



A Contrastive Analysis of Plural Formation in English and Ụkwụ̀nị̀

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Abstract. This study is a contrastive analysis of the morphology of plural formations in English and Ụkwụ̀nị̀. It is primarily directed at investigating the cross-linguistic variations in plural formation processes and the acquisitional challenges they pose. With insight from Auto-segmental phonology, primary and secondary data were analyzed using probability sampling and nominal scale. Data analyses revealed that phonological conditioning of the D1 morpheme and realizing nouns through allomorphs is only obtainable in English. However, plural noun formations are morphological processes involving vowel and consonant spreading of the skeletal tier. The study identifies the structural divergence between English and Ụkwụ̀nị̀ in number marking systems and establishes the pedagogical value of pluralization. The study recommends that English language teachers, especially in the Niger Delta region, particularly among Ụkwụ̀nị̀ users of English, should utilize auto-segmental phonology in the teaching/learning processes to avoid overgeneralization.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis, pluralization, nouns, morphology, phonology, Ụkwụ̀nị̀

1. Introduction

Globalization is continually entrenching the utility value of English in divergent sociolinguistic contexts worldwide which has made the acquisition of the language the chief objective in the outer and expanding circles (Emama, 2017). Arising from its overarching influence in the key sectors: economy, communication, science, and cultural hybridity, it is not surprising that English is at the core of most of pedagogical strategies developed to enhance the acquisition of the language in many non-native contexts (Vodopija-Krstanović & Marinac, 2019; Arta et al, 2019).

At the macro-level, investigations of the variegations between English and other language systems that globalization continues to engender have been investigated from the perspective of sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, stylistic (Emama, 2020; Mowarin & Emama, 2020; Amuzu, 2012; Senanu, 2012; Hiroshi, 2008). Significant investigative resources have been deployed to identify micro-level differences within subsystems of linguistic typologies cross-linguistically in syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and morphology. The challenge of intelligibility induced by the influence of the substrate languages and the pedagogical challenges in acquiring the target language, usually English, has also spawned many investigative endeavours in the Niger Delta region. In the context of Africa, particularly the Niger Delta, a further motivation for comparative cross-linguistic studies is the marked linguistic distance between English and the region's indigenous languages. The degree of linguistic isomorphism between English and the disparate substrate languages of the region is especially relevant to understanding the micro, cross-typological variegations between the substrates and target language germane to achieving competence in English. Consequent to the preceding, this study helps us to determine how a language teacher can help learners attain proficiency in the language by identifying probable areas of L₁ Ụkwụ̀nị̀ interferences. Contrastive analysts believe L₁ interference results from the dissimilarity of specific aspects of the learner's L₁ and L₂. Through a contrastive analysis, the pedagogue can predict and describe the patterns likely to cause learning difficulty and those that will not (Lado, 1963).

1.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is one of the fields in linguistics which deals with the systematic study of language. It

is systematic because the methods applied are both objective and empirical. The concern of linguistics is to explain how language works rather than promote language use. This is why Finch (2000:2), amongst others, asserts that:

Contrastive analysis is concerned with the process of a monolingual becoming bilingual. CA involves systematically comparing two languages, an L₁ and an L₂, to identify their similarities and differences. As James (1980:27) puts it:

Contrastive analysis is made up of micro linguistic analyses. The goal of the former is 'the description' of the linguistic code, without referring to the uses to which the code is put or how messages carried by this code are modified by the context in which they occur.

Lado (1963) proposes the theoretical foundations for CA when he argues that the level of linguistic isomorphism between the L₁ and L₂ will determine the extent of acquisitional/learning challenges that the learner encounters. He provides a comprehensive theoretical framework and a systematic procedure for conducting CA by outlining a procedure to predict likely learning difficulties in second language acquisition.

However, some linguists have challenged the adequacy of contrastive linguistic studies in explaining learning issues. Swan (2018) asserts that "the first charge was that contrastive analysis overpredicted learners' problem and its inappropriate application of behaviourist concepts. Consequently, many language analysts consider Error Analysis (EA) a more reliable method of accounting for learners' errors. Nevertheless, many linguists believe that contrastive analysis helps predict learners' errors. The Free Encyclopedia (2018) states that contrastive analysis helped predict learners' behaviours and difficulties.

1.2 Pluralization of Nouns in English and Ụkwụ̀nị̀

Nominal plural formation in English is achieved through several morphological processes. Most singular nouns are pluralized by adding -s or -es at the end of the noun. This category includes words like cat/cats, dog/dogs, bat/bats, house/houses, iris/irises, and flower/flowers. The formation of plural forms in the case of Irregular nouns is achieved through a process of internal vowel change; the change to the plural form generally being signalled by a change in the medial vowel between consonantal phonemes. Examples include goose/geese, man/men, tooth/teeth, mouse/mice, and woman/women. The correct spelling

of plurals usually depends on what letter the singular noun ends in.

Very little literature is available on pluralization in Ụkwụ̀nị̀. Most of the extant literature on Ukwuani provides little investigative data on the linguistic processes of nominal pluralisation in the language. Most research on Ukwuani language dwell on the debate about the ontological status of Ukwuani (Mumbasa, 2015; Ejiofor, 2015; Aghedo, 2007; Omenogor, 2011), comparative cross linguistics of Ukwuani and English in terms of verbal time-Relationship Signals and vowel systems (Osakwe, 2015; Omenogor, 2021) phonology (Okumo, 2010, 2013, 2018), orthography (Uti & Iloh, 1989), and Syllable structure (Okumo, 2018).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) stipulates that the mother tongue should be the language of formal pedagogy in primary education. During this period, English will be taught as a subject. If implemented, the policy was expected to enhance the learner's ability to naturally acquire/learn and differentiate key cross-linguistic differences between the MT and target language. However, the dynamics of the sociolinguistic pressures that English exerts accelerated the general abandonment of the policy in favour of one primarily driven by English. English is used as the language of instruction as early as primary 1 (Mowarin, 2007). Arising from the preceding, research-driven investigation of the pedagogical and acquisitional challenges that Ukwuani poses to competence in English has yet to receive adequate attention in the literature of contact linguistics. This is especially true in the specifics of the convergences/divergences in the syntax of pluralization. Thus, a Contrastive Analysis of the L₁ and L₂ in the pluralization of numbers in English and Ụkwụ̀nị̀ would expose the variegations and similarities and the facilitatory and inhibitory influence they exert on competence in the L₂.

2. Literature Review

Ụkwụ̀nị̀ language is one of Nigeria's 520 indigenous languages (Ethnologue, 2023). It is a member of the Kwa subgroup of the Nger Congo family of languages Osakwe (2017). Some scholars aver that Ukwuani is an Igbo dialect, and the claim that Ukwuani is distinct is nothing more than linguistic secessionism (Omenogor, 2011; Agbedo, 2007). However, Williamson (1990) describes Ụkwụ̀nị̀ as a language with ontological status and posits that Ụkwụ̀nị̀ is a minority language that forms a cluster with Igbo

languages: Igbo, Ikwerre, Ika, Izzii-Ikwo-Ezza-Mgbo, and Ogbia. Some linguistic differences (phonological and orthographic) have also been adduced as evidence of why Ukwuani is not a dialect of Igbo (Mumbase (2015). In his view, the Ukwuani identity was repressed and subdued in the past by Igbo ethnolinguistic imperialism. He further outlines sociopolitical factors that eventually led to the expression of Ukwuani identity when he observed that:

The independence that came with State creation exercises created a leeway for some nationalities hitherto helmed in by the bigger nationalities to escape from the suffocating prism of ethnolinguistic imperialism and echo the choric drum beat of self-assertion in all aspects of their respective languages and cultures.

Ukwuani is classified as a tone language. A language is tonal if pitch influences and creates meaning variations in a word with the same orthographic form (Yip, 2002). Ukwuani serves as the people's marker of identity and distinction aside from its communicative function. Ukwuani, like other substrate languages of the Niger Delta region, encountered the English language arising from the incursions of English ships into the Nigerian coast.

3. Materials and Methods

The data for the study consists of forty nouns extracted from four dialects, Ogume, Afor, Utagba, and Ashaka, of the Ukwuani language. The choice of dialects was random and unconnected to any notion of standard. Cross-dialectal data sourcing ensures that the findings and conclusions represent the internal sub-nuances of the Ukwuani language. Three competent Ukwuani/English bilinguals translated the test items from the chosen dialects. The data is presented in four tables according to the chosen dialects, cross-linguistically compared to words with cognate

meaning in English to determine the variegations in the morphology of plural formation of nouns.

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is auto-segmental phonology. It is a direct descendant of Generative Phonology, given its fullest expression in the *Sound Patterns of English* (SPE) by Chomsky and Halle in 1968. Auto-segment phonology continues to be regarded as central to the goals of phonological investigations set out in SPE. Auto segmental Phonologists hypothesize that phonological representations consist of several independent, parallel tiers or levels of representation. Auto segmental Phonology articulates this insight more clearly than its precursors. It also provides the formal means of representing these autonomous tiers and showing how they link up.

Auto segmental Phonology is a non-linear approach to phonology that allows phonological processes, such as tone and vowel harmony, to be independent of and extend beyond individual consonants and vowels. As a result, the phonological processes may influence more than one vowel or consonant at a time. One of the aims of autosegmental phonology is to investigate the consequences of having structures in phonology that are more complex or articulated than a linear string of segments. Instead, we set up underly and surface forms consisting of parallel strings of segments arranged in two or more tiers.

4. Data Presentation

The researcher adopted one of the two ways of presenting collected data for meaningful interpretation. This is the tabular presentation. The tabular presentation represents an arrangement of mass of data in tables. Here, the investigator arranged the data collected on past tense and plural formation in a tabular form and labelled them A, B, C and D according to the clans or communities that provided the data.

Table 3:

Data Collected on Pluralization (Utagba)

Word (singular form)	Pluralization in Ụkwuani	Pluralization in English
Nwan	/Ūmu/	Children /tʃɪldrən/
Mwan –Onyeke	/Ūmu-onyeke/	Boys/boiz/
Tebulu	/tebulu nebe/	Tables /teɪbls/
Akpukpu-ukhu	akpŪkpŪ ŪkhŪ nebe	Shoes /ʃu:z/
Ekukwor	/ekukwɔ nebe/	Books /b.ɪs/
Ugbor	/ugbɔ nebe/	Boats/bo:tz
Ewo	/ɛwɔ nebe/	Dresses / dresɪz/
Ite	/ite nebe/	Pots /pɒts/

Table 1

Data Collected on Pluralization (Ogume)

Pluralisation in Ụkwuani	Transcripton	Pluralisation in English
Uko	/ Ukɔ nebe/	Cups /kʌps/
Ngeji	/ ngedʒi nebe/	Spoons /spu:ns/
Oche	/ ɔche nebe/	Chairs /tʃɛ:z
Windoro	/Windɔrɔ nebe/	Windows /wɪndəʊz/
Onyeke	/ndikɔm/	Boys /bɔɪz
Oshishi	/ ɔʃɪʃi nebe/	Logs /lɔgz/
Efifia	/efɪfɪa nebe/	Grasses /græsɪz/
Efere	/efere nebe/	Plates /pleɪts/
Eziza	/ezɪzɪa nebe/	Brooms /bru:mz/
Ekwo	/ekwɔ nebe/	Doors /dɔ:z/
Unor ukah	/Ūnɔ ukah nebe/	Churches / tʃɜ: tʃɪz

Table 2:

Data Collected on Pluralization (Afor)

Pluralization in Ụkwuani	Transcripton	Pluralization in English
Ekpa	/ɛkpa nebe/	Bags/bægz/
Nsa	/ngsa nebe/	Combs /kəʊmz/
Obor	/ɔbɔ nebe/	Oranges /ɔrenʒɪz/
Ekwa	/ekwa nebe/	Eggs /egz/
Azu	/azŪ nebe/	Fishes /fɪʃɪs/
Ngeji	/ngedʒi nebe/	Spoons /spu:ns/
Onyinyo	/onyɪnyɔ nebe/	Foods /fu:dz/
Udala	/Ūdala nebe/	Cherries /tʃɛrɪz/
Echara	/ɛchara nebe/	Sticks of sugar cane /stɪks ɔf ʃŪgə keɪn/
Nkpuru oghu	nkpuru ɔgu nebe/	Drugs /drʌgz/

From our data analysis above on past tense in Ụkwuani ‘ni’ is an adverbial that is concatenated with the verbs as can be seen under clans A, B, C and D for the past tense in Ụkwuani.

Table 4:

Data Collected on Pluralisation (Ashaka)

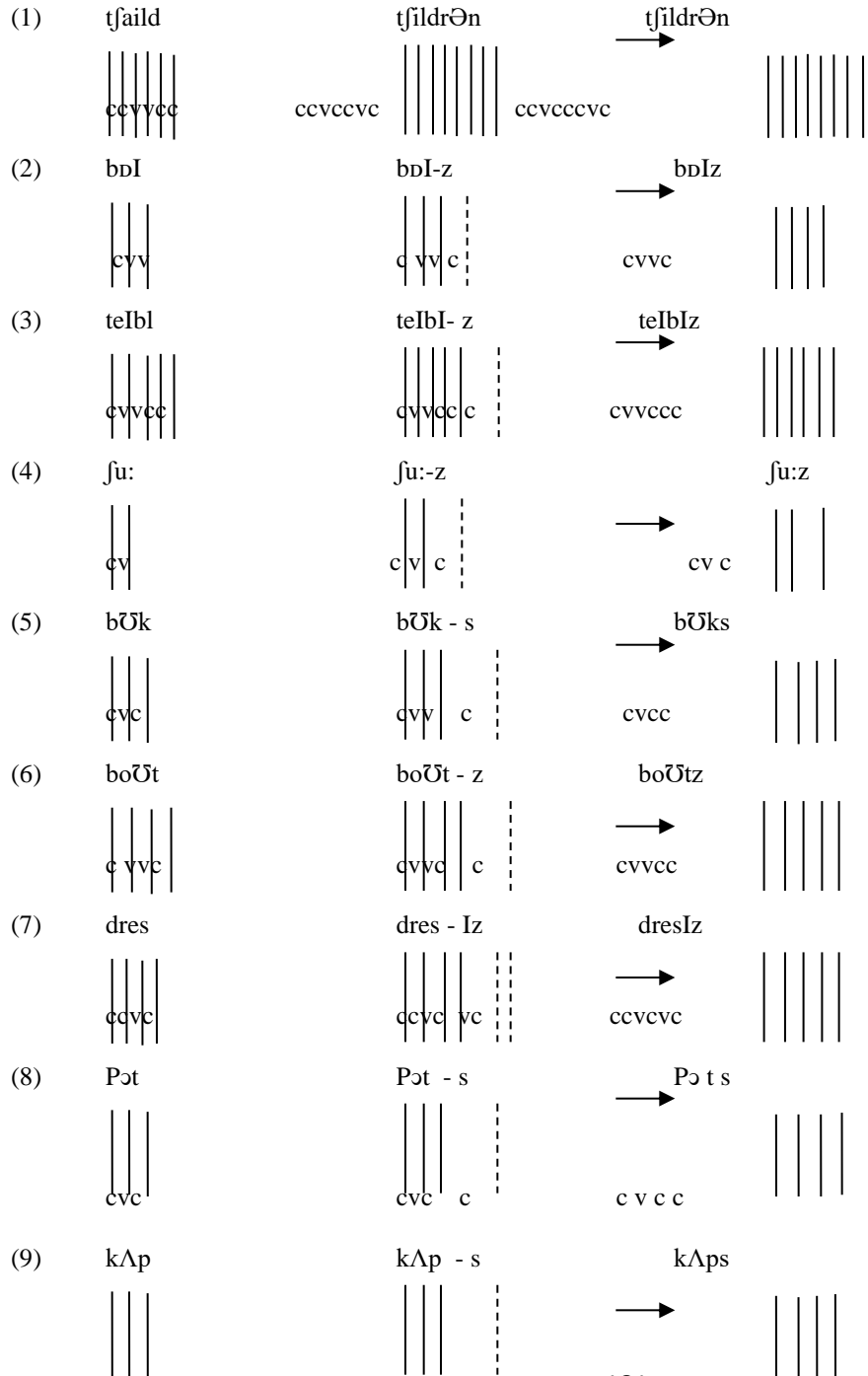
Pluralisation in Ụkwuani	Transcripton	Pluralisation in English
Anakita	/anakita nebe/	Lizards /lɪzɑ:dz/
Ewhu	/ewhu nebe/	Goats /gəʊt/
Okhukhu	/ɔkhukhu nebe/	Chickens /tʃɪkən/
Erunke	/erunke nebe/	Rabbits /ræbɪts/
Nkita	/nkita nebe/	Dogs /dɔgz/
Enyin	/enyin nebe/	Lions /læjəns/
Onogbo	/onogbɔ nebe/ /kpukpujɛkɛ	Cats /kætz/
Kpukpuyeke	nebe/	Ducks /dʌkz/
Akpuru osa	/akpŪrŪsɔa nebe/	Tortoise /tɔ:tɔɪsɪz/
Ife-Ugboko	/ifeugbɔkɔ nebe/	Snakes /sneɪks/
Ewhen	/ewhen nebe/	Monkeys /mʌŋkɪz/

Our data analysis above on pluralization in Ụkwuani indicates that nouns are not inflected in Ụkwuani. Instead, singular words are concatenated with numerals to show pluralization, as can be seen under clans A, B, C, and D for

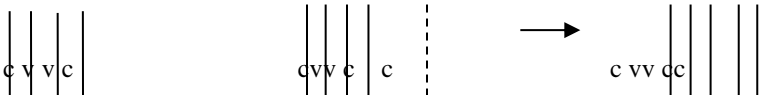
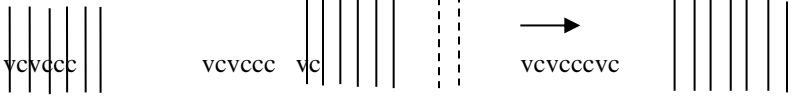
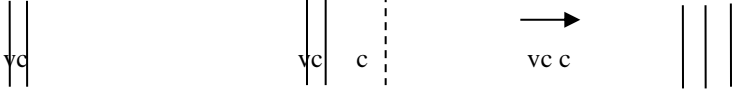
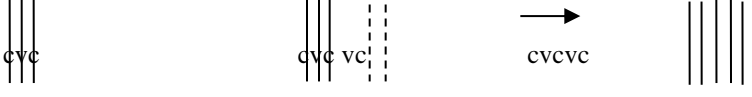
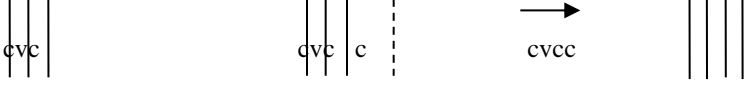
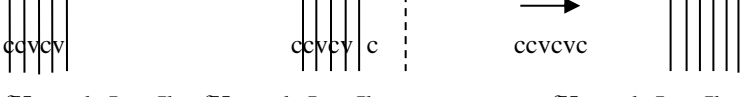
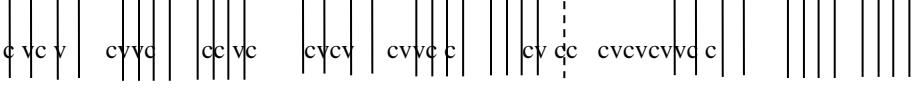
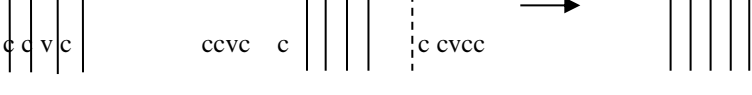
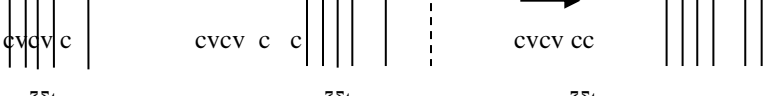
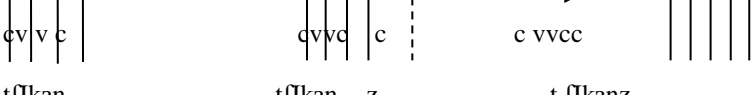
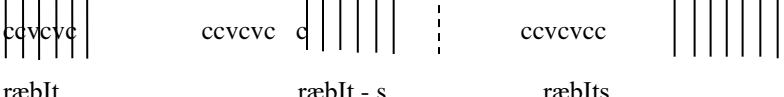
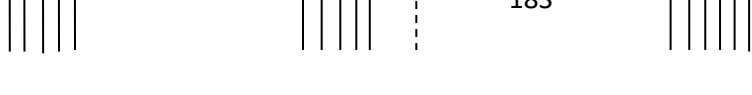
pluralization in ʘkwʘani. Quite notable is our analysis of 'swan', which involves linking two different roots to realize the plural form 'umu' as seen on the first item of the clan 'A' of pluralization in ʘkwʘani.

5. Theoretical Analysis of Plural Formation in ʘkwʘani.

From our data analysis on pluralization in ʘkwʘani above, it is evident that plural words are formed by concatenation, that is, linking together of roots (or use of conjunctions) as seen in numbers 1-39. As postulated by McCarty (1977:165), this is common with incorporating languages. ʘkwʘani is. Therefore, we incorporate language since all our data on pluralization in Ukwuani (numbers 1-39) conforms with our assertion that plural words are formed through concatenation or placing the suffix after the noun in ʘkwʘani. Let us apply this theory to pluralization in English below:



	cvc	cvc c	cvcc
(10)	spŪ:n	spŪ:n-s	spŪ:ns
(11)	c cvc tʃeɜ	ccvc c tʃeɜ - z	→ ccv cc tʃeɜz
	c cvv	ccvv c	→ ccvvc
(12)	wɪŋdʒŪ	wɪŋdʒŪ - z	wɪŋdʒŪz
	c vccvv	cvccvv c	→ cvccvvc
(13)	mæn	m-e - n	men
	c v c	c v c	→ cvc
(14)	lɒg	lɒg - z	lɒgz
	c v c	c v c c	→ c v c c
(15)	græs	græs - Iz	græsIz
(16)	c cvc pleɪt	ccvc vc pleɪt - s	→ ccvcvc pleɪts
	ccvvc	ccvvc c	→ ccvvcc
(17)	bru:m	bru:m - z	bru:mz
	ccv v	ccv c c	→ ccv cc
(18)	dɔ:	dɔ: - z	dɔ:z
	cv	cv c	→ cv c
(19)	tʃɜ:tʃ	tʃɜ:tʃ - Iz	tʃɜ:tʃIz
	ccvcc	ccvcc vc	→ ccv ccvc
(20)	bæg	bæg - z	bægz
	c v c	c v c c	→ c v c c

- (21) koŪm koŪm - z koŪmz

- (22) drɜndʒ drɜndʒ - Iz drɜndʒz

- (23) ɛg ɛg - z ɛgz

- (24) flɪʃ flɪʃ - Iz flɪʃIz

- (25) fŪd fŪd - z fŪdz

- (26) tʃɛrɪ tʃɛrɪ - z tʃɛrɪz

- (27) ʃŪgɜ - kɛɪn-stɪk ʃŪgɜ - kɛɪn-stɪk-s ʃŪgɜ - kɛɪn-stɪks

- (28) drʌg drʌg - z drʌgz

- (29) ɪza :d ɪza :d - z ɪza :dz

- (30) goŪt goŪt - s goŪts

- (31) tʃɪkɜn tʃɪkɜn - z tʃɪkɜnz

- (32) ræɪt ræɪt - s ræɪts


	cvcvc	ccvcv c	→ cvcvcc
(33)	læjɒn	læjɒn - z	læjɒnz
	 cvcvc	 cvcvc c	 cvcvcc
(34)	kæt	kæt - z	kæts
	 cvc	 cvc c	 cvcc
(35)	dʌk	dʌk - s	dʌks
	 cvc	 cvc c	 cvcc
(36)	tʰ:tɔɪ	tʰ:tɔɪ - s	tʰ:tɔɪs
	 cvcvɪ	 cvcvɪ c	 cvcvɪc
(37)	snɛlk	snɛlk - s	snɛlks
	 cɔvvc	 cɔvvc c	 cɔvvcc
(38)	mʌŋki:	mʌŋki - z	mʌŋki:z
	 c v c c v	c v c c v c	 c v c c v c
(39)	hit	hit	hit
	 cvc	 cvc	 cvc
(40)	kʌt	kʌt	kʌt
	 cvc	 cvc	 cvc
(41)	Split	Split	Split
	 cccvc	 cccvc	 cccvc
(42)	Pʊt	Pʊt	Pʊt
	 cvc	 cvc	 cvc
(43)	sprə:d	sprə:d	sprə:d

- The data indicate that nouns are not inflected in Ụkwuani. Instead, singular words are concatenated with numerals to show pluralization.

Table 5:
Hierarchy of Learning Difficulty in Number Formation

Component	Rule	Nature of difficulty
Phonological	T ^{Affix}	New item No similar T-rule in Ukwuani. Unique to English.
Z Syntactic	T ^{Zero}	New item No similar passivisation rule in Ukwuani Unique to English

The ordering above on the hierarchy of difficulties is ideal from a pedagogical point of view. It will be of immense benefit to the English language teacher.

7. Conclusion

The data analysis in this study rightly asserts that the pluralization of phonological representations consists of several independent, parallel tiers. It also provides the formal means of representing these autonomous tiers by showing how they link up using prosodic features. It was found that vowel and consonant spreading occurs in both English and Ukwuani. Also, plurals are realized through allophones and zero transformation.

Based on our findings, we arrived at the generalization that there is convergence in the formation of plurals in English and Ụkwuani because both processes are phonologically conditioned. Therefore, the area of convergence is that both languages undergo morphological processes of insertion of CV slots phonologically. Both processes involve the stringing together of discrete morphemes and the subsequent segmentation of words into morphemes. The point of divergence is the pluralization of nouns through allophones in English.

We have seen that adopting the principles and devices of auto segmental phonology provides a framework for analyzing Ụkwuani and English. We have also seen that the skeletal tier, which plays a pivotal role in auto segmental Phonology, also serves morphological functions. The root consonants and the vocalic melody are presented on independent tiers. Mapping principles regulate the linking of these independent morphological tiers.

Prosodic Morphology was conceived in the broader context of a Generative Grammar that incorporates the theory of the lexicon and morphology encapsulated in Lexical Morphology. The theory assumes a lexicon where different tier confluences take place. It is a significant development in morphological theory. It

provides a perspicuous way of describing languages with non-concatenative morphology.

8. Recommendations

Based on this study's pedagogical value, the following recommendations are as a result of this made:

An attempt should be made by English language teachers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, particularly among Ụkwuani L₁ users of English, to utilize the theory of auto segmental phonology in the teaching/learning processes to equip them with the best strategies for teaching pluralization of nouns to avoid overgeneralization.

It is equally recommended that the government should make more funds such as Education Trust Funds (ETF) and Petroleum Trust Funds (PTF) available to educationists, linguists, and other individuals who are interested in investigating Ukwuani and other languages so that more research can be carried out in the languages.

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