Ebonyi Journal of Language and Literary Studies Volume 9 (2) April 2026
EJLLS www.ejlls.com ISSN: 3141-3935 (Online); 3141-3943 (Print) VOL 9

DELETION WITHOUT DELETION: CONSONANT ELISION AND FEATURE REDUNDANCY IN IGBO WORDS

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Abstract
This paper re-examines what has traditionally been described as consonant elision in Igbo nouns. Drawing on new empirical observations, this study shows that the apparent loss of the first consonant in VCVCV structures is conditioned by consonant identity; vowel height relations; and glide permitting environments. The phenomenon is optional, gradient, and dialect-sensitive; properties that challenge a categorical deletion analysis. This paper argues that the first consonant does not delete rather undergoes a melody loss triggered by a dependent specificity from C_2 due to feature redundancy. Data were generated from recordings and existing literature, fifteen tokens of three-syllabic common nouns and eleven ideophones each for words with identical consonant, unidentical consonants, identical vowels and others with unidentical vowels. Native speaker judgment is employed in natural speech observation, fast vs slow speech comparison and dialect comparison. Consonant elision was evidenced in fast speech but present in slow speech showing optionality. The analysis extends redundancy based Underspecification theory and integrates it within a Strict-CV framework to account for variable phonetic non-realization while preserving structural representation. The Igbo data provide evidence that the apparent segmental deletion may reflect representational economy rather than true phonological removal.

Keywords: Consonant elision, Redundancy, Segmental deletion, Igbo words, Eha-Amufu speakers.

1. Introduction

In communication and speech interaction, phonological processes are explained using the underlying and surface realizations accompanied with the rule that links them as seen in Generative phonology or the constraints that are ranked to select them in optimality theory. Elision, the loss of a segment, is one of the phonological processes that is evident in speech interaction mostly for ease of speech, fast speech or adherence to the obligatory contour principle. Literature attests that consonant elision falls into this category. When words at the input level interact, some of the segments in the underlying representation do not have any concrete trace or presence in the surface representation. This research however argues that the so called consonant elision is not elision in its true sense but a melodic Underspecification which was not realized phonetically because of its melodic loss. In Strict CV account such languages that appear to have complex consonant clusters or where vowels are deleted, have their underlying phonological structure remain a simple C-V alternation (Lowenstamm, 1996). Lowenstamm's key contribution lies in the idea that every syllable consists of an alternating sequence of C and V slots, regardless of whether these positions are filled phonetically. For example, in cases where a consonant cluster appears in a language, there is an underlying V slot between the consonants, which is left empty or licensed in certain phonological contexts. This empty slot concept explains why certain languages allow clusters while others do not, as the licensing

of empty V slots is governed by language-specific rules. This paper extends this theory in arguing the phenomenon of optional consonant elision in Igbo. While most studies attribute licensing to empty V slots, this paper extends the theory to licensing of empty C slots in the Igbo language. This is not mere absence of the onset but a structurally overt onset that is stripped of its melody. There are cases of syllable, syllabic nasal, vowel and consonant elision but the focus of this paper is to examine lexical consonant elision in Igbo. Specifically, consonant elision that occurs within a noun. Consonant elision in Igbo nouns is evident in words with identical consonants in the different syllabic units. This identical consonant feature is a major criterion for consonant elision, however, it is permissible given vowel height/hiatus conditions and tonal alternations. This phenomenon is described within the ideophones, and some nouns with identical-consonant feature. This research argues that Igbo consonant elision is not deletion but a type of redundancy leading to melodic Underspecification licensed by feature redundancy under Strict CV. This theory provides a unified explanation for phonological processes such as consonant clusters, vowel-zero alternations, and cross-linguistic variation in syllable structure; and questioning consonant elision in Igbo is an added phenomenon.

2. Literature Review

Elision is the loss of a segment in speech process. It is a phonological process that accounts for the deletion of a vowel, consonant, syllable or any other chunk of segments in active speech process. It is common in Igbo and often occurs in fast speech or more fluent flow of utterances (Eme, 2008; Mbah & Mbah, 2010; Emenanjo, 2015). Consonant elision is claimed to be common in Igbo language and occurs as a dialectal variation pattern or in fast speech (Uwaezuoke, 2020; Edeoga, 2024). There are cases of syllable, syllabic nasal, vowel and consonant elision (Eme, 2008; Mbah & Mbah, 2010) and multi-syllables elision (Uwaezuoke, 2020) in Igbo.

Uwaezuoke (2020) uses primary data from Omambala dialect of Inland West Igbo Dialect Cluster (IWIDC) and data from existing literature to descriptively ascertain if there are only four types: vowel, consonant, syllabic and syllabic nasal of elision as evidenced in existing literature or if there are more. The research reveals that another type, a multi-syllables elision, is found in lexicalized words of the Anam variety of Igbo. While Uwaezuoke (2020) descriptively accounted for some of the conditions necessitating consonant elision e.g. the VCVCV structure and assimilation process involved, detailed feature-based conditions and analysis were not followed given that the focus of the research is on the different types of elision available. This paper focuses on consonant elision in words with the aim to get a finer detailed investigation and theory application. Edeoga (2024) researched on elision in Eha-Amufu variety of Igbo. The findings correspond with the four existing elision types in literature cf. (Eme, 2008) on the elision types. However, while the operations of the vowel and the consonant elisions align with the attested ones, the syllabic nasal elision among Eha-Amufu speakers of English operates differently. The study also attests that consonant elision is not optional in the variety under study but evidenced in both slow and rapid speech of Eha-Amufu speakers. Eze and Nwike (2024) also carried out a descriptive study on how consonant elision affect communication. Primary school pupils were randomly picked for the research and results show that consonant deletion changes the structure of words but meaning is retained in both simple and complex words. However, not much attention was given to ‘what triggers consonant elision?’ This gap will be filled in this research and subsequently question the true functions of such triggers or conditions.

The present analysis draws on the tradition of Feature Redundancy Rules as developed in generative phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968) and later refined in Underspecification theory (Archangeli, 1984; Pulleyblank, 1988). Redundancy rules ensure that only contrastive features are lexically specified, while predictable feature values are supplied by rule. Extending this logic to the Igbo data, I argue that when two identical consonants occur within a VCVCV configuration, the feature matrix of the first consonant is fully predictable from the second. Its melodic specification is therefore redundant and need not be independently represented. The apparent "elision" of the consonant is thus reinterpreted as the phonetic non-realization of a structurally present but melodically underspecified C-slot.

3. Methodology

The research design adopted for this research is a descriptive-analytic methodology, grounded in feature geometry. Data was purposefully generated for this study from primary and secondary resources, speech samples from Igbo native speakers voiced in standard Igbo and dialectal varieties from existing literature.Data were generated from recordings and existing literature, fifteen tokens of three-syllabic common nouns and eleven ideophones each for words with identical consonant, unidentical consonants, identical vowels and others with unidentical vowels.. Native speaker judgment is employed in natural speech observation, fast vs slow speech comparison and dialect comparison. Consonant elision was evidenced in fast speech but present in slow speech showing optionality.

Structural analysis was carried out on the identification of VCVCV configurations, isolation of $C_1 = C_2$ environments, classification of vowel height features (±high) and examination of identical vs non-identical V_1V_2 sequences. The Feature-based framework was employed in the analysis of specification of consonant features, specification of vowel features and determination of when elision seems to appear. The Strict CV theory was used to account for the variable phonetic non-realisation and structural preservation. All tones were marked: the high tone [ˊ], the down-stepped high tone [ꜜˊ] and the low tone [ˋ].

4. The Concept of Consonant Elision in Igbo

The data will be gradually presented with sequential analysis. Consonant elision in ideophones will be discuss first followed consonant elision in nouns. Generalisations will be drawn from the observed behavior of segments.

4.1 Consonant elision in Ideophones

Consonant deletion in ideophones are used to communicate consistency, steadiness and intensity. Deletion is optional but when it happens, creates a slight intense steadiness. Consider the examples in 1

Example 1

	Intense Force/speed/move	**steadiness/consistency**	**gloss**
a.	Wàwàwà	waaa	gushing of water
b.	Gbàgbàgbà	gbaaa	clear, shining, clean
c.	pípípí	piii	hooting
d.	wówòwó	*wóòó	shouting

e.	wáwàwá	*wáàá	irregular move
f.	váḿvàm̀váḿ	*vámàmám	irregular darting of eyes
g.	váḿváḿváḿ	váám̀	swiftness
h.	kpóḿkpóḿkpóḿ	kpóóḿ	hitting
i.	kpáìkpáìkpáì	Kpáái	flickering of fire/gunshot
j.	gbògbògbògbògbògbò	gbògbòòò	hailings
k.	sɛ́kɛ́ḿsɛ́kɛ́ḿsɛ́kɛ́ḿ	sɛ́kɛ́ɛ́ḿ	cat-walking

Note that these ideophones also have identical tones. The introduction of tonal alternation blocks consonant deletion as observed in 1(d-f). However, 1(g-h) shows that tonal alternation that can block consonant deletion is restricted to alternations on vowel TBUs. The alternation of tones on the vowel and syllabic nasal within each single unit did not trigger any change. Examples 1 (h-i) tell more that the tonal alternations on the first vowels within each unit string of segments is the factor that enables consonant deletion coupled with other requirements. This is also observed that in two syllabic units, the two syllables of the first unit stay while the consonants in the other units are deleted and only the vowels of the second syllables are retained as shown in example 1 (j-k)

4.2 Consonant Elision in Nouns

Consonant elision in nouns and gerunds are similar to that of ideophones in some ways. The consonants in the different syllables share the same phonetic properties**.** Butwhat kind of structureof words allow consonant elision? Or is lexical consonant elision a random phenomenon in Igbo language.

Example 2:

a.	ákwókwɔ́	áókwɔ́	book
b.	ósísí	óísí	stick
c.	àzízà	àízà	broom
d.	èbùbè	èùbè	glory
e.	ɔ̀ŋ́ọ́ŋ́ọ́	ɔ̀ọ́ŋ́ọ́	act of drinking
f.	òsísí	òísí	act of cooking
g.	àkídì	àkídì	bean family
h.	èbùnè	èbùnè	ram

Example 2 (a-c) show that consonant elision occurs in common nouns, in 2(d), abstract and proper nouns, in 2 (e-f), gerunds. Interestingly, it is observed that examples 2 (a-f) have identical consonants meaning that C_1 and C_2 are identical in these examples. However, 2 (g-h) do not have identical consonants and also did not have any form of consonant elision. Another observation is the loss of C_1 slot and the examples given are typical of VCVCV template with the core pattern $V_1 – C_1 - V_2 – C_2 – V_3$. It is difficult to generate a VCVCVCV template with identical consonants. The best gotten are ideophonic and do not have the initial vowel – jijiji or kwakwakwa – shivering/shaking, wawawa, zazaza, gbagbagba - high intensity.

Another feature important in loss of consonant slot is observed to occur in words with approximants consonants as seen in Example 3:

Example 3:

a.	áwɔ̀ˈzíé	áɔ̀ˈzíé	person's name
b.	àwɔ̀rɔ̀	*àɔ̀rɔ̀	scale
c.	òjìrì	òìrì	look-alike
d.	ògìrì	*òìrì	local seasoning

In examples 3 (a and c), it is observed that the approximants /j, w/ are elided in words with unidentical consonants while /g/ remains unelided in 3(d). However, example 3(b) suggest that the approximants do not always elide in the given environments. Note that in 3 (a and c) the vowels following, /j, w/ share same high and back feature respectively with their vowel counterparts, /i, u/. Therefore, it can be argued that Examples 3 (a and c) suggest that vowels may play some roles in the elision process. The following section will focus on the involvement of vowels in lexical consonant elision.

4.3 [+ High] Vowels in Lexical Consonant Elision

Consonants are often elided is speech in the environment of high vowels. Consider the data in Example 4.

Example 4:

	Word	**consonant elision**	**gloss**
a.	òtótò	òótò	morning
b.	ákwókwɔ́	áókwɔ́	book
c.	ósísí	óísí	stick
d.	àzízà	àízà	broom
e.	èbùbè	èùbè	glory
f.	òtùtó	òùtó	praise
g.	íˈdʒíˈdʒí	íˈíˈdʒí	housefly
h.	ɔ̀kàká	ɔ̀kàká	all discerning

From the words in Example 4, it is observed that the V1 is open to all heights, low /a/, mid /e, o/, high / i, u, ʊ/ vowels while V_2 is closed to only high vowels /i, ɪ, u, ʊ/. This shows that [+High] V_2 is a requirement for consonant elision to occur in Igbo words. In 4(h) although the V1 is not a high vowel (no word with high-low V1, V_2 vowel could be generated with identical consonants), it is higher than the /a sound in V_2 and this has blocked consonant elision even though, there are identical consonants. Again, it is observed that when V1 is a high vowel, V_2 is identical to V1 as seen in 4 (a and g). What is not certain is 'will C_1 undergoelision if unidentical [+ High] V1 and V_2 occur in its environment. Consider Example 5 below.

Example 5:

	Word	***Cons Del**	**Cons Del**	**Gloss**
a.	íˈtótò	*íˈótò	íˈítò	picking
b.	ìkùkù	*ìùkù	ììkù	wind
c.	íˈsúsù	*íˈúsù	íˈísù	kissing
d.	ìsúsú	*ìúsú	ìí sú	monthly saving
e.	íˈtʃótʃò	*íˈótʃò	íˈítʃò	gaggling
f.	òtʃíˈtʃá	òíˈtʃá	òóˈtʃá	cockroach
g.	ùtʃítʃì	ùítʃì	ùútʃì	night

h.	òdídí	òídí		type
i.	ùdí$^{\downarrow}$dé	ùí$^{\downarrow}$dé	ùú$^{\downarrow}$dé	spider

Example 5 shows that when V1 is [+ FRONT, +HIGH] and V_2 [+ BACK, +HIGH], consonant elision is disallowed. To allow consonant elision in 5(a-e), V_2 takes the front feature of V1. However, when V1 is [+ BACK, +HIGH] and V_2 is either [+FRONT or +BACK], consonant elision occurs. Examples 5 (h and i) may seem awkward but with the researcher's intuition as a native speaker, it sounds 'speakable', although it is more natural in 5(f-g). In some varieties of Igbo like the Awka, Anam and Omambala varieties, consonant elision occurs when [+Back] vowels occupy the V1 position and [+Front} or [+Back] does not matter in V_2 position such that the /ui/ or /ʊɪ/ glide seems possible, in other varieties of Igbo, V1 will assimilate V_2 /uu/ or /ʊʊ/ in (f and g).

4.4 [- High] Vowels in Lexical Consonant Elision

Examples in 6 show that there are instances of consonant elision when V_2 is [-High].

Example 6:

a.	ɛ̀lɛ̀lɛ̀	ɛ̀ɛ̀lɛ̀	moi-moi/bean pudding
b.	àkpàkpà (nike)	ààkpà	name of place in Enugu City
c.	ág^{w}ág^{w}á	áág^{w}á	mixed/variety

These are rare in Igbo and may be arguable except 6 (a and b) which are still commonly in use. However, the examples show that V_2 can only be [-High] when we have identical [-High] V1. This shows that identicality of vowels is a possible pass for consonant elision. So the mid and low vowels in V_2 position are only permitted when they also appear in V1 position. In some varieties like Ezaa (Eme, 2008), Anam (Uwaezuoke, 2020) and Eha-Amufu (Edeoga, 2024), words with [-High] V1 and [+High] V_2 produce identical [-High] V1 and [-High V_2] where V1 totally assimilates V_2 after consonant deletion as shown in 7.

Example 7:

ẹ́kwụ́kwọ́	ẹ́ẹ́kwọ́	book (Ezaa/ EhaĀmufu varieties)
áwụ̀wọ̀	ááwọ̀	cunning (Anam variety)

Only three syllable words undergo consonant elision process, the first syllable is (usually a V) a segment, the consonant of the second syllable gets elided, while the third retains its full length.

4.5 Generalisations for Lexical Consonant Elision

So far, the generalizations for lexical consonant elision are summarized as follows:

i. Only words with identical consonants undergo loss of consonant slot.
ii. The slot of the first consonant C_1 gets elided
iii. The word template is typically a $V_1 - C_1 - V_2 - C_2 - V_3$ pattern
iv. C_1 is elided in unidentical C_1, C_2 environment if C_1 is an approximant /j, w/ followed by corresponding /i, u/ V_2
v. V_2 is [+HIGH] , V1 [-HIGH]
vi. If V1 [+HIGH], V_2 is identical to V1
vii. if V1 is a [+HIGH, +FRONT], V_2 cannot be [+ BACK]

viii. when V1 is [+HIGH, + BACK], V_2 can either be [+ FRONT OR + BACK]
ix. With reference to vowel chart, the direction of sequence for V1 and V_2 of the same height is right to left (that is, back vowels gliding towards the front vowel) and upward gliding for others
x. [- HIGH] V_2 is allowed in lexical consonant elision only if V1 and V_2 are identical.

The first generalization 'identical consonants are required if consonant elision must take place' is a basic requirement that agrees with the redundancy of a consonant sound perceived by Igbo speakers such that once there is identity of consonant sounds, it creates an opportunity for consonant elision. This, however is not solely an essential requirement. The fact that the word must be a three-word syllable VCVCV is basic for the gliding essence and the first consonant is always the target for elision. It is phonologically possible to say that approximants and their vowel counterparts may be seen to possess same features, similar enough to trigger redundancy and prompting the elision of the approximant. The height of the second vowel must be high enough to cause a gliding effect; that is why [-HIGH] vowels are not allowed at the V_2 position except when V1 and V_2 are identical. The position of two [-HIGH] vowels will result to a flattened rhythm. This is also the case when a [+HIGH] is allowed in V1 position. The V_2 is also identical to V1 creating a flattened rhythm, these are allowed in Igbo language. The direction of the vowel glide triggered by consonant elision may be viewed from the type of gliding allowed, a rising glide is achieved when V1 is [-HIGH] and V_2 is [+HIGH] but when V1 is [+BACK] and V_2 is [-BACK] then a fronting or a leftward glide is observed.

Consonant elision portrays the flexibility of the C, V segments such that once there's sufficient evidence for meaning to be made, a segment can be elided. This shows that the absence of a C or V segment does not necessarily mean its non-existence. What happens is that a condition met in certain environment or criterion has licensed the elision of that segment.

4.6 Why the Igbo Phenomena do not Support an Elision Account

The analysis in the previous section shows different feature conditions that need to be met to trigger consonant elision: the vowel height, identical C_1 and C_2, the VCVCV structure and identical V1, V_2. A deletion or elision rule is not as complex as what is presented here. Deletion rules are typically mindful of positions e.g. intervocalic positions or just identical consonants or cluster simplification. Deletion or elision occurs when structural specifications are met. They are not inherently gradient or dependent on speech rate. The rules are systematic and discrete (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Kiparsky, 1982; Hayes, 2009). Conversely, the conditions observed here are more gradient and sometimes intertwined such that two or more phonetic conditions need to be in place to trigger the loss of the consonant. The conditions explained in the previous section are highly feature-driven. It will be trivial to attribute or capture such specificity by a simple deletion rule (Ohala, 1993). Also the strong dependency on consonant identity makes the VCVCV structure very predictable. Such predictability suggests redundancy other than elision (Chomsky & Halle, 1968). And the so called elision target predictable consonant which is not logical phonologically because only contrastive features are specified, predictable ones are redundant (Archangeli, 1984; Pulleyblank, 1988)

Again, the optionality of consonant lossobserved in fast speech and slow speech, or as realized in different speech varieties of the Igbo language, reinforces the claim that the consonant loss is not categorical. Its

presence is not arguable structurally, though it may not always be realized phonetically given variability in speech. Cannonical phonological deletion rules on the other hand is typically position based or structure driven exemplified in rules like C→Ø/__# (Ohala, 1993).

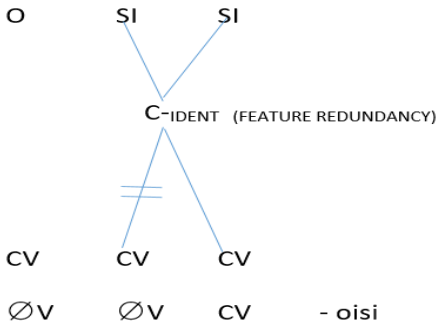
Every language adopts a system or phonotactics that help resolve complex structures or solve illformedness in the language. Igbo language does not lexically license onsetless vowel clusters in word initial position. Vowel sequences that surface are typically derived and subject to hiatus resolution strategies. The question would be, why would the Igbo system initiate deletion just to create a complex structure? This is phonologically unclear. A phonological rule should not introduce a marked structure that the language otherwise actively repairs. The only possible explanation may be that VVCV is not a stable deletion and must be representationally different.

4.7 Feature Redundancy and Melodic Underspecification in Strict CV Phonology

The VCVCV structure exemplified as the criteria for loss of segment is a well formed structure under Strict CV and therefore will not trigger any licensing. However, the identical nature of C_1 and C_2 suggests feature redundancy such that the native Igbo speaker perceives and predicts a consonant redundancy given that the phonetic non-realization of C_1 does not distort the meaning of the word because the hearer is likely going to draw inferences from C_2 to fill that gap. The Vowel in-between C_1 and C_2 cannot be said to block this feature redundancy because, though vowel height conditions the hiatus glide, the feature content of the vowel does not interfere with the predictability of the consonants' feature identity (Clements, 1985; Walker, 2000; Hasson, 2001). What this means is that that C_1 can still be predictable from C_2 regardless of the high vowel in V_2 position and the unrealisation of the C_1 is not dependent on which vowel is in V_2 position. The vowel is therefore said to be transparent and not contradictory as evidenced in existing literature concerning consonant harmony (Rose & Walker, 2004; Hasson, 2010), and consonant reduplication (McCarthy & Prince, 1995). So analyzing the VCVCV structure of words like 'ósísí', the C-slot for C_1 is never elided but it is stripped of its distinctive features because the Feature Redundancy Rule (FRR) which states that:

FRR: if C_1 and C_2 share identical feature matrices within VCVCV, C_1's features are predictable from C_2 and are not independently specified. This action leaves the C_1 -slot empty of melody and a slot without melody cannot be pronounced in the phonetic component. So although the C_1 -slot is there, the consonant cannot be realised and so appears 'elided' in the surface, minimizing redundancy (Clements, 2001). In this situation, it will be said that it is the feature redundancy rule (specifically, context-dependency redundancy) that licenses the phonetic non-realization of C_1 (see Dresher, 2009). Given this explanation, the structure can be represented thus: V – C(Ømelody) – V – C – V not V-V-C-V

c. osisi - stick



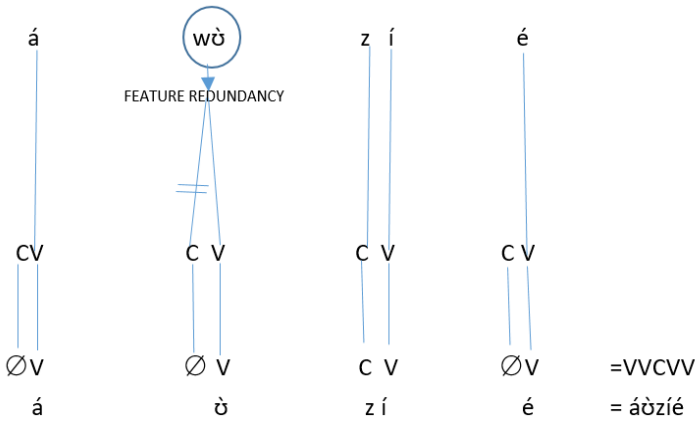
This licensing feature in consonant elision is validated since elision is observed not to occur in words with unidentical consonants as seen in Example:

Example 8:

a.	àgbósì	*àósì	ant
b.	ókpìrì	*óìrì	heavy long stick
c.	àkídì	*àídì	beans family
d.	ègwúsí	*èúsí	melon
e.	èbùlè	*èùlè	ram
f.	ɔ̀fɔ́má	*ɔ̀fɔ́má	very well

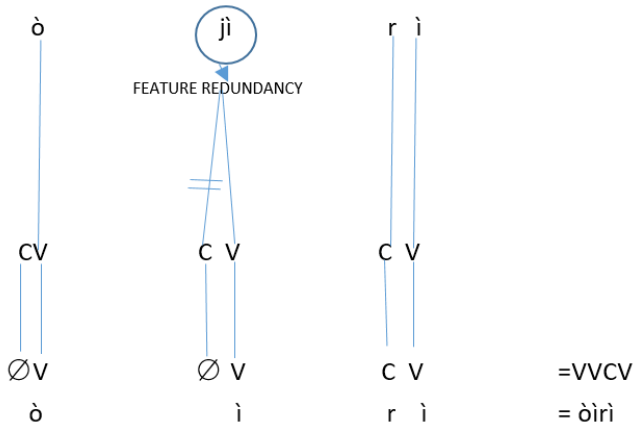
As discussed in section 1 of this paper, there are instances of consonant elision when C_1 and C_2 are unidentical, however, the C_1 is observed to be approximants and happens that they must occur with their corresponding vowel counterparts which share a high degree of acoustic similarity with them. This similarity may trigger redundancy of the consonant sound making it vulnerable to underspecification. This is observed mainly in fast speech. The approximant /w/ occurs with the Back High Vowel /u/ and the palatal approximant /j/ occurs with Front High Vowel /i/.

áwɔ̀zíé person's name



Note that from the tiers, C_1 becomes redundant because its feature matrix is predictable from the V_2 so its melodic is not specified independently while the C_1 and C_2 licensing happens between the second and third syllables, the C_1 V_2 licensing is within the syllable. Within the syllable /w/ is the onset of the nucleus /u/ and both share the feature [+ROUND] and [+ HIGH]. Here the principle of feature economy may trigger a simpler syllable structure representation. And in the syllable structure, the onset which is an optional consonant, is stripped of its melody. The same goes for the palatal approximant /j/ which also seems elided before /i/ because both share the features [+HIGH] and [+SPREAD]. Both /w/ and /j/ do not appear phonetically because they are stripped of their melody in feature redundant contexts.

òjìrì - look-alike



Another instance where consonant melody-loss is allowed without a high V_2 is when the V1 and V_2 are identical as seen in example 5 of section 1 such as èlèlè, òlòlò etc. This is considered a part melody-loss trigger. The feature 'identical C_1, C_2 and V1, V_2 are present. Consonant underspecification is blocked in other examples without identical C_1 and C_2 as seen in àkàrà, òtóló, èbélè etc. this shows C_1 and C_2 identical features criterion is primary to consonant underspecification.

A potential objection to the redundancy-based analysis concerns the optional nature of the phenomenon because C_1 which is argued to be underspecified, surfaces in slow speech, how then can feature redundancy and economy representation be responsible for its apparent loss? To answer this, note that redundancy regulates specification but does not delete structure. Predictable feature values are underspecified and may not be independently represented though they may still be phonetically realized in certain conditions e.g. slow speech. The Igbo data align with this model. Importantly, licensing non-realization does not entail obligatory non-realization. In careful speech, speakers may retain full melodic realization for clarity, emphasis or prosodic strengthening. Optionality is also patterned not random, this structural restriction supports a representational account, so redundancy defines where reduction is possible and phonetic implementation determines whether reduction is executed.

4.8 Strict CV in Ideophones

Ideophones that permit consonant melody-loss are usually two or three syllables. Ideophones with identical segments strip the consonants of the second and third syllables of theirmelodies retaining only the consonant of the first syllable and the vowel slots of the three syllables. This may be represented as

a. Wawawa - gushing of water
Wa wa wa
CV CV CV
CV ØV ØV ~~Wa~~aa

This phenomenon could be interpreted differently such that it is the second and third syllables that are deleted and the vowel in the first syllable undergo compensatory lengthening to fill up the empty slots of the tone bearing units. This other process is represented thus:

b. Wawawa - gushing of water
Wa wa wa
CV ØØ ØØ
CV

The first argument aligns more with similar phonological processes in the Igbo language as evidenced in the consonant deletion in nouns.

c. osisi - stick
O SI SI
CV CV CV
ØV ØV CV - oisi

Examples (a) and (c) show that segments are likely to loose their melody not syllables. These kinds of melody loss are optional and is observed to be triggered by a degree of redundancy. Every word that allows consonant melody-loss is characterized with identical consonant in the C_1 and C_2 slots and C3 slots in the case of ideophones. This strengthens the redundancy analysis because melody loss also targets identical consonants although the structure differs. This is understandable since ideophones behave differently from the normal grammar of a language (Dingemanse, 2017).

5. Discussion of Findings

The data reveal that consonant elision in Igbo is tightly conditioned by segmental identity and vowel height within a VCVC configuration. The systematic nature of this conditioning, together with its optional realization across speech styles, challenges a simple deletion analysis. Instead, the findings support an interpretation in which the first consonant becomes melodically redundant when fully predictable from the second, resulting in its variable phonetic non-realization.

The findings of this study reveal that what has traditionally been described as consonant elision in Igbo is in fact a highly constrained and feature-sensitive phenomenon. The apparent loss of C_1 occurs exclusively within a VCVCV configuration and is strongly conditioned by consonant identity ($C_1 = C_2$) and specific vowel height relations between V_1 and V_2, particularly where glide formation is possible. The process is further shown to be optional and sensitive to speech rate and dialectal variation, occurring more readily in fast speech but remaining available in certain varieties even under careful articulation. These properties collectively challenge a categorical deletion analysis, since true phonological deletion is typically position-driven and structurally obligatory. Instead, the data support a reinterpretation in which C_1 becomes fully predictable from C_2 under the specified structural and feature conditions, rendering its melodic specification redundant. Within a Strict CV framework, the C-slot of C_1 remains structurally present but loses

independent melodic content through feature redundancy, resulting in its variable phonetic non-realization. The phenomenon is therefore best analyzed not as consonant deletion or elision, but as melodic underspecification arising from representational economy in the phonological grammar.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that consonant elision in Igbo is neither random nor structurally driven by simple positional deletion. Instead, it is constrained by a convergence of segmental identity, vowel height relations and structural configuration within a VCVCV syllable pattern. The optionality and gradient nature of the phenomenon, together with its sensitivity to feature predictability, argues against a canonical deletion account.

Within a Strict CV framework, the C_1 remains structurally present but stripped of its melodic content when its features are fully predictable from C_2. the apparent surface loss therefore reflects feature redundancy and representational economy rather than segmental removal. Igbo thus, provides evidence that phonological grammar may license the non-realization of predictable structure without eliminating underlying positions

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