

IGBO NEGATIVE MORPHEME VARIATION: A STUDY OF OPI NSUKKA DIALECT

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Abstract

Dialects can be described as the different varieties of a particular language. Opi dialect is a subdivision of the Igbo standard form. Now, many find it difficult to understand the dialect because some variations. For this some question their being Igbo. The Opi dialect speakers communicate Igbo speakers using the standard form of the language. This study is the researcher's contribution to preserve the dialect as well as to give insight to Opi dialect researchers for further investigations. The aim of this study is to compare negative morphemes in opi dialect and that of the Standard Igbo in order to ascertain the areas of differences and similarities between the two. The researcher focused on the negation because of the sharp difference between that of the Opi dialect and the standard Igbo. The researcher is a native speaker of Opi dialect thus an intuitive knowledge of the dialect by the researcher is used to collect data and validated by other native speakers of the same dialect. the theoretical basis in which this study is based on is the Wave and the Accommodation Theories. The findings are: The negative morphemes in Opi dialect differ drastically from that of the standard Igbo form. Some negative morphemes in Opi dialect do not have any vowel attached to it. For example: 'g', and 'dg' replace 'ghi/ghị' in standard Igbo. Also 'le' and 'le' replaces 'la' in standard Igbo. Both dialects have slight differences in their negative morphemes and are the same language.

Keywords: Opi, dialect, language, Igbo, variation.

1.1: Background of the Study

Igbo is one of the three major national languages in Nigeria. The other two are Hausa and Yoruba, hence Nigeria is operating three national languages. Azuonye (2002), Egwuonwu (2016) and Emeka-Nwobia, (2020), opines that Igbo is the native language of Igbo people and it is by over 20 million speakers around the world. Igbo is one of the eight major languages in the Benue Congo group of African languages and has been classified as a member of the 'Kwa' subgroup of the Niger-Congo family.

Igbo has several dialects and it is spoken mainly in the South Eastern states of Nigeria. They are Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi and some parts of Delta and Rivers states. However, we should also recognize that Igbo native speakers can be found all over the world. According to Egwuonwu (2016:79), it is also recognized as a minority language of Equatorial Guinea. Again, it is written in the Latin script which was introduced by the British colonialist. As we have stated earlier, Igbo has many dialects. Some put it to be up to thirty dialects, some of which are not mutually intelligible. For the most parts, however, differences are lexical and phonological. As a result of these many dialects, there are various ways to spell and pronounce the same words in different dialects. It is noted that there are different grammar rules and letters in Igbo dialects (<http://ezinaulo.com>). Some Igbo dialects include Nsukka, Onitsha, Owerri, Abakaliki, Umuahia and so on. It is pertinent to note that within these major dialects mentioned and some not mentioned, there are sub dialects, for example in Nsukka there are many sub dialects as there are towns. The way an Opi person speaks is not exactly the way Edeoballa person speaks and the same applies to other towns in Nsukka senatorial zone. For this, this research concentrates on Opi dialect and how it deviates from the standardized Igbo language in the area of negation. It will go further to identify the rules leading to the phonological deviations.

This standardized Igbo dialect is not taken from one dialect of Igbo. According to Ezikeojiaku (1989), the standardized Igbo is taken from dialects like Owerri, Ụmụahịa and other Igbo dialects. In spite of the numerous dialects, the standardized Igbo language is understood by virtually every Igbo native speaker not minding the native dialect. According to Ekwuonwu (2016:79), Igbo displays considerable dialects variation yet without ever seriously hampering immediate mutual intelligibility. ‘Igbo niile na-asụ n’olu n’olu out’.

According to Achebe and Nga’ang’a (2007), ‘‘Linguists recognize up to five major dialect clusters and more than fifteen main Igbo dialects in existence’’. They accepted that studies on Igbo dialectology are ongoing and asserted that the final number is likely to be higher. Many Igbo linguists have devoted their time to the study of their own dialects or some other popular dialects resulting in the fact that some dialects have remained largely unstudied. One of such dialects is the Opi dialect one of the sub – dialects of Nsukka in Enugu state.

Nwozuzu (2008) grouped Igbo language into eight major groups. She states that ‘‘the study does not make any pretentious claim of being perfect or final (Nwozuzu 2008:132). Upon all the numerous studies going on in Igbo dialects, little or none has been done in Opi dialect. The scientific interest in the study of Igbo language began quite early in the nineteenth century in missionary circle in Sierra Leone where knowledge of African languages were seen as a necessary tool in the bid to evangelize the continent (Afigbo 1981:355). According to Afigbo, this interest had come to take deep root by the middle of the century. Between 1852 and 1900, over ten works had been published in Igbo language mainly by missionaries and their aides. Most of the books were grammar books, word lists and collection of proverbs, while the rest were translation of the bible into various dialects of the language.

The study of Igbo language and grammar in particular started many years ago. The early writers of the Igbo grammar books were foreigners. In 1861, Shaw published *Grammatical Elements of the Igbo Language*. In 1882, Crowder produced *Vocabulary of the Igbo language*. In 1892, Spenser produced *A Small Ibo Grammar* and in 1901, *A first Grammar of Ibo Language*. Three years later, Crowder’s *Original primer* was enlarged into two volumes reader, *Ibo Reader I and II* (Emenyonu 1978:23). In spite of the early beginning in the writing of Igbo grammar, studies in Igbo grammar had a slow growth.

Among the reasons for the slow growth could be attributed to the orthography controversy which existed between the missionaries and the inability of the Igbo mother-tongue speakers to accept a particular dialect as a standard Igbo. Another reason was lack of interest by the Igbo native speakers to research into their language. Igbo native speakers especially the elites embraced English language so much that they preferred speaking it to Igbo. In fact, an educated Igbo man was a man who could speak English fluently, a situation which obtained among other Nigerians as Fafunwa (1990:9) states:

Throughout most of the colonial period 1842-1959, Nigerian formal education was fashioned after the English system of education. The preferred accent was in English and for one to be regarded educated Nigerian he or she must be one whose only African identity was in color but English in thought and culture.

Fafunwa also stated that the hallmark of excellence was the ability to speak English fluently and if possible with Oxford accent even if the speaker was empty of thought and ideas no one cares. He further stated that an illiterate who could speak English was considered educated even though he could not read or write while a well cultured Yoruba, Hausa, Edo or Ibo etc who could read and write in his mother-tongue was considered illiterate. Fafunwa (1990:9).

Statement of the Problem

Opi dialect of Igbo in Nsukka local government has overtime shown deviation in aspects of speech especially in phonological and lexical forms. This may have been the reason why many say that it is not

easy understanding Opi dialect. In spite of the deviation of Opi dialect from the standard norm it has received little or no attention by scholars in the field of linguistics. Nsukka dialect and Opi in particular has overtime proved very difficult for many other Igbo speakers to understand. This may be as a result of deviation from the standardized norm. Despite the deviation inherent in Opi dialect, little or no study has been done on it.

Research Objectives

In language study, much has been done in Igbo dialects but no serious work has been done in Opi, Nsukka dialect to the best of the researcher's knowledge. The purpose of this study is to do the following:

a. Identify the extent of negation deviation of Opi Nsukka dialect from the standardized form of Igbo language.

b. To expose the Opi negative markers of the dialect and compare it with the standard form.

Significance of the Study

This study is important to the linguists because it will serve as a basis for more studies in Opi Nsukka dialect. It will also expose the rules guiding the deviation of Opi dialect negations from the standard variety and thereby making it easier for the other Igbo speakers to understand Opi dialect.

Study Population

The target population for this study comprises of forty (60) OPi native speakers. Ten (10) selected from each of the five autonomous communities that make up Opi Town and twenty (10) from standard Igbo speakers. The standard Igbo speakers were selected from among Igbo teachers in primary and secondary schools in the town, ten (5) of who are not native of Opi. The five communities that make up Opi town as already mentioned are:

- Agū Opi
- Idi Opi
- Ibeku Opi
- Ogbōzara Opi
- Ibagwa Opi

Sample and Sampling Technique

Sample for this study will comprise of interview gotten from fifty (50) Opi native speakers and ten (10) standard Igbo speakers. To obtain the adequate representation of the population, the simple random technique was used in selecting the respondents from each of the communities.

Data Collection Technique

Respondents were randomly selected and interviewed. These selected respondents represent all the combinations; ages: (older and younger speakers), region (Idi Opi, Ibeku Opi, Ogbōzara Opi, Opi Agū, and Ibagwa Opi) and language variety (standard Igbo and Opi dialect speakers). On the basis of age, the younger are in the age range of 18-40 while the older are in the age range of 41-80 years. The speakers cover people from different types of occupation and levels of education. Their speeches were collected under different circumstances and places. Greater percentage of texts used in this study was elicited from native speakers of Opi dialect. Setting up a research design capable of providing a data necessary to the solution of problems is the major responsibility of a researcher. A successful completion of a study depends on the adequate planning and the carrying out of the plan stated. Again, a research of this nature like any other sociolinguistic research considers that collection of text needs finding actual speakers who will be interested in participating for a long time. Direct opportunity for direct observation although of a limited sample of behavior is required in this research technique.

Validation of Data

To ensure the accuracy of data, the following were done and data organization and documentation were done. All data sets were checked to avoid duplicates and errors and data were arranged in sets. In effect, our data were taken mainly from primary and secondary sources. In drawing data from the primary sources, we made use of oral interview, and personal observation. As for secondary sources we made use of consultation of journals, unpublished works, books, research works, internet, conference papers, etc. Again, the researcher made use of compilation of Opi dialect word list and that of the standard Igbo. These are personal observations as trained Igbo linguist who is a native speaker of Opi dialect who also speaks standard Igbo fluently and English, as a second language.

Reliability of Data

The most common way to measure parallel forms reliability is to produce a large set of questions to evaluate the same thing and divide these randomly into two question sets. The same group of respondents answers both sets and the correlation between the results given. In the case of this research, the same interview was thrown to different people from four different communities in Opi town and the same results were realized.

Theoretical Framework

For Theoretical Framework, Wave and the Accommodation Theories are the theoretical basis in which this study is based on. Bailey wave theory is a new version of the old theory by Johannes Schmidt in 1872. This theory accounts for resemblances between separated but geographically adjacent branches of Indo-European family of languages. He states that a linguistic change spreads outward from some starting points like waves on a pond into which a pebble has been tossed. The result is that the geographical area is affected by different combinations of isoglosses and so ends up with various languages and dialects with varying degrees of similarities. Bailey's modern version is that wave of change moves, over a period of time, either through geographical space (as Schmidt has suggested) or through social space or both and may be slowed down by barriers of other kind such as age, sex class as well as physical geographical features. According to Wardhaugh (2010:222) "Wave theory makes claims about how people are affected by change". Changes are transmitted by individuals at any time, any change has certain speakers it will affect but may not reach others. Speaker C whom a particular change has not yet reached will differ from speaker A (whom the change has passed) and from B (whom the change is just reaching and who sometimes reduces the same output as A sometimes the same as C. Eze (2019:58) on explaining this states that it accounts for interpersonal variation (between A and C) and intrapersonal variation (within B). A social psychologist Howard Giles, developed Accommodation Theory and it is based on conversational situation. It is the adjustment of one's speech or the other communicative behavior vis-a-vis the people with whom one is interacting. Trudgill (1986:39) in explaining Giles accommodation theory states thus: 'In face-to-face interaction, speakers accommodate each other linguistically by reducing the dissimilarities between their speech patterns and adopting features from each other's speech'. If a speaker accommodates frequently enough to a particular accent or dialect, then the accommodation may as time goes on become permanent, especially if attitudinal factors are favorable. Convergences and divergences are the two main accommodation processes described by this theory. Giles (2001) as cited in Abah (2016:292) explains that convergence refers to the "strategies through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors in order to reduce social differences while divergence refers to instances in which an interlocutor distances himself from the interlocutor". That is when people from different varieties of the same language come in contact with one another, they adjust their speech to accommodate one another's for easy understanding. In this study, both theories are used to examine the differences and similarities between Opi dialect and the standard form of Igbo. It can be seen when an Opi dialect speaker communicates with a non Opi dialect speaker, the standard form of Igbo is used, and this becomes use of accommodation theory.

Methodology

In this study, socio - linguistic approach were used. The researcher interviewed and recorded the speech of the respondents in their natural conditions in order to get the sociolinguistic factors responsible

for their variation in speech as concerns negations. This method was adopted for the following reasons: The synchronic approach, which is an alternative to diachronic method is aided by invention of the tape recorder and this allows the collection of a permanent record of someone's speech for study of language change. While diachronic technique approach allows the collection of data only one point in time. The data collected within the same linguistic community came from people of different ages and social groups. We have a lot of advantages of taking this approach for the study. One, considerably, more representative sample of the speech patterns of a community will be gotten from the tape-recorded language data than the manuscript data gotten from the traditional historical linguistics.

Negative Morphemes Variation

Negative word formation is simple and easy to apply. For the negative – g, dg are used. In which one to be used is determined by the choice of speaker as in the following:

Data 1:1

S/N	Opi Dialect	Standard Igbo	Gloss
1	Mag	maghi	doesn't know
2	Jedg	Jeghi	did not go
3	bjadg	bjaghi	did not come
4	hug/hudg	hughi	did not see
5	Nweg	Nweghi	don't have
6	rig/ridg	Righi	did not eat
7	kwug/kwudg	Kwughi	did not speak
8	lag/ladg	laghi	did not go home
9	mug/mudg	mughi	did not give birth or did not learn
10	Madg	maghi	did not know
11	hudg	hughi	did not see
12	kog	gaghi	Will not

In standard Igbo, the negative is realized by suffixing the morpheme ghi to the verb. There is however, different realization of this morpheme in Opi dialect as seen above.

Opi dialect uses g: or dg: to denote negative.

In Opi dialect, we would have such forms as:

Data 1:2

S/N	Opi Dialect	Standard Igbo	Gloss
13	o ladg	o laghi	he/she did not go.
14	o ridg nri	o righi nri	he/she did not eat food.
15	o mag ihe	o maghi ihe	he/she doesn't know something.
16	o bg	o bughi	it is not
17	o mag	o maghi	he/she does not know.
18	o kwudg	o kwughi	he/she did not say.
19	o vudg ivu nwu	o bughi ibu ahụ	he/she did not carry that load.
20	o mug nwa	o mughi nwa	he did not born baby.

Whether to use ‘g’ or ‘dg’ as against ghi/ghĩ tends to be determined by the rhythm and sometimes by and tense.

‘lɛ’ and ‘le’ are also used for negation in Opi dialect as against ‘la’ in standard Igbo. Whether to use ‘lɛ’ or ‘le’ depends on vowel harmony. While ‘e’ in ‘le’ harmonizes with heavy vowel, ‘ɛ’ in ‘lɛ’ harmonizes with light vowels. All these are well pronounced in imperatives. For example:

Data 1:3

S/N	Opi Dialect	Standard Igbo	Gloss
21	abɪalɛ nonwa	Abiala ebe a	don’t come here
22	anwɪlɛ mnyi	añɪla mmiri	don’t drink water
23	achɔlɛ	achɔla	don’t find
24	ahɪlɛ	ahɪla	don’t find
25	akwalɛ	Akwala	don’t cry
26	aglɛ	agɪla	don’t sing
27	agbalɛ ɔsɔ	Agbala ɔsɔ	don’t run
28	atɔlɛ ego:	atɔla ego:	don’t keep money
29	atalɛ an:	Atala anɪ	don’t eat meat
30	azlɛ aɟua	azɪla ahɪa	don’t trade
31	ejele aɟua	Ejela ahɪa	don’t go to market
32	ekwule okwu	Ekwula okwu	don’t talk
33	Evule ivu	Ebula ibu	Don’t carry load.
34	arɪlɛ	arɪla	Don’t climb
35	ahɔlɛ	ahɔla	Don’t select

A close examination to the above list will reveal that where to apply ‘le’ or ‘lɛ’ is determined by vowel harmony rule. Hence ‘ɛ’ in Opi dialect are often used in place of ‘a’ which is one of the four light vowels. /ɛ/ harmonizes with light vowels while ‘e’ being a heavy vowel harmonizes with heavy vowels. We then can see from the above examples: for ‘ɛ’ abɪalɛ, (don’t come) anwɪlɛ(don’t die), agbalɛ (don’t run), atalɛ (don’t chew), All these in the case of azlɛ (don’t trade) where no vowel is between ‘z’ and l, it is assumed that vowel ‘ɪ’ is silent. For this ‘lɛ’ instead of ‘le’ comes in. ‘ɛ’ harmonizes with light vowels ‘a’, ‘ɪ’, ‘ɔ’ and ‘u’ in Opi dialect. On the other hand, ‘e’ in ‘le’ harmonizes with heavy vowel ‘u’, ‘o’ and ‘e’ as we can see from the examples above.

Conclusion

We have exposed the variations in negative morphemes of Opi dialect and that of the standard Igbo. We also discovered that those Opi negations are not used indiscriminately. We see that ‘lɛ’ and ‘le’ obey the rules of vowel harmony. At the same time, the two are used as imperatives just like ‘la’ in standard Igbo. From the research, we can discover that Opi dialect has more negative morphemes than that of the standard Igbo. Again, Opi dialect negative morphemes differ completely from that of the standard Igbo language. This research has helped in exposing an aspect Opi Nsukka dialect which is negation. It has also exposed the variations that exist between this dialect and the standard form. This will help researchers who may wish to investigate on Nsukka dialect especially on the dialect of Opi Nsukka.

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