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PHONETIC VARIATION AND TONES IN THE IGBO PERSONAL NAMES

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Abstract

Igbo personal names are African traditional names in Igbo language borne by the Igbo in the South East and South South geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Among other significance, it tells the story about the dialect of the bearer and phonetic processes that go on in the language. Recent studies by Kammelu (2008), Ogbonna (2008), and Onuka (2008), Agbo (2014), Mmadike (2016),Onuora (2016) and Onumajuru (2016) have all focused on the philosophy, semantics, syntactic, and the sociolinguistics aspect of the Igbo personal names. However, little attention has been given to the segment and tonal alternations in Igbo personal names. Igbo language is a multidialectal language (Nwaozuzu 2008) that employs both segments and suprasegments in the phonological formation of names: a phenomenon that is reflected in the pronunciation of the Igbo personal names. Consequently, this paper aims to provide insight on the segmental and suprasegmental alternations in Igbo personal names and its semantic implication. Data were collected through interviews and documents evaluation. Data were analyzed using descriptive method. The results show that the alternation of consonant segments such as /r/ and /h/,/v, f/ and /h/, /n/ and /l/, /l/ and /r/, /z/ and /d/, /b/ and /w/, /a/ and /i/, /u/ and /i/ and /e/ and /o/ in Igbo personal names do not bring a change in the meaning of the names examined, while a change in a tone which rides upon the segments leads to a change in the meaning of some Igbo personal names.

Keywords: Igbo Personal Names, Segment alternation, Tonal alternation, Semantic Implication, Phonological formation.

1.0 Introduction

The subject matter of phonetics and phonology is speech sound. Mba and Mba (2008) say that 'generally speaking, phonetics concerns itself with the production of speech, from its articulation, acoustics to its perception. Phonology on the other hand studies the organisation structure of this speech sounds across languages. Egbokhare (2011) echoes and says that phonetics is the study that deals with how speech sounds are produced, perceived and transmitted through air. Phonology deals with how sounds are organised and patterned in the expression of sounds. Sound are captured in phonetic and orthographic symbols and written left to write. Sounds are also organised into smaller indivisible unit called features organised in a sequence with the phoneme representing what Egbokhare (2011) calls scaffolding, timing frame and skeleton for integrating distinctive features which exist in various sequential and hierarchical relationship. Sounds that are phonetically different in words without a change in meaning are free variants. Sounds are said to be in free variation when they are allophones of the same phoneme. In this case, the alternation of one sound with another does not bring a change in meaning. When the alternation of phoneme and tone

brings about a change in meaning, the phoneme and tone is said to be distinctive. Both sound segments and supra-segments (tones) are distinctive in Igbo language. For example, in the name Okpala and Okpara (first born), the different in /r/ and /l/ does not separate the meaning of those names but in Ò̀bùmúnàèmé Am I the doer? and Ọ̀bùmúnàèmé I am the doer. The tonal differences separate the meaning of these names. This is occurs because the Igbo language is a multidialectal and tonal language (Nwaozuzu2008).Hence dialectal phenomenon such as accent variation and tonal behavior as regards functionality manifest in Igbo personal names.

Igbo personal names are African traditional names in Igbo language borne by the Igbo in Nigeria. The Igbo people live majorly in South East Nigeria, especially in Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo States. Over time, it has been observed that the Igbo personal names which are carefully given in the dialect of the parents are not pronounced and written in the dialect of the bearer, rather they are written in a the popular dialect known to the person who is available to pencil the name down during name registration either in school, hospital and in public places. The dialects where these names are written are sometimes different from the parental accent. Worth of mention is the fact that Igbo names are not written with tone, and sometimes when this tones are not added to Igbo personal names, it would be difficult to get the right pronunciation and when the wrong pronunciation occurs, what was intended in terms of meaning and the accent may be lost. Reason for this is because in Igbo speech community, there is a standard dialect and traditional dialect (Nwachukwu 1983, Emananjo 2015). Standard Igbo is used in writing in public places like hospitals, schools and other public places where Igbo personal names are recorded. However, the Igbo names are given in one's local or traditional dialect but written mostly in standard Igbo. Sometimes the bearer's accent is never taken into cognizance when recording a name. Besides, the Igbo names are pronounced with distinctive tones but written without tone marks; this leads to wrong pronunciation and consequently, confusion in the meaning of these names.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. to show sound alternation occasioned by accent variation in the different dialects of Igbo,
2. to identify the functions of tones which are not written with the Igbo personal names.

1.3 Igbo Personal Names

So many works have been carried out in Igbo personal names but none of these works concentrated on the free variation and distinctive tone. This study will review few key current works on Igbo personal names. Kammelu (2008) looked at the phonological and semantic construction of Igbo personal names. The author noted the earlier classification of Igbo personal names by Iwundu 1994 into ideational, monumental and testimonial names. The author examined the reconstruction of Igbo personal names from the semantic and phonological perceptive taking cognizance of the contractive and incisive names. Her study shows that the contracted names take the initial or/and final syllable of such name while the incision names either take the form of the duplication of a syllable, anglicision, retention of one or two syllables, deletion of (some) syllables and initialization. Results of the study show that the phonological reconstruction of Igbo names makes them meaningless.

Onuoha (2008) investigated the changing pattern in the spelling of Igbo names. The study noted and described how the influence of English language has affected the spelling of Igbo names. The researcher stressed the influence of English phonological system on Igbo language which has lead to the inclusion of /h/ in Igbo name spelling as a mark of aspiration. The study also noted the phonological approximation of the differences in the English orthography to the Igbo phonetics which results in the use of 'or' in the place of the sound /ɔ/, /g/, for /gʷ/ and double /ff/ for a single [f] in Igbo. Other discovery by Onuoha (2008) is the introduction of English spelling system where two similar consonants can succeed itself in a syllable resulting to having a double consonant such as /kk/ /ff/, /tt/ /rr/ etc in Igbo names, and the substitution of the Igbo language consonants such as /gb/, kw, with the Igbo sound /b/ and /k/ respectively. Onuora (2016) investigated clipping of the Igbo names from the perceptive of the optimality theory, while Mmadike (2014) categorized and analysed the 'ala' (land) names in Igbo. Mmadike (2014) noted that the 'ala' names which reflect the Igbo world view and belief is borne by the male child among the Igbo. The author however noted that the introduction of Christianity has affected the bearing of the Igbo names.

One basic observation in the works reviewed is the fact that Igbo names which are full of meaning have been either influenced by English language in terms of meaning and spelling. One area that has been lacking the attention is the study on the pronunciation of Igbo personal names. Pronunciation involves how names are articulated. For a name to be articulated properly, it must be written properly as pronounced. Igbo dialect is as many as the local communities in Igbo land. Nwaozuzu notes that about 50 consonants are in free variation in Igbo. For instance, where one Igbo speaker from Onitsha uses the variant /l/ (first born), another in Umuahia and Owerri use the variant /r/ (first born). This phenomenon which also manifests in Igbo personal names has not received serious attention. The implication of this is that it may be difficult for most people to know that two names that differ with just one sound actually have the same meaning. As regards tones also, Igbo is a tonal language but Igbo names which are pronounced with functional tones are not written with tones, causing people to assumed the tone attached to the segments in that name. When a name is pronounced with wrong tone, it gives the name a different meaning entirely. Exploring how tones alternates in Igbo names will stimulate people to pay attention to the tones when pronouncing Igbo names.

1.4 Methodology

Data for this study were gathered through interview and documents such as admission and graduation register. This data includes the recordings of six hundred personal names, made up of three hundred adult male names and three hundred of adult female personal names. Some of the names were sourced from graduation and admission lists in three federal Universities in Nigeria: The University of Lagos, The University of Nigeria Nsukka, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Structured interview were also conducted among the Igbo in these three schools to know the actual accent of the speaker as against the accent it written. This study adopts a qualitative descriptive linguistic approach in data description.

1.5 Data and Results

Samples from the data show that segments such as consonants and vowels are in free variation, for instance, in the data below, /v/ and /h/, and /u/ and /i/ alternate in the personal names below

(i) I*v*eọmavsi*f*eọmavsi*h*eọma (Good gift/thing)

Consonant /v/ alternates with /f/ and /h/ but the meaning remains the same
(ii) Ob*u*ọ̀ravsob*i*ọ̀ra (Mind of the people)

The italics are used all through this paper for emphasis. In the data above, the back vowel /u/ alternates with the front /i/, same with /v/ and /f/ but the meaning remains the same. In example (iii) tone on the vowel /e/ in the two names alternates leading to a change in the meaning of the two names.

(iii) Òk*è*chúkwú (one God creates) vs Òk*é*chúkwú (God's share)

The alternation or changes in tones caused the meaning of the names to change. Both the segment and supra-segment alternation is not shown when Igbo personal names are being documented in the register. The remaining part of this work will show consonants, vowels and tonal alternationsin Igbo personal names as stated in our objectives.

1.5.1Consonant alternation in Igbo Personal Names

In the names below, consonants /r/ and /h/ alternates with each other without any change in the meaning. In the example (i-iv) below, the consonant sound /r/ alternates with /h/ in the following names:

(i)	Obio*r*a	Obio*h*a	(mind of the people)
(ii)	Ezimo*r*a	Ezimo*h*a	(road that everyone knows)
(iii)	Adao*r*a	adao*h*a	(daughter of all)
(iv)	I*r*uọma	i*h*uọma	(Good face)

In the above examples /r/ is realised as /h/ in these two names and the meaning of the personal names remain intact. Evidence from the list where individual that bears these names came from show that the names with variable /r/ are majorly borne by the Igbo in Anambra and Enugu dialect while /h/ version is borne among the Igbo speakers around Imo and Abia and mostly seen in written standard Igbo. In writing, the /r/ form is common among the two. The consonant /v/ alternates with consonants /f/ and /h/ in the names in example (i-x) below

(i)	I*v*esinachi	i*f*esinachi	i*h*esinachi	(things from God)
(ii)	I*v*eọma	i*f*eọma	i*h*eọma	(Good thing)
(iii)	Nnabui*v*e	nnabui*f*e	nnabui*h*e	(Father is something)
(iv)	Avame*v*una	Afame*f*una	ahame*hu*na	(My name should not get lost)
(v)	Ị*v*ụnannaya	i*f*ụnanya	i*h*ụnanya	(Love)
(vi)	I*v*eanachọ	i*f*eanachọ	i*h*eanachọ	(what people are looking for)
(x)	Nwanyibuị*v*e	Nwanyibuị*f*e	Nwanyibuị*f*e	(woman is something)

Ample example in (i)- (x) shows that /v/ can be realised as /f/ and /h/ in Igbo personal names. From our general survey on the register, the name *Iveoma* and all the /v/ version is seen among Anambrarian. *Ifeoma* and all the /f/ versions are also seen among the Anambra, and Enugu people, while the *iheoma* and all the /h/ version is borne mostly by people from Imo and Abia dialects. In writing, the /f/ form is common among the three. In example (i-viii) the consonants /n/ alternates with /l/ in the names with the change in the meaning. They are presented below:

(i)	Ụ*n*ọọma	ụ*l*ọọma	(Good house)
(ii)	Ahamuefu*n*a	Ahamefu*l*a	(name should not get lost)

(iii)	Chieji*n*a	Chieji*l*a	(Night should not come)
(iv)	Ane*n*e	Ane*l*e	(Lets continue to watch)
(v)	Ke*n*echukwu	ke*l*echukwu	(thank God)
(vi)	Onwuegbu*n*am	onwuegbu*l*am	(Death don't kill me)
(vii)	A*n*ọzie	A*l*ọzie	(Stay well)
(viii)	Ka*n*ụ	Ka*l*ụ	(Name of gods)

All the names from i-viii differ with just one sound /n/ and /l/ which do not change the meaning those names. The data in i-vii indicates that /n/ is released as /h/ verse verse in Igbo names. As shown in the register where individual pen their state of origins, most people that use the /n/ version are from Anambra and Enugu, while the /l/ version tends to originate from Imo and Abia and few Ebonyians. However, in writing, the two sounds are common among Igbo speakers. In the names below, the consonant /l/ alternate with /r/without a change in meaning of the names in the example (i-x) below:

(i)	Ebe*l*e	Ebe*r*e	(Mercy)
(ii)	Ọ*l*ụchukwu	Ọ*r*ụchukwu	(God's work)
(iii)	Chinweta*l*ụ	Chinwete*r*e	(God brings)
(iv)	Ọ*l*ụchukwu	ọ*r*ụchukwu	(God's work)
(v)	Ọfọdi*l*e	ọfọdi*r*e	(righteousness is powerful)
(vi)	O*l*iaku	o*r*iaku	(one who eats wealth)
(vii)	Ama*l*a	ama*r*a	(grace)
(viii)	U*l*imma	U*r*imma	(ornament of beauty)
(ix)	Ọ*l*ụebube	ọ*r*ụebube	(glorious work)
(x)	Suụpu*l*uchi	suụpu*r*uchi	(respect God)

Like the other examples, the names in examples in (i-x) above, the consonants /l/ alternates /r/ while the meaning of those names remains constant. Meanwhile in writing as indicated in the register, the /l/ form is found among the Anambra and Enugu State indigene while the /r/ variant is found among the Imo and Abia State indigene. However the /l/ is more common than /r/ in writing. In few names recorded in the data for this study, consonant sound /z/ alternates with /d/ and /b/ alternates with /w/ as seen in examples (i-ii) below:

(i)	Ozoemena	O*d*oemena	(another should not happen)
(ii)	Chidi*b*em	Chidu*w*em	(God should guide me)

The alternation of all these consonants as recorded in examples above, do not change the meaning of names above.

5.1.2 Vowel alternation in Igbo Personal Names

Vowel alternations in Igbo names are not as common as consonants but few Igbo names contains vowel alternation; they include the samples in example (i-iv) below:

(i)	an*a*debe	an*ɪ*debe	May the land keep
(ii)	ob*u*ọra	ob*i*ọra	Mind of the people
(iii)	*e*kezie	*o*kezie	God created
(iv)	ng*ɔ*zɪ	ng*o*zi	blessing

In (10i-iv) the vowel /a/ alternates with /ɪ/, /u/ alternates with /i/, /e/ alternates with /o/, while /ɔ/ alternates with /ɪ/, The alternation of these vowels does not change the meaning of names

above. It is also important to note that it is not all Igbo personal names that consonant and vowel sounds can alternate. For instance, consonant sounds hardly alternate in the following names in Igbo language:

(i)	Uchechukwu	(the mind/will of God)
(ii)	Udechukwu	(God's glory)
(iii)	Akachukwu	(God's hand)
(iv)	Chioma	(God is good)
(v)	Azuka	(back is greater)
(vi)	Umunna	(children of same father)

This is because most of these sounds do not alternate in Igbo dialects. The names are explicating what is in the language. /ch/, /d/ /m/ /z/ and /k/ are not common alternates in many Igbo dialects unlike /r/, /l/, /f/, /h/ and the likes.

5.1.3 Lexical Tone Alternation in Igbo Personal Names

Lexical tones in Igbo language are tones that distinguish two words with same sounds. These tones are found in Igbo names but not shown (i.e are not marked) when' writing the Igbo names. In example (i-vi),there are alternations of high and low tone on the italicised vowels.

(i)	*Ó*bị́ńnà the heart of the father	*Ò*bị̀ńnà (*Ò*bi+ńnà) the palace of the father
(ii)	*Ó*bí jì the heart hold	*Ó*bị̀j̀i (Obi+ji) the heart of the yam (king of farmers)
(iii)	Nwáji child of yam	Nwáji (Nwa+ji) the child holds
(iv)	*Ò*kè*c*húkwú one God creates	*Ò*ké*c*húkwú (*Ò*ké+chúkwú) God's share
(v)	Óbíefùma the heart not get lost	Òbíéfùnà (Obi+efuna) the kinsman should not get lost
(vii)	Ìhè*s*ìnàchí Something from God	íhésìnàchí (Obi+efuna) light from God

The Igbo personal names in (i-v) have the structure of noun+noun structure while (vi-vii) have the structure of noun+verb/Prop). The low and high tone distinguished the names in example (i-vii). In example (i-ii), tones distinguish the two sentenceswith similar sound segments as seen below:

(i)	(a) Mbàdị̀nùụjù (b) Mbàdínùụjù	Kinsmen that is contented(Declarative Sentence) Kinsmen be contented (Imperative sentence)
(ii)	(a) *Ò*bùmúnàèmé (b) *Ó*bùmúnàèmé	Am I the doer? I am the doer (Declarative Sentence

(iii) (a) Ò̩sị̀nàchí from God?
(b) O̩sìnàchí from God(Declarative Sentence)

In example (i) the high and low tones on the verb *di* distinguish the two sentential names from declarative and imperative sentences. Also in (ii) the low and high tones on the pronoun subject '*o*' distinguish the two sentential names from interrogative to declarative sentence, same with the example (iii). Unlike the examples of vowel and consonant alternation where a change in the segment sounds does not change the meaning of Igbo personal names, a change in tones on the names changes the meaning of Igbo personal names. The tones ride upon the segments that lead to a change in meaning in some Igbo personal names.

The implication of this study is that the way some Igbo names are written does not fully tell the story of accent of the bearer. This is because these names are recorded in standard Igbo in schools and hospitals where they are recorded. Also, it could be that the writer is not familiar with the dialect of the bearer, and consequently register the names what he or she knows. The tragedy of this is that once a name is written during birth, school period and any other official document, it is always difficult to reverse it. It is a generally, a common practice among the Igbo to avoid tone marks when writing their names, even in general writings such as text. This creates more confusion on the meaning of such Igbo personal names on the part of the hearer. Even though the bearer do know the meaning of his or her name, he or she may not have to keep explaining the meaning of such name or how they are pronounced especially when they are pronounced in his or her absence. This is why it is very critical that Igbo personal names, especially those that have similar sounds but differentiated with tones need to be tone marked.

Given personal names in some way represent parental choices. Some names represent parental wishes, prayer, experience etc. No one else except the parent choses the names one bears in the Igbo society. Altering the names both in pronunciation and writing simple imply that the parental choices and voices are being disregard in Igbo personal name.

One thing seen in this study is that names alternates and tone are not represented. How it got to this stage is outside this study, but this study believes that this occurred when most people were not educated, there allowing others to pencil their names down for them. Why such assumption was that in the early days, the head master registers people names in school, or the nurse in the hospital or the clergy in the case of church. Even at that, the act of writing Igbo personal names without tone makes some Igbo names confusing and meaningless. The issue of meaningless in Igbo person names has been centered around anglicised Igbo name, n which many blame the influence of English language on Igbo. In this case where names are differently written from the way it was written, the educated Igbo should receive their own blame. Even parents who must have noticed and refuse to protest should also be blame because names tell much about the bearer and the accent of the bear should not be taken for granted. There is no doubt that writing Igbo names without tone has affected the knowledge of the Igbo tones both among students and non-students. Most Yoruba names are written with tone and it gives you the accurate pronunciation of such names. This shows that the tone in Igbo names cannot be undermined anymore. Consequently, the study recommends that tone should be added to Igbo names hence forth, and the bearer's accent should be taken into

cognizance when writing Igbo personal names for the first time and always especially now that all hands must be on deck to transfer Igbo to the next generation.

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