



Dialect Contact and Change in Ngor-Okpala Dialect of Igbo

Emmanuel Lucas Nwachukwu¹

nwachukwuemmanue@gmail.com

National Institute for Nigerian Languages

Department of General studies

Famous Oghoghophia IMU²

omufamous@gmail.com

08063860426

Department of Linguistics

National Institute for Nigerian Languages

Abstract: This study investigates the notion of contact-induced change in Ngor-Okpala dialect in relation to Mbaise and Etche dialects with evidences in phonic interference and sentence structure. The focus of this study is on the phonic interference and variation in sentence structure created as a result of dialect contact between Ngor-okpala dialect and her Mbaise and Etche neighbours. It also aims to examine the factors responsible for this contact-induced change in Ngor-okpala dialect such as geography, migration, marriage and economic activities will be reviewed. The study adopts comparative and descriptive methods, while data for the study were gathered from both primary sources such as personal communications and secondary sources such as journal articles, and textbooks. Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is adopted as the theoretical framework. This study reveals that Ngor-okpala dialect has been diffused because of its contact with Etche and Mbaise dialects. It also revealed with evidences in phonic interference and sentence structure of the Ngor-okpala dialect. The study concludes that dialect change in Ngor-okpala is the product of linguistic contact that exist along a continuum of variation which is dependent on which dialect they come in contact with and this determines the distinctiveness and areas of diffusion in the dialect.

Keywords: Dialect, Dialect contact, Dialect change, Language, Phonic.

1.1 Background to the study

The evolution and development of human natural language shows that they depend on one another at every point in time(see Imu 2018).

. Just as there are contacts between languages, there are contacts between dialects of mutually intelligible languages. Dialect contact and change suggests that contact between speakers of mutually intelligible language can result in dialect change. This implies that when two dialects

come into contact, dialect change may occur through various means such as borrowing, pidginisation, or creolisation.

Matras (2020) observed that language contact occurs when speakers of the same or different languages interact. This leads to the broad consensus that languages change over time, and there are operative factors responsible for this process of change, and the role of language contact in processes of change.

Britain (2018) noted that dialect contact approaches to language change examine the linguistic consequences of interaction between speakers of different but mutually intelligible varieties of a language. This also implies that Dialect contact approaches therefore rely on a robust link between, at one end of the scale, the linguistic outcomes of often fleeting and temporary encounters, and on the other, the emergence of new dialects that can, in some cases, come to function as varieties of a particular language.

The history of linguistics has proven that variations in dialects were among the first attractions to linguistic thinking. One of the most fundamental puzzles in linguistic discourse is the question of how and why dialects changes, leading to variations. Variations in language are common, and there is little or no evidence that any language have developed in total isolation. Dialect boundaries are, if anything, indeterminate and this indeterminacy leads to variation in language usage (dialects) as a result of many factors such as contact which is the concern of this study. Dialect contact is the interaction of one speech community with another and the effect the contact has on their respective language behaviour (dialect change). Dialect contact-induced changes manifest in different ways and extent, but rarely without the change working in both directions. This study discusses notion of contact-induced change in Ngor-Okpala dialect in relation to Mbaïse and Etche dialects, and factors responsible for this contact-induced change in Ngor-okpala dialect. The method adopts descriptive and the Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) approach.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conceptual review

This section reviews the concepts of dialect, and dialect contact, drawing from previous literature in this area. Ivic and Crystal (2023) define dialect as a variety of a language that signals where a person comes from. The notion is usually interpreted geographically (regional dialect), but it also has some application in relation to a person's social background (class dialect) or occupation (occupational dialect). Traditionally in linguistics, dialects are defined as regionally restricted varieties of a language.

In the submission of Nwagalaku, Obiora, and Christopher (2021), dialect refers to a group of people's unique way of speaking a language that differs from the standard. According to Akmajian, Demers, and Harnish (2004) the literal sense of the word "dialect" and its linguistic meaning, is a substandard use of a language, or, in other words, an incomplete, corrupt, or pure

form of a standard language. It refers to a distinct type of a language in linguistics and does not carry any such judgment.

Dialect contact according to Britain (2017) is the interaction between speakers of different but mutually intelligible varieties of a language, and the linguistic consequence of this is dialect change. Sankoff (1980) defines dialect contact as the incorporation of foreign elements into a speakers' native language. This incorporation causes change in the native language structures which leads to substratum interference.

2.2 Theoretical studies

There are many theories that linguists have proposed to explain how dialect contact and change occur. The relative importance of each theory can vary depending on the specific circumstances of dialect contact, and it is possible that more than one theory can be used to explain linguistics facts.

Contact Linguistics Theory: This theory suggests that contact between speakers of mutually intelligible or different languages or dialects can result in language or dialect change. Contact linguistics theory posits that when two languages come into contact, language change may occur through borrowing, pidginization, or creolization. Borrowing occurs when speakers adopt new words or structures from another language. Pidginization occurs when speakers create a simplified, mixed language to facilitate communication. Creolization occurs when a pidgin language becomes the native language of a community. Dialect contact occurs when speakers of two or more languages or varieties interact and influence each other. When speakers of mutually intelligible languages interact closely, it is typical for their dialects to influence each other.

The Wave Theory: The wave theory was first suggested by Johannes Schmidt in 1972. He noted that linguistics innovations spread from one language or dialect through contact on the part of speakers of neighbouring languages and dialects. In linguistics, the wave model or wave theory is a model of language change in which a new language feature (innovation) or a new combination of language features spreads from its region of origin, affecting a gradually expanding cluster of dialects. This theory suggests that language change occurs in waves, as changes originated by some speakers gradually spread to others in a speech community. The wave theory posits that linguistic change is not a simultaneous process, but one that occurs over time, with changes spreading like waves through a speech community. For example, a change in pronunciation or grammar may begin with a small group of speakers and gradually spread to others over time.

Gile's Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT): This is a theory of communication developed by Howard Giles. It concerns the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication to their interlocutors, the extent to which people perceive other speakers as appropriately attuning to them. The basis of the theory lies in the idea that people adjust (or accommodate) their style of speech to one another. Doing this helps the message sender gain approval from the receiver, increases efficiency in communication between both parties, and

helps the sender maintain a positive social identity. One of the areas that CAT has been applied to is dialect contact. Dialect contact occurs when people from different dialects communities interact with each other. In these situations, people may adjust their speech in a number of ways, including:

Convergence: This is when people adjust their speech to become more similar to the speech of their interlocutor. For example, a person from Ngor-okpala might converge to an Mbaise accent if they are talking to someone from Aboh Mbaise or Ezinihitte Mbaise.

Divergence: This is when people adjust their speech to become more different from the speech of their interlocutor. For example, a person from a lower-class dialect might diverge from a person from a higher-class dialect in order to assert their social identity.

Maintenance: This is when people do not adjust their speech at all. This can happen for a number of reasons, such as if the person is trying to assert their identity or if they are not aware of the other person's dialect.

The decision of whether to converge, diverge, or maintain one's dialect is influenced by a number of factors, including: the perceived social status of the interlocutor, this means that people are more likely to converge to the speech of someone they perceive as having higher social status. The perceived similarity between the interlocutors, speakers of language are more likely to converge to the speech of someone they perceive as being similar to them in terms of social class, ethnicity, or other factors. The context of the interaction, speakers are more likely to converge in social settings such as market and marriage. This study states that Gile's CAT model is important to explaining a variety of linguistics change related to dialect contact.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Ukaegbu (2018) asserts that dialect contact and change suggests that all languages do not have similar features, the differences and influences they have on each other makes it more interesting and provides a fertile ground for research in linguistics on the different phonemic and morphological attribute of these dialects. This implies that language is dynamic and does not change in isolation; changes are driven by external factors such as contact. Ngor-okpala dialect is distinct from Mbaise and Etche but contact-induced changes are evident.

Gibson & Lutz (2019) explain that there is broad consensus that languages change over time, that is, dialect contact and change is a linguistic universal. Ezikeojiaku (2004) supports this assertion that languages are always in a state of flux, as they are like organisms, and keep changing as long as the society continues to grow and develop. This implies that there is broad consensus that languages change over time. However, the direction and extent of the change may differ from dialect to dialect. This is to say that the directionality of influence of dialect change could be extreme or a balance. In the case of Ngor-okpala dialect change, it is not extreme and the original dialect structure is not wholly distorted, just accommodation of some lexical items and phonetics from these other dialects (Mbaise and Etche)

Aikhenvald (2002) notes that dialect change has been identified to impact on all aspects of linguistic structure. Dialect contact and change support the view that there is a general and seemingly universal (Ngor-okpala dialect inclusive) and therefore presumably innate human tendency to 'behavioural co-ordination' (Trudgill, 2004) as a result, when two or more dialects interact like in the case of Ngor-okpala and Mbaïse and Etche dialects, there is an underlying motivation, though not conscious, to achieve a degree of interactional convergence.

Thompson, (2001) argues that in the simplest definition, dialect contact and change is the use of more than one dialect in the same place at the same time. Dialect contact and change in this substantive sense does not require fluent bilingualism or multilingualism, but some communication between speakers of different dialects is necessary. The Ngor-okpala people are not necessarily fluent in Mbaïse or Etche dialect but have adopted and accommodated some of the elements in their dialects.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). This theory seeks to explain and predict how people adjust their communicative behaviour during social interaction. It focuses on how people tend to talk like those they talk with and this is responsible for dialect variation and change. One will normally speak more like your addressee and this may be upward convergence, moving more like a formal or standard language, the 'acrolect'; or downward convergence, speaking on a more informal level or approaching dialect forms. Two speakers may also adjust their talk in both ways, approaching each other in the middle.

2.5 Summary of Literature

The literature review has shown that dialect change within mutually intelligible language is a linguistic universal which includes Ngor-okpala dialect. For change to take place in any dialect there must be some form of dialect contact and it is this interaction that leads to diffusion in such dialect and interactional convergence, which is the case with Ngor-okpala dialect.

3. 1 Dialect Contact and Change in Ngor-Okpala

Ngor-okpala is located in of Imo state, South East of Nigeria. It is largest local government in the state and is an amalgam of many indigenous, autonomous communities. Ngor-okpala is the dialect spoken by the people. They share boundaries with other local governments in the states like Etche, Owerri and Mbaïse, who all have their distinct dialects. Onyeaghalanwanneya (Umuohiagu, Logara, and Obiangwu) are close to and share boundary with Mbaïse, while the Umukabia share boundary with Etche, a Local Government Area in Rivers State. Despite these distinctions, they share similar cultures, linguistics, and traditional religious practices, indicating a common ethnic heritage. Because of their close boundaries, they interact dialectically, and as a result of this, the Ngor-okpala dialect has experience some changes.

According to Ezikeojiaku (2004) languages are always in a state of flux, as they are like organisms, and keep changing as long as the society continues to grow and develop. Njoku (2016) affirms

also that as these languages grow, they diversify, and as they do, dialects change and there is an increase in individual lexical items as a result of dialect contact, leading to borrowing from neighboring linguistic communities and there is the urge for neo-formations for items, ideas, or phenomena that may not have existed in the larger speech community.

Ngor-okpala, Mbaïse and Etche speak in their dialects with specific sounds, words, lilt, and pronunciations that are used by their people or speakers. However, because of the mutual intelligibility and contact among the dialect spoken in Ngor-okpala and these other areas mentioned above, they adopt their linguistics features in communication.



Figure 1
Dialects map of Imo State (2022)

Source: <https://soluap.com/ngor-okpala-maps/>

One evident change of linguistic inter-influencing on the Ngor-okpala dialect is phonic interference, which are essentially the production and the perception of sounds. Dialect contact in Ngor-okpala has led to changes in pronunciation. Ngor-okpala speakers pronounce certain sounds differently because of dialect contact with Mbaïse. In this case, they may start to adopt each other's pronunciations. For example, the pronunciation “Fu tawa” which means “come out”

Ngor-okpala- Fu tawa

Mbaise- Fu taha

This effect of dialect contact affects the expression of the phrase in Ngor-okpala dialect, because people at the boundary communities with Mbaise begin to pronounce this phrase and related ones like the Mbaise speaker.

Table 1

Phonetic interference of dialect contact in Ngor-Okpala and Etche

Ngor-okpala	Etche	Surface realisation
Báá	Bá	Increase
Ità	Ità	to chew
Téé	Té	Rub
Kéé	Ké	Share
Déé	Dé	Write
Opirimá	Okérimá	Plantain
Mmánùnri	Mmánùiri	Palm oil
Ányasù	Ábali	Night
Áhekere	Àhẹkere	Groundnut
Ákìlù	Ákhìrìlù/Ákhìrìlùlù	Bitter cola
Apiti	Apìtìrì	Slime/Mud
Àmàmihe	Àmàmihne	Knowledge

It is common to hear those Ngor-okpala communities close to Etche to say similar words but with tonal variation that is distinct to Etche dialect.

Table 2**dialect contact and change in Ngor-Okpala and Mbaise**

Ngor-Okpala	Mbaise	Surface reliasation
Ichéku	Nkwá	African, velvet tamarind
Ihé	Whé	Something
Ághwa	Áwha	Name
Álikiri	Álikará	Rusty thin/dried/tough
Usékwu	Usokwu	Kitchen/fireplace for cooking

While the Mbaise dialect has different way of pronouncing the words above, when said, the Ngor-okpala speaker does not have difficulty in understanding them and using them in conversations.

3.2 Sentence structure

Also when in sentence construction, the Ngor-okpala speaker adopts the Mbaise and Etche dialect unconsciously because of dialect contact.

Onye-a o wuonye- who is that person? (Ngor-okpala dialect)

But because of dialect contact, we hear communities close to Mbaise say:

Onye o buonye – Who is that person?

Instead of “wu” it changes to “bu” which is common in Mbaise dialect.

Alikirijawuigwensogbu – A rusty bicycle is problematic (Ngor-okpala dialect)

Alikirijabuigweanyanonu- (Mbaise dialect)

Aghwammadujialaraya – One’s name plays out in one’s life (Ngor-okpala dialect)

Awhammadujialaria- (Mbaise)

The difference in both dialects does not solely lie on the spelling but the manner in which it is said.

Onyeejilanneyaeguwuegwu – Nobody should take his/her mother for granted (Ngor-okpala)

Onyeejilennieegwuegwu- (Mbaise)

The differences in both sentences are subtle, the “ejil(a)” ends with vowel (a) in the Ngor-okpala dialect while it ends with (e) in the Mbaise dialect. Also the “nneya” in Ngor-okpala is differently spelt in Mbaise as “nnie” which brings about tonal variation.

Ewukaa- This goat (Ngor-okpala dialect)

Eghukaa we (Etche dialect)

Uloyawuka- His house is this one (Ngor-okpala)

Uloyabukem- (Etche dialect)

Because of the dialect contact between Ngor-okpala and her neighbours (Mbaise and Etche) it has resulted in change in Ngor-okpala tonal patterns and sentence structure. According to interview with IkechukwuOgu (2023) a native and speaker of Mbaisedialect, some parts of Ngor-okpala close to Mbaise speak like their Mbaiseneighbours, those close to Owerri and Etche speak a corrupt form of these dialects, and the geographical proximity makes it very possible, however, there are still dialectical differences between Ngor-okpala dialect, Etche and Mbaise dialects.

3.3 Factors Responsible for Dialect Change in Ngor-okpala

The findings of Gillian Sankoff (2001) reveals that the linguistic outcomes of dialect contact are determined many factors but in large part by the history of social relations among populations, including economic, political, and demographic factors. The following factors have been identified by this study as responsible for Ngor-okpala dialect change.

Geography: Language contact most often involves face-to-face interactions among groups of speakers, at least some of whom speak more than one language in a particular geographical locality. Often they are neighbors, as in the case of Ngor-okpala, Mbaise and Etche who share close geography. For example, the Obiangwu and Obiagwu communities in Ngor-okpala share close boundary with Enyigugu of AbohMbaise, without doubt, this proximity to Mbaise has influenced the people to speak a variant of Mbaise dialect. Similarly, Umukabia, Imerienwe and Umuneke in Ngor-okpala share close boundaries with Etche in Rivers state, and people from these Ngor-okpala communities speak variant of Etche dialect.

Economic Activities

Ngor-Okpala people not only share close geography with the Mbaise and Etche people but they also go there to carry out economic activities like trading, vice versa. In this process the dialects of both sides interact with the other, and over time causes change in the Ngor-okpala dialect. According to Giles' theory, when groups of people who speak mutually intelligible dialects come into long-term contact, the dialects usually become more alike. The interactional mechanism by which dialects in contact converge is widely understood to be linguistic accommodation, which happens during face-to-face contact.

Migration

Another common factor responsible for dialect contact and change in Ngor-okpala is the migration of people from to and from Mbaise and Etche. Research has found that speakers who move to a new dialect region may come to adopt features of the second dialect. (Schmidt, 2015) According to Sankoff (2001) the migration factor is the kind of population movements usually described as immigration, where newcomers fit themselves into an existing polity rather than establishing a new one, has often led to rapid linguistic assimilation of newcomers. Because of the close geography, migration is easy thereby creating avenue for dialect contact and change. The Ngor-okpala dialect has over time developed a mixed variety of Mbaise and Etche dialect,

and for those at the boundary villages, the Ngor-okpala dialect is almost attenuated in favour of the influencing dialect.

Marriage

The issue of intermarriage is one of the factors responsible for the contact and change in Ngor-okpala dialect. Because of the common boundary with Mbaise and Etche, the people of Ngor-okpala intermarry from these parts. The amount of contact arising from intermarriage between Ngor-okpala and the other dialects is one of the most important factors that have determined how much change has occurred in the dialect. The more contact there is, the more likely it is that Ngor-okpala speakers will adjust their speech to be understood.

3.3 Summary of findings

This study revealed that Ngor-okpala dialect has been diffused because of its contact with Etche and Mbaise dialects. It also revealed with evidences in phonic interference and sentence structure of the Ngor-okpala dialect. The study also reviewed some factors responsible for the contact-induced change in Ngor-okpala dialect, they include, geography, marriage, economic activities, and marriage. The findings of this investigation will help to enhance both the lexicon and orthography of the standard variety of Ngor-okpala dialect and by extension to the Igbo language.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, dialects change in Ngor-okpala is the product of linguistic contact because of factors such as geography, migration, economic activities and marriage. It is noteworthy to state that this contact-induced change in the Ngor-okpala dialect exist along a continuum of variation which is dependent on which dialect they come in contact with and this determines the distinctiveness and areas of diffusion in the dialect. Dialect contact represents a complex process that can have a significant impact on the overall dynamics and use of a language.

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