back of the house
m̀gbùájā house)	outside the fence (usually at the back of the
m̀kpúmè	stone
m̀búzù	cricket (edible)
m̀gbá	wrestle
m̀bè	tortoise
m̀gbú	pain
m̀kpókū	matches
m̀bù	a club
m̀mádu`	a person
m̀mánú	oil
m̀mírī	water
m̀gbèdè	evening

mgbídí	a town in Igbo land
m̀bàzù	a digger
ímà	knife
ímā	beauty
ímányá	drink
ím̀onwú	masquerade
ím̀úṵ	spirit
íméfiè sin	
m̀búbò	farm (in front of the compound)
mgbírímgbá	bell
íméwú	maltreat

Underneath are examples of words that are preceded by a syllabic nasal /n/.

<u>Nnewi Dialect</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
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ndélí	midnight
nsòwú	trouble or problem or disturbance
ntē	cricket (inedible)
ndù	life
ndìdì	patient
ndù	maggot

ńkítā	dog
ńtùtù	hair
ńtútū	needle
ńzū	native chalk
ńzā	a specie of birds (usually small)
ńzè	a chieftaincy title among the Igbo
ńnwá	a child
ńnē	mother
ńnà	father
ńtú	nail
ńnékwú	hen
ńkú	firewood
ńtú	ash
ńkù	wing
ńnùnù	bird
ńgwèrè	lizard
ńgú	fetcher (used to pluck something from the tree)

Accordingly, some onomatopoeic words in Nnewi dialect correspond to vowel harmony in their formation. Examples of such words encompass the following:

<u>Onomatopoeic Words</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kọị kọị shoes	noise made by high heeled
gbim gbim powder	noise made by gunshot – gun
tim tim something	noise made by hitting hard on
nwụrị nwụrị object is squeezed	sound gotten when a soft
potọ potọ / pịtị pịtị	sound gotten when watery or very soft substance
	is stepped upon
kom kom hitting of a gong.	sound gotten from the

Nevertheless, there are some Igbo words that their formation may seem not to follow the rule of vowel harmony, however, in the formation of some of such words rule of vowel harmony still prevail. Examples of such words include compound words such as:

Nnewi Words

Gloss

mkpúrú + édémédé = mkpúrúédémédé
 alphabet

myìrì + ùdàúmē = myìrìùdàúmē
 syllabic nasal or semi-vowel

ógwù + mágàlà = ógwùmágàlà

an animal that camouflages

úlò + élū = úlòēlù

upstairs

úgbó + élū = úgbóélū

aeroplane

ákwú + órù = ákwúórù

pineapple

ùdà + úmé = ùdàúmē

vowel

úgbó + mmírī = úgbómmírī

ship

úgbó + ókpóró + ígwè = úgbóókpōrōīgwè

train

ányá + mmírī = ányámmírī

tears

ógwù + égō = ógwùēgō

money ritual

ányá + òkú = ányáōkū

jealousy

àkpà + ósè = àkpàōsè

bag of pepper

òmé + nà + ùkó = òménáūkó

some who gives when it is

scarce

$$\text{Òkó} + \text{̀nkwò} = \text{Òkò̀nkwò}$$

name

$$\text{Úchè} + \text{ńná} = \text{Úchènńà}$$

name

$$\acute{I}j\grave{e} + \acute{o}m\acute{a} = \acute{I}j\grave{e}\bar{o}m\bar{a}$$

name

Íke' + nnà = Íkénnà

name

At the same time, some words in the dialect exist which are not compound words and yet do not comply with rule of vowel harmony. Such words are:

àhímù	scent leaf
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ńjìnà	snail
Èméká	name
Ébùká	name

From the aforementioned illustration, it could be noticed that the words demonstrate partial vowel harmony in their formation. Such goes a long way to support that Nnewi dialect as well as Igbo language as a whole demonstrates partial vowel harmony because some of the listed examples obtain in Igbo language.

All things being equal, in the process of this study, some words which did not correspond to the rule of grammatical construction in Nnewi dialect and Igbo language in general were found. It is important to note that no matter how we feign ignorance of the rules of a language, or how a native speaker or a learner of a language tries to modernise the lexical item of a language to resemble that/those of another language without any academic supporting literature, such construction can never be acceptable. In this connection therefore, constructions as below cannot be catalogued as part of Nnewi dialect and indeed not Igbo words. Some of such misspelt words comprise:

okafor

ekch

ezech

ukoh

afor

uzor

ordu

awka

orlu

udoh

orji

omeh

ukpor

Conclusion

At the end of the study, it was found out that for either the native speaker or the learner of Nnewi dialect to form acceptable words in the dialect and in Igbo language as a whole, there is every tendency that such a person must do so based on the agreed convention of Igbo grammar. The study also revealed that even though majority of Nnewi dialect and some of Igbo words agree with total vowel harmony, some evidence of partial vowel harmony still exist in the dialect as well as in Igbo language as a whole.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the elites in Igbo language need to come up with programmes that will sensitize both Nnewi dialect speakers and all the Igbo language speakers on the need to constantly use their dialect and language wherever they are and in all forms of communication especially among the Igbo native speakers without feeling shy or uncivilized; because it is said that practice makes perfect and what you do constantly will never elude you coupled with the adage that says that whatever you call your thing is what it is. It is believed also that Nnewi

dialect and Igbo language as a whole will survive and develop as others like English if we the owners and the speakers become proud of it and use it conscientiously. The paper at the same time suggests that vowels ĩ , i , u , a , eñ be regarded as neutral vowels; since they seem to co-occur with both $\text{ĩ}+\text{ATRñ}$ and $\text{ĩ}-\text{ATRñ}$ vowels in certain Igbo words.

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