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SHORT COMMUNICATION

A linguistic analysis of vowel lengthening in the language of military parades

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ABSTRACT

We focus on vowel lengthening in language use by the Nigerian Armed Forces on parade ground. Existing studies on vowel lengthening show vowel lengthening not only as a phonological phenomenon whereby a single vowel is doubled subject to certain phonological conditions but also as a sociolinguistic process that expresses affirmative, directive, summon, emphasis, question, denial, disappointment and discontentment. We continue the discussion on vowel lengthening with reference to sociolinguistics and argue that preparedness, readiness, accuracy and precision that contribute to the beauty of military parades are enhanced or made possible through vowel lengthening in language use. The import of the paper is that the role of sociolinguistics in language use and language interpretation cannot be undermined in parades of any armed forces in any country of the world.

Keywords: language use, vowel lengthening, interpretation, grammar, sociolinguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on vowel lengthening can be divided into two categories. Research works in the first category show that vowel lengthening is rule-governed and that it is a phonological process whereby a single vowel becomes double subject to certain phonological conditions

(see Owolabi, 1993; Oyebade, 2006; Utulu, 2009). For example, Owolabi (1993) argues that vowel reduplication and lengthening are the same and cites some examples below as evidence of vowel reduplication and lengthening in the Yorùbá language

- | | |
|-----------|----------------------|
| a) gbé e | (carry it) |
| b) tàn án | (deceive him/her/it) |

However, Ikotun (2010:173) observes that Owolabi's (ibid) position only focuses on vowel reduplication and not on vowel lengthening. Ikotun (ibid) argues that in examples (a) and (b), the vowels 'e' and 'an' in the monosyllabic verbs are reproduced to serve as pronouns in the object position. For example,

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| gbé iṣu | gbé e |
| (carry yam) | (carry it) |
| tan Olú | tàn án |
| (deceive Olú) | (deceive him/her) |

Ikotun's (ibid) argument is based on the difference between the Dictionary definitions of reduplication and lengthening (see Turnbull, 2010). According to him, while reduplication shows that a vowel is doubled, lengthening shows that a sound is prolonged. So, while Owolabi's (ibid) position has to do with vowel reduplication, an extract below, that is taken from Ladipo (1970:32), shows evidence of vowel lengthening in language use. See lines 5 and 6.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ará Ọ̀yọ̀: | Kò ní ṣíṣe, kò l'áìṣe, ọ̀baa wa!
Ọ̀lọ̀lá aiyé o, olókíkí aiyé!
Bí a báa gbe sí ọ̀tún tí kò jẹ,
A tún daríi rẹ̀ sí òsì, ọ̀baa wa!.. |
| Sango: | Gbonkaa oooooooooo! |
| Gbonkaa: | Ooooooooooooo! |
| (Gbonkaa wọ̀lé) | |

Ikotun (ibid) also adds that what is rule-governed is vowel reduplication and not vowel lengthening. This is because the number of times a vowel can be lengthened or reproduced depends on the speaker's or the speakers' preference and the social situation as evident in lines 5 and 6 in the extract above.

Furthermore, Ikotun (2010a; 2010b) shows vowel lengthening as a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is common in the utterances of language speakers and that it is used to express linguistic functions such as affirmative, directive, command, summon, emphasis, question, denial, discontentment, disappointment, bad behaviour, calamity, sorrow, sympathy and surprise. We agree with Ikotun (ibid) that vowel reduplication is grammatically based whereas vowel lengthening is socio-linguistically oriented. The grammatical use of vowel reduplication as shown by Owolabi (ibid) and the social use of vowel lengthening as enumerated by Ikotun (ibid) show a marked difference between vowel reduplication and vowel lengthening. In this paper, we are interested in the social use of vowel lengthening with reference to the English language. We submit that social functions of vowel lengthening such

as command, sensitization, readiness, echo and preparedness help not only the Nigerian Armed Forces but also any armed forces of any country in military parades with reference to accuracy and precision.

2. DATA COLLECTION

This research work is descriptive. The data used in this research were drawn from three sources. Some data were drawn during Nigerian Independence Day ceremonies between 2011 and 2015. It would be recalled that on October 1 of every year, Nigerians mark their Independence Day which they got from the British Colonialists on October 1, 1960. Since October 1, 1960, the Nigerian Armed Forces entertain spectators and invited guests with military parade on October 1 of every year to commemorate the day Nigeria got independence. Some data were also gathered during the Nigerian Armed Forces Remembrance Day. The Nigerian Armed Forces Remembrance Day is also a yearly event where soldiers who are still alive remember their colleagues who died in active service. Again, the Nigerian Armed Forces hold parades to honour their fallen colleagues. Some data were tape-recorded between 2010 and 2015 when some important dignitaries visited some army and police barracks for inspection. Before such visitors were welcome into the barracks, some Guards of Honour were mounted to welcome the visitors with parades.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data presented below include ten English words that belong to different lexical items such as noun, adjective, preposition, adverb and verb. Although ten English words are presented below it does not mean that the number of words used by the Nigerian Armed Forces where vowel lengthening occurs is limited to the data shown below. The data simply help to confirm that vowel lengthening is inevitable in language use among members of the Armed Forces at parade grounds. The data are as follows.

	ENGLISH WORD	ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION	ARMED FORCES PRONUNCIATION
i.	fall-in	fɔ:l-ɪn	fɔ:l-ɪɪɪɪɪn
ii.	right	raɪt	raɪɪɪɪɪt
iii.	left	left	leeeeeeeft
iv.	parade	pə'reɪd	preeeeeee
v.	attention	ə'tenʃn	ə'tenenenenenʃn
vi.	at	æt	ææææææt
vii.	forward	'fɔ:wəd	'fɔ:wæææææəd
viii.	about	əbaʊt	abaɪɪɪɪɪt
ix.	guard	gɑ:d	gaaaaaaa:d
x.	salute	səlu:t	səluuuuuuu:t
xi.	pick-up	'pɪkʌp	'pɪkʌʌʌʌʌʌp
xii.	present	pri'zent	pri'zeeeeeent

Inferences that can be drawn from the data above are many. English, like any other language, has words that belong to different grammatical categories. For example, there are some verbs that are consonant initial and consonant final. An example of such words is 'present'. The second vowel in such words can be lengthened. So, the verb 'present' [pri'zent] can be pronounced as [pri'zeeeeeeent]. There are also some English verbs that are consonant initial but vowel final. Some examples are 'fall-in' and 'salute'. However, while the nasal vowel, though not orthographically, that occurs finally in the verb 'fall-in' can be lengthened the vowel 'u' in the verb 'salute' should be lengthened because in English pronunciation the vowel 'e' that occurs finally is silent. The explanation we have given on the word 'salute' is also valid for the word 'parade'. Some English words too, are nouns, adjectives or adverbs when used and each of such words is consonant initial and consonant final. Each of such words also has a vowel and the vowel can be lengthened. Some examples are, 'right' which can be realized as [raiiiiiiit] and 'left' as [leeeeeeeft]. Prepositions like 'at' can have the vowel 'a' that occurs initially lengthened as in [ææææææt].

Furthermore, some instances of vowel lengthening in language use on the parade ground are presented below:

fɔ:l-iiiiii. (When this order is given the soldiers will assemble on the parade ground).

preeeeeee jn (This is to alert the soldiers to stand still).

'fɔ:wæææææd march (The soldiers are asked to move forward).

Stand ææææææt ease (The soldiers are asked to relax).

'pikAAAAAAAAp arms (This is an arms drill command).

As it has been argued earlier in this paper, preparedness, readiness, awareness, sensitization, accuracy and precision that contribute to the beauty of military parades are made possible through vowel lengthening in language use. However, one area of this research that has not been examined is: Do the members of the Nigerian Armed Forces pronounce the English words as the native speakers do? The answer to this question can be the focus of another paper.

4. CONCLUSION

We have examined vowel lengthening in language use by the Nigerian Armed Forces on parade ground. We have argued that existing studies on vowel lengthening show vowel lengthening not only as a phonological phenomenon whereby a single vowel becomes double subject to certain phonological conditions but also as a sociolinguistic process that expresses affirmative, directive, summon, emphasis, question, denial, disappointment and discontentment. We have continued the discussion on vowel lengthening with reference to sociolinguistics and argued that preparedness, readiness, echo, command, accuracy and precision that contribute to the beauty of military parades are enhanced or made possible through vowel lengthening in language use. We have also shown in the paper that the role of sociolinguistics in language use and language interpretation cannot be undermined in military parades of any armed forces of any country of the world.

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