

INFLUENCE OF CONSONANT OMISSION ON SOME IGBO WORDS: A STUDY OF ONITSHA EDUCATIONAL ZONE

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at how some Igbo words were affected by the removal of consonants; it was conducted in the Onitsha educational zone in Anambra State. In Igbo, there occurs elision of consonant. At the vocal cord, compression of the air produces spoken sounds known as consonants, implying that there is restricted airflow at the vocal cords. The removal of a spoken consonant from a word that contains a consonant is known as consonant elision. This study's specific objective is to understand the potential changes that could arise from pronouncing terms that contain consonant speech sounds in Igbo, and to find out the possible changes that are brought about in the spelling of some Igbo terms as a result of consonant omission. Through the use of a random sampling technique, sixteen students from Ezechima Primary School Onitsha Anambra State participated in the study. A descriptive survey design approach was used in the study. This study found that the omission that occurs in a word due to consonant elision makes the word incomplete. The study's findings showed how a term's typical pronunciation changes when a consonant is omitted, though, there is no meaning loses. This study recommends that future research should concentrate on specific Igbo terms that have consonant omissions that cause pronunciation changes but are not classed as words or terms to be examined under consonant omission in the Igbo language.

Keywords: Language(Igbo), Vowel, Consonant, Consonant omission and Igbo tribe.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool that humans use to communicate with each other. It serves as a channel for information sharing between people. Man is different from other animals because of this inherent gift from God. According to Chomsky and Halle (1968), this means that man alone possesses this natural ability, which facilitates effective communication, and equally have a device in himself that made him to use language, hence, language acquisition device. Language serves as a means of self-identification and ancestry; hence it might be said that language is the cornerstone of human origin and civilization. This implies that it could be challenging to discern between various cultures and individuals in the absence of language. With language serving as a tool for human communication in a multitude of circumstances, it is important to keep in mind that language can be classified into two categories: linguistic and para-linguistic. Taking into account the foregoing, it can be claimed that the language or communication type that is being studied in this study is a linguistic form of communication in which verbal utterances are utilized to transfer information between individuals. Every nation in the globe has a distinct means of communication. It can be said that Igbo has its own writing system because, certain languages that have become more

prevalent have created writing systems unique to themselves. The Ọnwụ orthography was designed to bridge the gap after a number of disputes and delays in the development of an official orthography to be used in writing Igbo. This is an orthographic system with 36 letters, comprising 28 consonants and 8 vowels. As a result, speakers of the language utilises it. It is a language used by black people who are originally from Southeast Nigeria, and is used for a wide range of purposes.

The black people that live in the southeast of Nigeria are known as the Igbo tribe. These are the people who are known to have lived in the area that is now known as Igbo land in Nigeria. They speak the Igbo language, which is used to establish connections with one another through conversation. The Igbo tribe has five states in Nigeria: Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. In addition to these States, there are speakers of the Igbo language in neighbouring States like Delta, Rivers, Kogi, and Akwaibom, among others. Natives and speakers use this language as a means of self-expression and to deal with day-to-day challenges. When necessary, speakers from the same community as well as neighbouring communities use it to arbitrate, defuse, and fairly settle disputes among them. This implies that the Igbo language has a big influence on people who speak it. This is a result of language speakers' self-awareness. Because of their shared understanding, there is less of a communication gap between language speakers, which promotes harmonious coexistence. In the absence of this understanding, a person's inability to communicate in a way that others can understand could cause discord in a given society.

According to the backgrounds mentioned above, there are many more languages spoken throughout the world than just the Igbo language under discussion. It involves written and spoken languages that are used both domestically and internationally. Nigerians speak approximately 400 different national languages, but only three are recognized as the majority languages (Eze, Nwike & Ezeudo, 2023). Akindele (2022) asserts that there are more than 522 languages spoken in Nigeria, and Lewis, Gary, and Fenning (2021) asserts that there are between 522 and 527 languages spoken in Nigeria. Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba are the three primary languages spoken in Nigeria. In this study, the Igbo language is examined. Igbo is one of the primary languages spoken in Nigeria by the Igbo tribe, a West African nation that is multiethnic. The Igbos used many forms of writing to record and instruct before the colonial era. Generally speaking, the missionaries were the ones who initially began recording the Igbo language sounds they heard when they realized they needed to learn the language to aid them in their missionary work. During this time, the Igbo people began using the Lepsius orthography, the Igbo uniion, and Onitsha-Igbo (dialect), and this sparked a heated debate over the appropriate writing system for the Igbo language. Azuonye (1992) states that this issue persisted from 1929 until the introduction of Ọnwụ orthography in 1961. Nonetheless, it is important to explicitly declare that the Igbos had a writing system prior to colonization. Nsibidi is the writing system used by the Igbo people (Azuonye, 1992: 698). The fact that different writing systems were employed in the Igbo language - Igbo-union, Onitsha-Igbo, Lepsius orthography, etc. should be noted. This lends credence to the idea that language-specific information is written in the same writing system as English. It is possible to deduce that about all the world languages uses an orthographic system to encode English words (Collins, Mees, & Carley 2019).

On a national level, the Igbo language, which is one of the primary languages in Nigeria was discussed as an example. Igbo orthography refers to the writing system used to write the language and the objects that surrounds it. This implies that the Ọnwụ orthography from 1961 is the official orthography used by anyone who wishes to write in Igbo. A writing system called Ọnwụ

orthography was created in 1961 specifically for writing in the Igbo language. It is the official writing system used by the Igbo people for document writing and instruction. The Igbo language is unique, nonetheless, in a lot of ways. It is a tonal language. In this language, tone is utilised to distinguish between two or more words that sound similar when spoken. Examples are as follows:

- a. Áká Hand
- b. Ákà Bangle

- c. Ísí Head
- d. Ísì Smell

- e. Àkwá Egg
- f. Ákwà Clothe
- g. Ákwá Cry

The aforementioned examples show how tone, that is, high and low tone was used to distinguish the samples. Accordingly, it should be mentioned that there are three different tonal markers in Igbo: high('), low(`), and intermediate tone(˘). This tone mark can be used to indicate different word pronunciations. It can be used to differentiate between similar-sounding. For instance:

- h. Úchè Sense
- i. Úché Name (of a person)

- j. Ònyínyé Gift
- k. Ónyínyé Name (of a person)

The above statement indicates that tone distinguishes between them. The second characteristic of the language being discussed is that Igbo has undergone vowel assimilation. In this context, vowel assimilation occurs when two vowels that seem to stay close in a word, one of the two moves forward or backward to swallow the other vowel that is close to it, causing the vowel to take on the form and characteristics of the vowel that swallows it. When a vowel joins two words and the first letter of the second word and the last letter of the first word are both vowels, one of the two vowels next to each other will swallow the other, changing the form of the swallowed vowel (Okafor & Ewelukwa 2012). This study is primarily concerned with consonant ellision, which is the phenomenon where a consonant deviates from its normal location due to rapid speech delivery. As a result, this study focuses on the influence of consonant omission on some Igbo words: a study of Onitsha educational zone, with two objectives that formed this study: to understand the potential changes that could arise from pronouncing terms that contain consonant speech sounds and to find out the possible changes that are brought about in the spelling of some Igbo terms as a result of consonant omission. Given the aforementioned, it is evident to consider that consonant elision can be noticeable in Igbo names since people's names are a component of the language's vocabulary. Before going over consonant elision, it will be important to talk about consonants as they were utilised in the study.

2. CONSONANT

A consonant is a spoken sound made by a speech utterance with vocal tract stricture. Consonants are thought to reflect the letters used in Igbo writing and arise when there is not a free flow of air at the place of articulation. According to Nwike (2021), the Igbo language lacks specific consonant and vowel sounds that the English language possesses, making it challenging for an Igbo learner of the English language to acquire language proficiency. As earlier said, the Igbo writing system was developed in 1961 by the Ọnwụ committee. This means that, according to Nwike (2021), the Igbo alphabets are as follows:

A B CH D E F G GB GH GW H I J K KP KW L M N
Ñ NW NY O Ọ P R S SH T U Ụ V W Y Z

In keeping with the foregoing, Nwike (2021) deduces that the 28 consonants of the Igbo language are represented by the following alphabets.

B CH D F G GB GH GW H J K KP KW L M N
Ñ NW NY P R S SH T V W Y Z

Accordingly, it is clear that in Igbo consonants, only the letter ‘Ñ’ has a diacritical mark. In Igbo, there are eight vowel speech sounds: four light (AỊOỤ) and four heavy (EIOU). By orthography, Igbo has two syllabic nasals: ‘M’ and ‘N’. In Igbo, consonants can occur at the beginning or middle of a word as opposed to the end, unlike vowels. Consonants in Igbo cannot stand alone, and cannot be used as pronouns; vowels, on the other hand, can. Igbo has both vowel and consonant elisions, but it's important to note that they are similar yet distinct from one another. The former is a case of a vowel falling off during speech, while the latter is a case of a consonant being eliminated from the word in which it occurred. One may claim that the Igbo language is distinct in all of these because consonants enrich the language's vocabulary. Consonant elision occurs in the Igbo language, as was previously mentioned, which results in various realiations of interpretation, depending on where it is used.

2.1 Elision of Consonant

Due to rapid speech, one consonant in an Igbo word that had two consonants in it was unintentionally lost. A situation called consonant elision occurs when a consonant is absent from a word where it should be, leaving the affected word or words' letters incomplete. According to the previously stated claims, it is significant to remember that if any of the consonants that have been highlighted above, that is, B CH D F G GB GH GW H J K KP KW L M N Ñ NW NY P R S SH T V W Y Z are absent from a word where they should be present, one may infer that the consonant was omitted due to a rapid utterance. In Igbo, some instances of consonant elision are as follows:

Table one

S/N	Word	Gloss	Consonant Elision	Onitsha-Igbo	Letter that Fell Out
1	<u>Ò</u> mùmù	Learning	Óùmù	Óùmú	m
2	<u>Á</u> híhíá		Áihíá	Áifíá	h
3	<u>Ò</u> mùmé		Óùmé	Óùmé	m

Consonant omission happens when a person speaks quickly and is not aware of the words he says. This means that there might not be any indication of consonant omissions while the speaker is aware of his language. It is crucial to notice from the above table that the words in the previously stated samples, whose letters are underlined were omitted. This indicates that the consonants in the Igbo words ‘m’, ‘h’ and ‘m’ were eliminated, resulting in an inadequate number of letters to form the word.

In this case, Onitsha dialect and Onitsha-Igbo are distinct from one another because Onitsha dialect is the language used to identify the indigenous of Onitsha as a people, while Onitsha-Igbo is the dialect that is spoken and understood by all Onitsha residents and traders (Ikekonwu, 1985 and Nwaozuzu, 2008). This implies that no particular community speaking Igbo can assert that they are the original speakers of the language. For instance, this is the Igbo language that most people in the Onitsha community, especially at the Onitsha Main Market utilize for transactions and conversation. As a result, in their attempt to have a discussion, especially while speaking fast, they mispronounce some Igbo syllables and omit a consonant that is important to the formation of the phrase. This implies that it is easy to determine that a consonant has been omitted from a word that should have a consonant when something similar happens.

According to the background information provided above, this investigation looked at the impact of consonant omission on a few Igbo words. It studied the Onitsha educational zone which is in Anambra State, and focused on two main goals: to understand the potential changes that could arise from pronouncing terms that contain consonant speech sounds in Igbo, and to find out the possible changes that are brought about in the spelling of some Igbo terms as a result of consonant omission. Herein, this study ascertained whether there is a change in the pronunciation of those terms, and also, if there is a change in pronunciation, does it in any way bring about change in the meaning of the names. The population of this study is all the pupils of Ezechima Primary School Onitsha in Anambra State, in the 2022/2023 academic session. The sample size is all the primary five pupils who were specifically chosen for this study. Primary five has four arms. From each of the arms, four students were chosen at random, and they each came up with the four names that were used for this study. Lastly, a descriptive survey approach was employed in this study to shed light on the methodology. A descriptive research survey methodology was employed, as there are no computations involved in this study, just definitions and descriptions of the terms and data used.

2.2 Empirical study

In 2023, Eze, Nwike, and Ezudo carried out a study. They precisely used names that people answer in Igbo from the Department of Linguistics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the 2020–2021 academic session to conduct the study. The study's main goal was to look into the spelling of specific Igbo words in connection to elision and assimilation of vowels. The basis for this study's discussion was the type of vowel assimilation and elision that is so noticeable in Igbo names. The population of this study consisted of all first- through third-year students in the Linguistics

Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In order to achieve the objective that served as the study's direction, Eze et al. (2023) employed a descriptive survey design. This study discovered that some Igbo names are either omitted or assimilated as a result of speaking quickly while articulating them. The prevalence of vowel elision, regressive vowels, and complete assimilations in Igbo names was also revealed by this study. A study conducted by Eze et al. (2023) focused on the influence of vowel assimilation and elision in the spelling of specific Igbo names, whereas the current study is concentrating on the influence of consonant omission on some Igbo nouns.

Ubani (2021) conducted research on the English, Yoruba, and Igbo sound systems. According to the study, each language in the world has a distinct sound system, which leads to variations in pronunciation and spelling. These sound patterns often influence L2 instruction, acquisition, and learning. The goal of this research was to compare and contrast the sound systems of English and the indigenous languages of Nigeria, Yoruba and Igbo. As part of a qualitative design, Ubani (2021) employed primary data gathered through focus groups, observations, and interviews. There was also use of a range of secondary sources. The study found that although English is an Indo-European language with a unique sound system, Igbo and Yoruba, two of the three languages, belong to the same language family but have different phonemes. The study emphasized the origins of their favourable and unfavourable locations of convergence and divergence with regard to L2 acquisition. Ubani's (2021) research provided solutions for negative interference scenarios. The current study and the Ubani (2021) study are analogous since they both had an impact on the Igbo language for different reasons. In contrast to the preceding work, which examined the English, Yoruba, and Igbo sound systems and how they interfere with second language learning, the current study examines influence of consonant omission on some Igbo words.

3. PRESENTATION AND EXAMINATION OF CERTAIN IGBO TERMS

This section examines some terms in the Igbo language that was used for the study, and details all of the pronunciation-related events that took place.

Table two

S/N	Word	Gloss	Consonant Elision	Consonant letter that fell out
1	Ákwúkwó	Book	Áùkwó	kw
2	Ákúkó	Story	Áúkó	k
3	òsísó	Quick	Óísó	s
4	Ókúkù	Hen	Óùkú	k
5	Ógwùgwù	Deity	Óùgwú	gw
6	Òsgbúgbú	Killing	Óùgbú	gb
7	Ósísí	Tree	Óísí	s
8	Àchìchà	Bread	Áíchá	ch
9	Ònyínyé	Gift	Óìnyè	ny
10	Ùchíchá	Cockroach	Úíchá	ch
11	Òmùmé	Behaviour	Óùmé	m

The terminologies stated above make it evident that they are both given names for certain objects utilised in the language and culture as well as names that people bear in Igbo. It is also clear that the speaker's fast speech caused certain consonants to be lost. But as a result, there was a conspicuous consonant elision in the study's terminology. By deduction, it is evident that the consonants "kw," "k," "s," "k," "gw," "gb," "s," "ch," "ny," and "m" were removed from the words where they belonged. In light of the explanations of the terms used in table 2 above will be provided in light of the study's goal.

In the first column of the above mentioned table, "Ákwíkwó" was utilised as a focal point. " The term 'Ákwúkwó' is an Igbo word. Due to the speaker's rapid speech, the consonant "kw" was omitted from the word. Thus, instead of saying " Ákwúkwó," one will pronounce "Áùkwó," even though the correct pronunciation is " Ákwúkwó." However, this resulted in the amount of words that were supposed to make up "Ákwúkwó" being reduced from five to four letters. This indicates that the meaning of the word "Ákwíkwó" is still complete and, therefore, the existence of consonant elision did not change the meaning in any way; rather, it merely affected how the phrase should be pronounced, which is why "Ákwúkwó" was used instead of "Áùkwó." It can also be claimed that the other words utilised in table two above experienced incidents comparable to this one.

Even though the primary concern that drove this study was the influence of consonant omission on some Igbo words, there are other Igbo words or names that experience consonant elision but do not follow the pattern of other forms of consonantal elisions. For example, it is evident that each item in the given table has a certain form. It is clear that there are two "s" in this Igbo word, "Ósísí," with the second "s" persisting after the first fell off during a fast speech. Nevertheless, a consonant was eliminated in the circumstances, even if such is not applicable in the table three. A more detailed example is given in the table below:

Table three

S/N	Word	Gloss	Consonant Elision	Consonant that Fell Out
1	Ónyébúchí	Onyebuchi	Ónyéùchí	b
2	Chíámáká	Chíámáká	Chîáká	am
3	Chúkwúdí	Chukwudí	Chúùdí	kw
4	Chínédú	Chínédú	Chîèdú	n
5	Chínyéàkà	Chinyeaka	Chîèáká	ny

As the accompanying table illustrates, these are all Igbo names with evidence of consonant elision. For example, when the name "Ónyébúchí" is spoken, the term "Ónyéùchí" will be pronounced swiftly. Here, it is clear that the letter "b" was removed from the sample provided in the previous table. Again, it is evident that the word's meaning remained unchanged even after the letter "b" was removed from the name. The reason this type of removal was not regarded as a consonantal elision in Igbo grammar is the researcher's concern. This is because in other instances, the omitted consonant did not change the word's meaning; rather, it merely slightly changed how it was pronounced. More generally, this is an issue that distinguished Igbo scholars must address. The following letters were among the ones that disappeared from the previously described samples: "b," "am," "kw," "n," and "ny."

4. CONCLUSION

Consonant omission is one situation where the presence of the deletion results in a change in the way the words are pronounced. The study's goals suggest that they were accomplished, especially in relation to a possible change in sound and a spelling shift brought about by the removal of a consonant. The study's first goal was accomplished since it found that there is, in fact, change in the sense that a name's pronunciation changes when an Igbo letter is absent. This finding was based on the probable change that may have occurred in the pronunciation of terms or names. Secondly, it is imperative to state clearly that a change has occurred due to possible alterations in the spelling of particular Igbo terms or names. This considers the fact that the absence of a consonant causes the letters meant to form the word's components to be incomplete, changing the way the word is spelled. However, the terms' or names' meaning remains unaltered in any way despite the occurrence of consonant deletion, elision, or omission. It is clear from the foregoing that the second goal of the study has been accomplished.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Further research in Igbo, according to this study, should look into words like Chíámáká, Chúkúdí, and Chínédú', as well as other names or words that resemble the kind of consonant omission found in the names/terms that were initially identified. It should also note why these words suffer consonantal omission but are ignored when talking about consonant deletions in Igbo.

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