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## Speech Variation in Emowha Dialect of Igbo

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### Abstract

This work focuses on language variation with historical antecedents in Emowha speech community of Igbo language. This research work has the objectives of establishing the lexical and phonological variation and whether the pattern of migration of the villages affected the variation. This study employed the field methods of quantitative approach as theoretical framework. Similarly, the paper adopted primary and secondary sources of data and descriptive and analytical method of data analysis. The research work observed that Emowha dialect of Igbo records more lexical variation than phonological variation: Oduoha and Elibrada villages exhibits more of the variations and the patterns of migration of the villages that make up Emowha speech community has no effect on the variation. Consequently, this study concludes that the speech variations exhibited by Oduoha and Elibrada villages are not significant enough to predict that in the near future the two villages will develop their own dialects.

**Key Words:** variation, Emowha, Sociolinguistics approach, dialect, Igbo

### Introduction

Emohua is a speech community that comprises of eight (8) villages and speak Emowha dialect of Igbo as acknowledged in Nwaozuzu (2017, p. 103) and Manfredi (1991) quoted in Emenanjo (2015, p.7). A

dialect as defined by Fromkin et al (2011, p. 430) as ‘when there are systematic differences in the way groups speak a language’. However, in the case of Emowha dialect there exists lexical and phonological differences in the way each of the villages

within Emowha speech community speak, though these differences do not blur full mutual intelligibility. The burden of this paper is to list and analyse the variations and to establish whether their patterns of migration is one of the causes.

### **The Migration History of Emohua**

Emohua is made up of eight villages, namely: Oduoha, Elibrada, Isiodu, Rumuakunde, Rumuche, Rumuohia, Mgbuetor and Mgbuitanwo. One truth about Emohua villages is that they do not have a common progenitor. In all probability, therefore, the name Emohua is circumstantial. Emohua people do not have a common ancestors... the six original Emohua component settlement had a putative ancestor. These ancestors might have come with their groups from different directions and at different times (Chukunda 2001, p.8). History has it that ODUWOHA, the ancestor of Oduoha and Isiodu villages, the earliest settlers in Emowha with his people migrated from Rukpokwu in present day Rivers State to Emohua. ODUWOHA settled at Isiodu first, gave birth to his first son 'ISHI' who isiodu is named after and latter proceeded to Oduoha at about 1400 AD or earlier (Chukunda 2001). However, another tradition claims that Odu, the ancestor of Isiodu and his group were clearing a thick

forest to settle and eventually met another Odu, the ancestor of Oduoha and his people in their settlement (Uchendu 2003, p. 15). This version of history does not enjoy the support of majority of the people of Emohua. Moving on Olo and Eссор his half-brother, the ancestors of Rumuche and Rumuohia respectively migrated from Ogbia in present day Bayelsa State to ABUA in present day Rivers State to Emohua. Olo being a great hunter and warrior preferred his brother ESSOR to live very close to him. ESSOR in one of his hunting expectation picked Ehiekne the ancestor of Mgbaitanwo, Ehiekne is said to come from Kalabari in present day Rivers State (Uchendu 2003). Further Akunde, the progenitor of Rumuakunde village migrated from Runde in present day Rivers State and they have the responsibility of serving the gods of Emowha – Eli Udele.

Similarly, the migration story of Elibrada is a nomadic one as they move from ABUA to Osuognu (Odogo II) to miniresiri both along the coastline in present day Rivers State to their present settlement in Emohua. Mgbuetor which is one of the smallest villages has three ancestors who decided to live together peacefully. Mgbuetor in Emohua means three compounds. One of the progenitors migrated from ORU in present

day Imo State and others from Ibaa and Omagwa in present day Rivers State. This paper considered the variations within Emowha dialect of Igbo Vis-à-vis historical antecedent with of the objectives of analysing lexical and phonological variations and determining whether the patterns of migration is responsible for variations within the dialect. Emohua is one of the major communities in present day Emohua Local Government area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Emohua comprises of eight (8) villages and it is bounded by Akpor Aluu, Ibaa, Odeagwu, Ogbakiri (Wezina) and Kalabari. The main occupations of Emohua people are farming and fishing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical model adopted in this research work is field methods. The field methods was propounded and popularised by labov, the pioneer variationist in the early sixties and seventies. As one of the framework in quantitative approach, William Labov used it to analyse linguistic change and variation in Martha's Vineyard Philadelphia Speech community (Labov 1981). This framework assumes that there is no single style use in the production of a community (common) grammar but that each speaker uses grammar in a varying way.

(<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext>). Further field methods hold empirical (observational) data sacrosanct as against citation data. This smacks off a sharp difference between variationist and theoretical linguist.

According to Labov (1981) the large volume of recorded speech of high enough quality of data needed must be got through participation-observation method and recorded sample of group interaction. The group interaction method of Labov is akin to focus group discussion method in use in contemporary research. Similarly Labov (1981) claims that face-to-face interview is the only means of obtaining the quality of recorded data, that are required in quantitative study. The face-to-face interview above could be elicited using structured or unstructured interview that can only be carried out using field methods which is the hallmark of quantitative study.

### **Language Variation**

Language variation is a very important concept in the study of language use. Language varies as the speakers vary. It is a fact that no two speakers use language completely the same way. Language varies in pronunciation, lexical items and word arrangement. Olaoye (2015) cited Banjo (1979) as saying 'one of the most fascinating

things about language is that it manifests variation that is included by space, time and situation'. Further Agbedo (2001) claims that linguistic variation refers to the available use of certain linguistic items as observed in the speech patterns of language users. Some features of speech, however, are shared by groups, and become important because they differentiate one group from another (Holmes 2013, p. 131). Language varies along regional (geographical location) and social lines – different social class constructs language to mark them off from the others. However, the different variations are termed as dialects of the language.

Regional variation (dialect) is associated with the linguistic features that are unique to speakers of a language in a particular geographical zone. For instance, Holmes (2013, p. 133) gave an ample example of America and British dialects of English: got (British) gotten (American), have you got (British) do you have (American), have you eaten (British) did you eat (America). Similarly, Igbo language spoken in South East and their neighbouring states in Nigeria is considered multi dialectal as it has many regional dialects. Ikekeonwu (2001) claims that 'a common assertion that seems to go without any challenge is that Igbo language is multi-dialectal...' Regional variation

which draws from diachronic or historical linguistics had long being studied before variationists begin to study regional dialects. The variation geographers, for clear understanding present dialects in language map. They use tiny lines (Isogloss) to show variations within a language. Social variation discusses the different dialects used by different groups or classes within the social structure, just as the society is stratified into elite class (highly educated people), middles class, working class and poor working class, so there are different varieties of language (dialect) to mark off that individual class. Similarly, Olaoye (2015) observes that social class is one of the possible sources of differences in language development, as manifested in the contrast between the poor working class and the middle class children. Further Holmes (2013, p. 139) claims that the Received Pronunciation (RP) is the variation that is used by the best educated and most prestigious members of English society. Moreover, social variations help language planners to allocate domains of usage to dialects, as the variety considered most prestigious is used in Education, office and politics. Concerning language variations and domains Ayeomoni (2012) noted that 'a language is considered prestigious in given functions and is considered low if it is not

given any function at all or allocated low status function'. In agreement with the above quote, the standard Igbo variety is used in Education in primary schools across Igbo land in line with the language policy of Nigeria. This gives it a prestigious status.

### **The Concept of Dialect and Language**

Language is too important a concept. Nwaozuzu (2017) realizing this observes that 'language is one of the most fundamental aspects of human behaviour and the development of a language into a refined instrument of expression and communication is to my mind, one of man's greatest achievement.' It is truism that people do not speak the same way, even when the dialect/language is the same. There are observed differences in words and sounds in the way people speak. Language and dialect are inseparable as they do not have a neat classification. Fromkin et al (2011) put it thus:

It is not easy to distinguish between dialects and languages on strictly linguistic grounds. Dialects and languages reflect the underlying grammars and lexicons of their speakers. It would be completely arbitrary to say, for example, that grammars that

differ from one another by, say twenty rules represent different languages whereas grammars that differ by less than twenty rules are dialects ...rather, dialects merge into each other, forming a dialect continuum.

What we find is that every single form represents a dialect of a language. For instance, in Igbo language, you have Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu, Mbaise, Onitsha, Umuahia, Nsukka etc, and dialects. The Government, religious or cultural organization such as society for the promotion of Igbo languages and culture (SPILC) makes a conscious effort to make one of its dialects acceptable for general use for political or social reason. They get involve in language planning concepts of corpus planning and status planning. Status planning focuses on the assignment of social function to a language in a community. In strengthening the above Agbedo (2007) observes that status planning refers to a deliberate effort to allocate the functions of language and literacies within a speech community. It involves status choices, making a particular language or variety an official language, national language etc. Often, it with involve elevating a language or dialect into a prestige variety.

After the choice of a variety as a prestige language or standard form, there is always the process of corpus planning, which means the enrichment and expansion of the vocabulary of the language, in terms of orthography, sound and structure to handle grammatical items. Agbedo (2007) and Trudgill (1992) agree that corpus planning aims to develop the resources of the language so that it becomes an appropriate medium of communication for modern topic and forms of discourse, in terms of equipping terminology, standardization of language, orthography grammar and dictionary etc. This was practical in Igbo as Fredrick Ogbalu with the formation of SPILC included ‘or’ in order to pacify the problematic representation of Ọ sound (phoneme) in Igbo language (Chinagorom and Onuora 2018, p. 64). Dialects see to the enrichment of standard form of language as even the standard language can also be referred to as a dialect.

### **Empirical Studies**

There have been works in sociolinguistics which dwell on language domain, variation, language attitudes or proficiency. Uchendu (2017) worked on language variation and change in INYI speech community: A sociolinguistic study has as its objective ascertaining the variable realization of some

language features as found in the speech of INYI Igbo speakers. And using descriptive survey design, purposive sampling technique, participant observation and unstructured interview as methods of data collection, she discovered that there are variation in the speech patterns and behaviours of INYI people and that there are many factors that are responsible for language changes in the community.

Uchendu concluded that the aged speakers of INYI who are not exposed and educated and the younger ones still maintain the same but in the future influence from education, travel and contact with people will lead to changes. This work is the same with the present work in that they are both on variation but differ in that Uchendu (2017) worked on INYI dialect whereas the present work is on Emowha dialect.

On language domain, Ayeomoni (2012) ‘the languages in Nigerian socio-political Domains: features and functions’ has the objective to find out the functions and domains of language use in Nigeria as a multilingual nation. After considering media, commerce, religion and homes domains Ayeomoni finds out that the three major indigenous languages including the foreign and minor languages have their district use domains and concludes that the language use

situation in Nigeria is clear despite the numerous languages. This work is the same with the present work as they are on sociolinguistics, but differs from the present work as it treats language domain while the present work discussed variations.

In another work titled *Peerglossia: A sociolinguistic study of its effects on the English language proficiency of Nigerian Senior Secondary School Studies in Kano state, Nigeria* Olaoye (2015), has the objective to find out the influence of peer group language over the standard language that they are taught in school. The work adopted a random sampling method to select some six secondary schools in Kano city. Two sets of questionnaire were printed: one for English teachers and the other for students. After a careful analysis of the questionnaires it was found out that social class remains one of the sources of variation in language development and also students' parents occupation and socio-economic history greatly influence students' choice of words; and He concluded that teachers of English should acknowledge peer group language and use it in teaching varieties of English. This work is the same with the present work because the two are sociolinguistic work. However, while this

work treated language proficiency, the present work discussed language variation.

Further, Ihemere (2006) "An integrated Approach to the study of language Attitudes and change in Nigeria: the case of the Ikwerre of Port Harcourt city" with the objective of investigating the language shift and attitude of the Ikwerre people in Port Harcourt and their choice between Ikwerre and Nigerian Pigeon English (NPE) used the direct and matched guise experiment to collect data. Also 76 Ikwerre informants from Port Harcourt were used. After a careful analysis of the data it was found out that there is a generational language shift from Ikwerre monolingualism to Nigerian pigeon English (NPE) and also while the older generation uses Ikwerre the younger ones use Ikwerre and Nigerian pigeon English. He concluded that in Port Harcourt the speaker of NPE are valued more than the users of Ikwerre in terms of level of education, modernity and sophistication. This work is the same with the present work as they are socio-linguistic work, however differs from the present work as it is on language attitude and change while the present work is on language variation.

Moving on, Ikekeonwu (2001) work on Igbo language and its dialects: A critical appraisal with its objective to classify and analyse Igbo dialects using Secondary Source of data

collection. After much analysis of the language and its dialects, she found out that there is disenchantment with the standard Igbo dialect as some scholars from especially the Onitsha axis believe that much of words are from the Owerri dialect, and she concluded that all Igbo should take delight in speaking the language as it will not deny them of the ability to speak any other language and also that their various dialects is not inferior to any other one.

The tables are arranged in row and columns. In the table the rows designated as GENERAL are all filled out with words. However, the empty column under the ones designated as ODUOHA and ELIBRADA mean those villages retain/use the words in the column designated GENERAL.

**Table 1: Household Items**

S/N	Gloss	General	Oduoha	Elibrada	Igbo
1.	Bucket	Agba kuru		Kang ara	Boke eti
2.	Rope	Eriri	Owuri		Eriri
3.	Basket	Okwo kwo	Eketi		Eketi
4.	Door	Onumgbo	Igbirigbo		Ìgbó, Ònụzọ

5.	Bottle	Ololo	Mbi	Akpa kpa	Ololo
6.	Knife	Ọgarị	Ẹlẹkẹ	Ẹlẹkẹ	Mmà
7.	Triple stand	Okogara		Okeigwe	Osiet e
8.	Axe	Ehingwo	Ehingwe		Kanyi ike
9.	Groundnut	Ahiekerere	Okpekere		Ahuekere/ekere
10.	Maternity	Ọrọnwọ/Ọmụngwọ	Gbaguhene li	iriagbọ	Ọmụngwọ
11.	Bag	rẹkpa	Erekpaa		Àkpà

Table 1 above shows lexical variation in Emowha dialect within the communities that make up Emowha clan in areas of household items and words that pertain to family. Apart from the numerous word differences in other communities in Emowha as represented by the column 'GENERAL' on one side and Oduoha and Elibrada prefer Mbi and akpakpa respectively. Also when other communities refer to maternity as Ọrọnwọ Oduoha and Elibrada call it gbagunheneli and Iriagbo respectively. The term Iriagbo requires some measure of explanation. It is on record that Elibrada in their sojourn to their present location in Emowha had settled in so many locations that share boundaries with ijaw



town along the coastal regions. They could have borrowed/loaned the word IRIAGBO as a result of language contact with those ijaw towns as the same is used for maternity in Kalabari – an Ijaw town in present day Rivers State. Further in Row 11 we noted phonological variation as the narrow vowel /e/ is attached to rẹkpà (Bag) in General Emowha to result in ẹrẹkpà (Bag) in Oduoha.

**Table 2: Animals**

S/ N	Glo ss	Gene ral	Oduo ha	Elibr ada	Igbo
1.	Goat	Owu	Wowu		Ewu
2.	Crab	Ariana		Ikoli	nshikọ
3.	Fowl	Anunu	ọchịc hị	ọchịc hị	ọkụk ọ
4.	Lizard	Okitipo	Ngbere		Ngwere

Table 2 shows lexical variation in animals in the dialects in Rows 2, 3, 4 and phonological variation in Row 1 where we recorded word extension; where the /w/ semivowel/consonant sound is attached to ‘owu’ (goat) in general Emowha to generate ‘wowu’ (goat) in Oduoha variety.

**Table 3: Expressing State**

S/ N	Glos s	Gene ral	Oduoha	Elibr ada	Igbo
1.	Chief	Elerurie	Eleokpotokpo		Onye eze/ chifu
2.	Age d pers on	Nnezi	Okeí		Oke nye
3.	Sour	Ogba uka	Ruihu		igba uka
4.	Even ing	Anyasu	Ndere		Mgb ede
5.	Leav e him	Saaka	hapu		hapu ya

Table 3 above, whose words express state or position is replete with lexical/word variation as the other six communities represented by GENERAL column and Elibrada use words that are different from those of Oduaha.

**Table 4: Imperative/Gratitude**

S / N	Gloss	Gen eral	Od uoh a	Elib rada	Igbo
1.	Do not stay long	igbu okụ/ igbu oge	ịtant a		E gbula oge
2.	Cut hair	kpáá rishi	gbẹ rishi		kpuo isi

3.	Come down	hidá á	Shid a		rida/ritu o/ridata
4.	Stone/ throw	li nhẹ	shí nhẹ		tuó okwute
5.	Plant cassav a	Líí mba laka	chí mba laka		kọọ akpu
6.	Can you hear	ịyọn ụ	ịyàn ụ		ị na-anụ
7.	Take/ collec t	hụọ ya	hụọ a		Wéré

In table 4 above, which is mostly imperative, we recorded lexical and phonological variations. Rows 1 and 2 have lexical variation and rows 3 – 9 are phonological variation as follows:

In row 3 and 4 Oduaha substituted /h/ voiceless glottal fricative and /l/ voiced alveolar lateral approximant with /s/voiceless palato alveolar fricative to generate shida and shi nhẹ respectively. Also in row 5 Oduoha variety alternated /l/ consonant sound with /tʃ/ voiceless post-alveolar affricate to derive chi mbàlaka. In no. 6, the vowel /a/ is used to replace the narrow back vowel /o/ in ị yọnu in general Emowha to generate ị yànụ (can you hear). Similarly, in row 7, Oduoha variety used /l/ voiced alveolar lateral approximant to alternate the /j/ voiced palatal approximant in general Emohua (hụọya) to

realise huola. Further in showing appreciation (thank you) in no.8, Elibrada used the syllabic nasal /m/ to substitute the front close unrounded vowel /i/ in general to derive mmele and lastly in no.9 to expressing personal pronoun ‘you’ the Oduoha and Elibrada variety use the /g/ voiced velar plosive to alternate the /dʒ / voiced post-alveolar affricate as in ‘jina’ in general Emowha variety to generate ‘gina’.

### Discussion

It is evidently clear to us that the minor lexical and phonological variations among villages in Emowha speech community do not reflect the patterns of migration. One would expect that since Isiodu and Oduoha are the first settlers and proceed from the same progenitors (Rukpoku) they will speak the same variety of dialect. However, this is not the case as they exhibit some minor variations. Isiodu village speaks completely the variety that is designated General with other villages not shown in the table because they do not exhibit variation.

Historically, Oduoha and Elibrada do not have the same ancestors. Geographically Elibrada is situated between Oduoha and Isiodu villages which are from the same ancestors. The closeness of Elibrada and Oduoha could be the answer to why the two

villages sell and buy in the same market, farm in the same pieces of land, intermarry, engage in wrestling contest and sometimes worship in the same church. Of course language is a central tool in all these. Over the years they have borrowed some lexical and phonological items from each other. This process over time has influenced the language the two villages settled with. Recall the word maternity is called gbagunheneli in Oduoha and Elibrada preferred Iriagbo which has an Ijaw origin. From the table we can see that Elibrada village borrowed more from Oduoha village as Oduoha has more lexical item that vary from the column designated as GENERAL which many villages in Emowha speech community speak. Also it is fairly safe to say that the direction of influence is from Oduoha to Elibrada.

Further, table one shows a considerable variation in lexical items between Rumuche (General) and Elibrada villages. While Rumuche (General) refers to bottle as ololo, Elibrada refers Akpakpa and knife as Ogari Elibrada prefers eleke. Similarly, Rumuche (General) refer to fowl, triple stand, bag and groundnut as anunu, okogara, rekpá and Ahiekere, whereas Elibrada calls them Ọchịchị, Okeigwe, erekpá and okpekere respectively. It is also interesting to note that Rumuche and Elibrada traced their historical

antecedent to Abua which is an Ijaw settlement.

Their speech variation may be as a result of their geographical location in present day Emowha speech community. While Elibrada is situated very close to Oduoha, the other six villages, including Rumuche, are situated close to each other (side- by-side) on the other side.

### **Findings/ Conclusion**

After a careful analysis of the data, we find out that Emowha speech community records more lexical variation than phonological variation. Similarly, Oduoha and Elibrada villages exhibit more variations from the other six villages of Emowha speech community. Moving forward we also notice that the pattern of migration of the villages that make up Emowha speech community has no effect on the speech variation as Oduoha and Elibrada communities which speak almost the same variety did not come from same progenitor. However, it is obvious that those of them that migrated from the same sources exhibit variation in their speech. For instance, Oduoha and Isiodu migrated from Rukpoku while Rumuche and Elibrada are traced to ABUA.

Based on what we have done – our data and analysis – in this research work, we conclude

that the amount of variation in Emowha speech community will not be so significant that Oduoha and Elibrada will diverge to form another dialect in the nearest future.

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