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ELISION IN EHA-AMUFU

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Abstract

Elision is one of the prominent phonological processes found across languages, the Igbo language inclusive. It involves the dropping of some speech sounds when speaking especially in rapid speech. Studies across languages have revealed different types of elision. The Igbo language with its numerous dialects manifests elision as one of its phonological processes. Vowel elision, consonant elision, syllable elision among others abound in various Igbo dialects. However, the main thrust of this study is to further investigate elision in Igbo language with specific data drawn from Eha-Amufu dialect of the Igbo language. The goal is to ascertain the types of elision which manifest in the dialect and explicate what prompts them. Finding reveals that the types of elision present in the Eha-Amufu dialect are vowel elision, consonant elision, syllable elision and syllabic nasal elision. While the operation of vowel elision and consonant elision in the dialect remain the same as they operate in other Igbo dialects reviewed, syllable elision in the dialect is preceded by initial vowel doubling. On the other hand, syllabic nasal elision in the dialect comes with final vowel doubling but this happens after the syllabic nasal which is the first sound segment has been elided. The study further reveals that against the general assertion that elision occurs in rapid speech, elision in the Eha-Amufu dialect is an inherent feature and as a result occurs both in rapid and non-rapid speech.

Keywords: elision, phonological processes, consonant elision, syllable elision, rapid speech.

Introduction

Language basically consists of the spoken and the written forms. Phonology as an aspect of language study concerns itself mostly with the spoken form and adopts a number of phonological processes in its operations. These phonological processes include: assimilation, dissimilation, nasalisation, deletion or elision, insertion, coalescence, vowel reduction. metathesis among others. All these processes affect the articulation of sounds that occur in syllables, words or sentences in one way or another. It is also pertinent to note that these phonological processes occur in different languages and dialects across the world. However, they do not apply equally in the languages and dialects.

Assimilation makes a sound becomes similar to a neighboring sound. This can happen within a word or between two words. A sound may be influenced by the sound which comes before it in a word sequence or at word boundaries thereby giving rise to progressive assimilation. The same way, a sound may be influenced by the sound which comes after it in order to give rise to regressive assimilation. Assimilation can also be total or partial as the case may be. In the case of dissimilation, a sound segment avoids taking the feature of a neighboring segment

completely. On the other hand, nasalization is the process by which air is released through the nasal cavity during the production of certain speech sounds. Insertion inserts an extra sound segment or more to a word or morpheme. Insertion occurs at different junctures in words. Insertion can happen at the word initial, middle or final positions. Thereby giving rise to prothesis, epenthesis, and paragoge as the types of insertion. In coalescence, two or more sound segments with their own distinctive features are merged into a single segment. Again, vowel reduction reduces unstressed vowel to a schwa. Metathesis interchanges the position of sounds in words. Elision which is also known as deletion is another phonological process prominent in phonology. Elision is that phonological process which deletes or drops a sound segment when speaking. This definition is buttressed by Mbah & Mbah (2010), Febriyanti (2015) and Uwaezuoke (2020) in the way they defined the concept of elision. Mbah & Mbah (2010) sees elision as the omission or deletion of some segments in rapid speech. Febriyanti (2015) says that "elision process happens when speakers leave or delete a phoneme out of pronunciation as an attempt to fasten and get rid of difficulties in speech". Uwaezuoke (2020) defines it as "a phonological process involving the deletion or dropping of a segment or some segments in speech". Hence there is an agreement between the three definitions that elision involves the deletion or dropping of a sound segment or some sound segments in speech.

Elision as a phonological process is not limited to any single language but operates across different languages. However, the way and type of elision vary from one language to another. In the Igbo language for instance, five types of elision have been identified. These types of elision according to Uwaezuoke (2020) are consonant elision, vowel elision, syllable elision, syllabic nasal elision and multi-syllables elision. The present study is a further investigation into the concept of elision in Igbo language with the aim of finding out if there are other types of elision or the operations of elision found in the language. This will be achieved by investigating the operation of elision in the Eha-Amufu dialect of Igbo.

The Eha-Amufu dialect deserves serious scholarly attention because it has several distinct features that distinguish it from other dialects of Igbo as well as the standardized Igbo. One prominent area that needs to be studied in the dialect is the area of the phonological process of elision. As already noted in this study, elision happens mostly during fast speech. However, the case is not completely so with this dialect. The speakers of the dialect are so used to it that they do not seem to realize that they elide some sound segments when producing some words both in fast and in slow speeches. The process of elision in this dialect is worthy of note because whenever the words they produce with elision are produced by any person without elision, the speakers of the dialect automatically see and recognise such a person as a stranger who is not an indigene or a person whose competence or performance in the dialect has been affected by contact with other dialects of Igbo.

The Eha-Amufu people and their dialect

Eha-Amufu is a dialect of Igbo spoken by the Eha-Amufu people. Eha-Amufu is in the Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It is a railway town; the Portharcourt-Enugu-Makurdi-Kafanchan railway passes through it. Eha Amufu also hosts Igbo land's closest train station to Northern Nigeria. By the classifications of the Igbo Language into dialect by Nwaozuzu (2008), the dialect belongs to Northern Group of Dialects. The town shares border with some communities in Ebonyi and Benue States.

The people have a lot of rich cultural practices. Some of such cultural practices include: their child naming practice, marriage practice (Onwa esa), masquerading practices, their wrestling acts, burial and funeral rites and justice system among others. Despite the rich nature and contents of these practices, a number of them have waned and are no longer practically in practice due to the effect of westernization and wide acceptance of Christianity among the indigenes. However, some of these practices like child naming practice, burial and funeral rites are still upheld by the people till date.

Besides the rich cultural heritage of the Eha-Amufu people, there are also several unique features which deserve serious academic research in the Eha-Amufu dialect. The present researcher has made some attempts by carrying out research into some of such areas like; question formation in Eha-Amufu, the Eha-Amufu greeting forms, address forms among the Eha-Amufu and the current research also is on elision in the dialect.

Literature review

Several scholarly studies have been carried out on the subject of elision across languages and some Igbo dialects. Some of these scholarly works on elision will be reviewed here, beginning with the studies done on languages other than the Igbo language to studies in the Igbo language.

Abdullah's (2020) work is a comparative study of elision in standard British English and central Kurdish. The study sees elision as a common speech simplification process which can occur either in single words or in connections between two words. Findings of the study reveal among other things that: (i) elision is useful for simplifying complex cluster of consonant sounds in both onset and coda; (ii) elision is found in both English and Kurdish, but it is more pervasive in English and (iii) in English and Kurdish, the consonant sounds /t/ and /d/ are the most elided sounds, but in vowels /ə/ is the most elided sound.

Ansah's (2020) work is an examination of elision in Esahie, a Kwa language spoken in the Western North region of Ghana. The study reveals that both vowels and consonants can be elided in Esahie. It further reveals that there is an interface between phonology and morphology when accounting for elision in Esahie because though elision is a phonological process, it is influenced by morphological factors such as vowel juxtapositioning during compounding, and at word boundary.

Caesar & Sackitey's (2024) study is on elision in Dangme. Dangme is a Kwa language spoken inparts of Accra, Ghana. The study employed the auto-segmental theory to explain vocalic, consonantal and syllabic deletions in the language. Findings of the study show that in Dangme, syllabic and segmental elision is realized within a lexical item, a morpheme or word boundary, and word finals and is a morpho-phonological phenomenon. It also reveals that: compounding, reduplication, and nominalization are morphological factors that trigger elision in Dangme, and that elision could be leftward or rightward at morpheme boundaries in the language.

The study of Maduagwu (n.d.) is on consonant and vowel elision in Ogbahu dialect of Igbo. Findings of the study reveal that vowel elision in Qgbahu entails tonal elision. What this means is that the tone on a vowel gets lost once the vowel elides. The study also reveals that

both consonant and vowel elision occur at morpheme boundary or within a word in Ogbahu dialect. The occurrence is different from what happens in Standard Igbo where vowel elision occurs only across word boundary. Maduagwu's study is similar to the present study which sets out to examine an Eha-Amufu dialect of Igbo. However, it is different from this study because this study is not limited to only vowel and consonant elision.

Emenanjo (2015) identifies vowel elision and consonant elision as types of elision in Igbo. The work notes that the occurrence of vowel elision in Igbo is very limited and varies from dialect to dialect. It also identifies vowel assimilation as a precondition for vowel elision in Igbo. Citing examples from Mbaise dialect, Emenanjo (2015) states that the adjacent tones on the vowels at the word boundary must be on the same pitch level and regressive assimilation must precede vowel elision. On consonant deletion, Emenanjo (2015), notes that it occurs in rapid speech and with words which have the feature of consonant harmony. Emenanjo's study is similar to this in that it is on elision in Igbo. It is different because it considers only vowel elision and consonant deletion with examples from Mbaise dialect while this study is on Eha-Amufu dialect and considers more than vowel and consonant elision.

The work of Uwaezuoke (2020) is an investigative study on elisions in Igbo. It reexamined the phonological process of elision in Igbo to determine whether the types of elision in the language are confined to consonant elision, vowel elision, syllabic elision, and syllabic nasal elision as noted in earlier studies. The study reveals a fifth type of elision in Igbo. This new type of elision which is termed multi-syllables elision, according to Uwaezuoke (2020:136), exists in Anam variety of the Igbo language. Uwaezuoke's is similar to this study but different from it because while Uwaezuoke's is based on Anam dialect the present study is based on Eha-Amufu dialect.

Types of elision in Igbo

The five types of elision found in the Igbo language are discussed in this section.

Vowel elision: According to Uwaezuoke (2020), this form of elision occurs at the boundary of two words where the first vowel at the boundary is elided. However, Emenanjo (2015) notes that this type of elision is preceded by vowel assimilation. The type of assimilation that happens in the context of vowel elision is regressive assimilation. On vowel elision, Emenanjo (2015) further explains that the adjacent tones on the vowels at the word boundary must be on the same pitch level. He illustrates this with the word *nwaoke* which consists of two words *nwa* 'child' and *oke* 'male' as an example. In the example, the vowel /a/ in *nwa* elides to now result to *nwoke* 'male child'.

Consonant elision: Concerning consonant elision in Igbo, Emenanjo (1987) describes two cases of consonant elision in Igbo. In one case according to him, the first consonant of nouns with VC_1VC_1V is elided to give VVC_1V. Uwaezuoke (2020) supports this view by averring that consonant elision happens in a VCVCV structure. For this to happen, according to Uwaezuoke (2020), the consonant of the second syllable which often times is the same as that of the third syllable, is dropped. He buttresses this with the following examples:

a. afụfụ → aụfụ 'hardship'
b. osisi → oisi 'stick/tree'
c. ọ̀kụkọ̀ → ọ̀ụkọ̀ 'fowl'
d. agbụ̀ghọ̀ → aụ̀ghọ̀ 'cunning'

The second case presented by Emenanjo is where the second consonant in a noun with VCV_2CV_2 is elided so that VCV_2CV_2 becomes VCV_2V_2 as in the following example:

e. agbọghọ → agbọọ "young unmarried girl"

Syllable elision: Uwaezuoke (2023) identifies another form of elision in Igbo, known as syllable elision. He defines it as the type of elision whereby the second syllable in a word with three syllables of VCVCV structure is elided. He also notes that for syllable elision to take place, the consonants of the second and third syllables will be the same. He further observes concerning syllable elision that the tone of the elided syllable does not elide. To illustrate syllable elision in Igbo, he gave these two examples drawn from Ezza dialect and they are:

i. ẹkwụkwọ → ẹkwọ 'book'
ii. ụtụ̀tụ̀ → ụtụ̀ 'morning'

Syllabic nasal elision: Another type of elision in Igbo as identified by Eme (2008) in Uwaezuoke (2020) is syllabic nasal elision. In his words, this has to do with the elision of the syllabic nasal at the initial position of NCVCV word structure thereby realizing only the second and the third syllables. He cited the following examples from Ezza dialect to illustrate it.

(i) mmadụ̀ → madụ̀ 'person'
(ii) mbọ̀sị̀ → bọ̀sị̀ 'day'
(iii) nthèke → thèke 'when/since/during'

Multi-syllables elision: This is the fifth type of elision in the Igbo language as posited by Uwaezuoke (2020). He gives examples of multi-syllables elision with the following examples from Anam vareiety of Igbo:

(i) Ànam̀ (Ụmụ̀zìàm̀) variety:
ụmụ̀ èze Ānam̀ → ụmụ̀zìàm̀
children king a community 'a town'
'children of the king of Ànam̌'

(ii) Ànam̀ (Ụmụ̄em̄) variety:
ụmụ̀ ènwelụ m̄ Ānam̀ → Ụmụ̄em̄
children owner 1st Pers.POSS. a community 'a town'
'children of owner of Ànam̌'

Methodology

This is a descriptive study. Data for the study consist of both primary and secondary data. The primary data which are data from Eha-Amufu dialect of the Igbo language are elicited from the researcher's introspection as a native speaker as well as from interactions with eight respondents orally interviewed by the researcher. The respondents consist of four adult men and women respectively. The number is limited to eight to give the researcher the opportunity to reach out to them easily. The age range of the respondent ranges from 20 – 86. This is to make sure that the opinions of adult native speakers ranging from the young adults to the very old adults were properly sought on this subject matter. All the respondents live in Eha-Amufu the community under study. The reason for this is to ensure that the data gotten from them were real and authentic. A total number of forty-one (41) words were gathered and used

for analysis. The secondary data on the other hand are sourced from books and other published articles on the subject of elision.

Data presentation and analysis

The data for this study are presented in the table below and will be analysed here under. Data in serial numbers 1-37 are instances of syllable elision; number 38 is an example of consonant elision while numbers 39-41 are examples of syllabic nasal elision as shall be seen in the analysis.

Table 1

S/NO	STANDARD IGBO	ELIDED FORM	EHA-AMUFU	GLOSS
1	Osisi/Oshishi	Oisi/Oishi	Ooshi	Stick/tree
2	Ahụhụ	Aụhụ	Eehụ	Ant/insect
3	Ụtụtụ	Ụụtụ	Ụụtụ	Morning
4	Anyịnya	Aịnya	Ịịnya	Horse
5	Akwụkwọ	Aụkwọ	Ẹẹkwọ	Book
6	Ajụjụ	Aụjụ	Aajụ	Question
7	Uchichi	Uuchi	Uuchi	Night
8	Ụzịza	Ụịza	Ụụza	Spice
9	Ọchịcha	Ọịcha	Ụụcha	Cockroach
10	Afụfụ	Aụfụ	Aahụ	Suffering
11	Azịza	Aịza	Ẹẹza	Broom
12	Echichi	Eiche	Eechi	Title taking
13	Achịcha	Aịcha	Eecha	Bread
14	Ọbụbụ	Ọụbụ	Ọọvụ	Insect
15	Ijiji	Iiji	Iiji	Fly
16	Akụkụ	Aụkụ	Ẹẹkụ	Besides
17	Akụkọ	Aụkọ	Aakọ	Story
18	Ogugu	Ougu	Oogu	Insect
19	Omimi	Oimi	Oomi	Deep
20	Abụbọ	Aụbọ	Aabọ	Ingredients
21	Awụwọ	Aụwọ	Aawọ	Deceit
22	Ọmụmụ	Oume	Ọọmụ	child bearing
23	Ọsụsọ	Ọụsọ	Ọọsọ	Sweat
24	Ụfụfụ	Ụụfụ	Ụụfụ	Foam
25	Ọbụbọ (anụ)	Ọụbọ	Ọọbọ	Dissecting
26	Omume	Oume	Oome	Character
27	Ọzịza	Ọịza	Ọọza	Swelling
28	Ọkụkụ	Ọụkọ	Ọọkụ	Fowl
29	Ifufe	Iufe	Iife	Wind
30	Nnụnụ	Nụnu	Ụụnụ	Bird
31	Akpụkpọ	Aụkpọ	Aakpọ	Leader
32	Echiche	Eiche	Eeche	Thought
33	Abụba	Aụba	Ẹẹba	Feather
34	Akịka	Aika	Ẹẹka	Termite

35	Ntụtụ	Nụtụ	Nntụ	Needle
36	Mbibi/Mbubu	Mbibi/Mbubu	Mmbu	Borrowing
37	Ngwugwu/mvuvu	Ngwugwu/mvuvu	Mmvu	Wrap/Package
38	Mmiri	Mmiri	Mii	Water
39	Mmụọ/Mma	Mmụọ	Maa	Spirit/god
40	Mmee	Mmee	Mee	Blood
41	Nne	Nne	Nee	Mother

Here below the five types of elision which are: consonant elision, vowel elision, syllable elision, syllabic nasal elision and multi-syllables elision identified in Igbo by different scholars and presented in Uwaezuoke (2020) are adopted as a model for the review of Eha-Amufu elision data. The data will be examined under the above mentioned five types of elision already identified in Igbo in order to determine whether the five types of elision are present in Eha-Amufu and also to know the way they operate.

Vowel elision: Worthy of note at this point is the fact that vowel elision exists in Eha-Amufu dialect at the boundary between two words or lexical items. This type of elision in the dialect is preceded by regressive assimilation. Therefore, when the two lexical items come together, the first vowel at the boundary is elided. Examples of vowel elision are given below. It is also important to note that these examples did not emanate from the table above.

1. *Ugbọ* "boat" + *elu* "sky" ------- *Ugbelu*"aeroplane"
2. *Unu*"salt" + *ẹgụ* "farm" -------- *Unegụ*
3. *Manụ* "oil" + *ẹnụ* "bee" ------- *Manẹnụ*"honey"
4. Nchị "ear" + ike "hard" ------- Nchike "stubborn"
5. Ede "cocoyam" + Ẹrụ "place" ------- edẹrụ "specie of cocoyam"

The structure of the above examples is $V_1 + V_2$ -------- V_2V_2 justifying the fact that the first vowel at the word boundary which is also the last vowel of the first word is elided while the second vowel at the word boundary and the first vowel of the second word is retained.

Consonant elision: Examining the available data from Eha-Amufu dialect, the available data shows that consonant elision is not a common occurrence in the dialect. From the (41) data sourced for this analysis, only one instance of consonant elision can be found. This is seen in the table below.

6. Mmiri -------- Mii 'water'

Here, apart from eliding the syllabic nasal /m/, the consonant /r/ which is between the two vowels is also elided to realise the word /mii/. This provides an evidence of consonant elision in Eha-Amufu dialect. However as already pointed out, instances of this type of elision is limited in the dialect.

Syllable elision: A close examination of the Eha-Amufu data shows the presence of syllable elision in the dialec**t**. The structure of the word where syllable elision occurs in the dialect is VCVCV or NCVCV. The feature of syllable elision is not just present in the dialect but has a very common occurrence in the dialect. However, the operation of syllable elision in Eha-Amufu dialect is slightly different from its operation in other dialects of Igbo that have been studied by the scholars reviewed above. The difference is that instead of just eliding second

syllable in a VCVCV structure where the consonant of the second and third syllable are similar and leaving out the first and the last syllable to remain, syllable elision in Eha-Amufu is preceded by the initial vowel doubling in a VCVCV structure. What this means is that before the elision of the second syllable in Eha-Amufu words with VCVCV structure, the initial vowel in such a structure is first doubled. Again, unlike in the example from Ezza dialect where after syllable elision, only two syllables with VCV structure is left, three syllables with VVCV structure are left in Eha-Amufu after syllable elision. Examples are:

Table 2

S/N	WORD	EHA-AMUFU FORM	GLOSS
7	Osisi/Oshishi	Ooshi	Stick/tree
8	Ahụhụ/Ẹhụhụ	Eehụ	Ant/insect
9	Ụtụtụ	Ụụtụ	Morning
10	Anyịnya/Ịnyịnya	Ịịnya	Horse
11	Akwụkwọ / Ẹkwụkwọ	Ẹẹkwọ	Book
12	Ajụjụ	Aajụ	Question
13	Uchichi	Uuchi	Night
14	Ụzịza	Ụụza	Spice
15	Ụchịcha	Ụụcha	Cockroach
16	Afụfụ	Aahụ	Suffering

Though numbers 1-34 are perfect examples of syllable elision in Eha-Amufu, 1-10 rendered as 7-16 have been chosen as examples for want of space. From these examples 7-16, one observes the following: (a) in (7), /oshishi/ becomes /ooshi/. What this means is that the second syllable with CV structure is elided but meanwhile, the first syllable which is a V structure is doubled to realise the elided form /ooshi/. The same thing cut across in all the other examples in this section.

In the second instance of syllable elision in Eha-Amufu, the syllable elision is preceded by a syllabic nasal doubling. In this kind of situation, the word structure is NCVCV. This means that the word in this type of structure begins with a syllabic nasal. Examples are seen below

Table 3

S/N	WORD	EHA-AMUFU FORM	GLOSS
17	Ntụtụ	nntụ	Needle
18	Mbubu	Mmbu	Borrowing
19	Ngwugwu/mvuvu	mmvu	wrap/package

From examples 17-19 /ntụtụ/ becomes /nntụ/, /mbubu/ - /mmbu/ and /mvuvu/ - /mmvu/. What it means is that the second syllable which is a CV is elided in each of the words after the doubling of the initial syllable which is an N to give rise to the elided NNCV structure.

Syllabic nasal elision: As regards Eha-Amufu dialect, syllabic nasal elision is present. However, the structure of the word(s) where syllabic nasal elision occurs in the dialect is NCV. What this means is that the words here are always two syllable words and not three syllables. The operation here is that the first/initial syllable which is a syllabic nasal is elided leaving

only the second syllable consisting of CV. After the elision of the first syllable, the vowel of the second syllable is doubled thereby giving rise to a CVV structure. Examples are seen below:

Table 4

S/N	WORD	EHA-AMUFU FORM	GLOSS
20	Mmee	Mee	Blood
21	Mma	Maa	Spirit/divinity
22	Nne	Nee	mother

From exaples 19-22, /mmee/ became /mee/, mma – maa and nne – nee. What happens here is that the initial syllable which is a syllabic nasal elides to leave only the second syllable with the structure CV. However, the V in the CV now doubles itself in each of them thereby giving rise to another two syllable structure with CVV as in all the examples.

Multi-syllable elision: This type of elision is not present in the dialect.

Findings

Finding reveals that the types of elision present in the Eha-Amufu dialect are: vowel elision, consonant elision, syllable elision and syllabic nasal elision. This aligns with what applies to the English, Kurdish, Esahie, Dangme languages as well as some of the dialects of Igbo reviewed earlier in this study. However, apart from the vowel and consonant elision that has the same kind of operation with examples from these languages and other Igbo dialects, the syllable elision and syllabic nasal elision have different forms of operation in the Eha_Amufu dialect. The data examined show that syllable elision in the dialect is preceded by initial vowel doubling while syllabic nasal elision in the dialect is followed by a final vowel doubling. This also differs from instances of syllable and syllabic nasal elision in the other languages and dialects of Igbo. This is because when there is syllable elision in other dialect of Igbo where it exists, the number of syllable reduces from three syllables of VCVCV structure to two syllables of VCV. However, in this dialect the syllable remains three but changes from VCVCV structure to VVCV. In the situation where the initial segment is a syllabic nasal with the structure NCVCV and also having similar consonants or consonant harmony it becomes NNCV thereby retaining the initial three syllables even after one syllable have been elided. In the case of the syllabic nasal elision, Eha-Amufu dialect elides the syllabic nasal in mostly two syllable word(s) and doubles the vowel of the second syllable to have CVV lexical item. What this study has shown is that beyond having varied types of elision in the different dialects of Igbo, there are also varied ways by which these different types of elision operate across the dialects.

Finally, the study further reveals that against the general assertion that elision occurs in rapid speech, elision in the Eha-Amufu dialect is an inherent feature and as a result occurs both in rapid and slow/non-rapid speech. At whatever point these words that are produced with elision occurs in the dialect, there must be elision no matter how slowly the speaker may wish to speak.

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