TONAL HIERARCHY AND CONFIGURATION IN ỌPÌN-ÈKÌTÌ VARIANT OF ÈKÌTÌ DIALECT OF YORÙBÁ

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Abstract
This paper aims at constructing a fully articulated theory of tonal hierarchy and configuration within the framework of Optimality Theory (OT). It examines the nature of the phenomenon of tonal configuration across morpheme boundary in Ọpìn-Èkìtì dialect of Yorùbá language. Vowel elision is one of the strategies of eliminating vocalic hiatus in Yorùbá language. At times, the first vowel across morpheme boundary (V_1) is elided and in some other cases, the second vowel (V_2) is elided. When any of these vowels is elided, the tone it bears is either elided with it or surfaces on the surviving vowel, depending on the type of tone involved. The questions addressed here are (i) In Ọpìn-Èkìtì, which tone (high or low) is deleted across morpheme boundary? (ii) What happens when two tones (High and Low) are contiguous across morpheme boundary and either of these tones cannot be deleted? Two important findings emerge from this research. First, the hierarchy of tone in Ọpìn-Èkìtì dialect is L>H instead of H>L that we have in the Standard Yorùbá. That is, the Low tone is ranked higher than the High tone. Second, there is a phenomenon of tone coalescence across morpheme boundary when the High tone cannot delete in favour of the Low tone. These findings lead to the conclusion that the Low tone is stronger than the High tone and so it is ranked higher in sonority than the High tone. The analysis of the data is done using the Optimality Theory.

Keywords: Ọpìn-Èkìtì, Tonal hierarchy, Tonal coalescence, Optimality Theory, Faithfulness constraints, Markedness constraints.

Introduction

Many languages and dialects do not delete High tone across morpheme boundary when it is contiguous to a Low tone. Rather, when High tone and Low tone are contiguous as a result of morphological or syntactic concatenation, the low tone is deleted in favour of the High tone. In Standard Yorùbá (SY) (a Niger-Congo language), for instance, the Low tone is often deleted across morpheme boundary as in the data below which is adapted from Tuner (2006).

1. a. dé + èkó ⟶ dékŏ
   arrive Lagos 'arrived Lagos'
   b. ní + àná ⟶ lánă
   prep yesterday 'by yesterday'

In the same vein, syntactic concatenation of High-toned and Low-toned vowels in Môbà dialect (very close to Ôpìn-Èkìtì variant of Èkìtì dialect) leaves the High tone retained while the Low tone is deleted. This is also shown in the examples below:

Tuner (2006)

2. a. ní + ẹ̀bà ⟶ lẹ́bà
   Have ẹba 'have ẹba'

Although, works have been carried out on the Standard dialect and other closely related dialects such as Môbà (Bamisile 1986, Tuner 2006, Ajiboye), Ìkôlé-Èkìtì (Salawu 2001) and many more, the variant of Èkìtì spoken in Ọpìn-Èkìtì community has not been given much attention.

Ọ̀pìn-Èkìtì is a community situated in Èkìtì Local Government Area of Kwara State. The community comprise of Osí, Ẹ̀pẹ̀, Ìsàrè, Òkè-Ọ̀pìn, Ìkêrin, Ìsölô, Aárè, Öwáatun, Êtán and Àjùbà. This community is bounded by other dialects of Yorùbá like Ìgbómìnà and Okun.

This study seeks to explain the condition that determines high tone deletion across morpheme boundary in Ôpìn-Èkìtì dialect. I also explain the condition that brings about tone coalescence in the dialect.

The core of the theoretical framework used in this work is Optimality Theory. It is a theory born out of Autosegmental Phonology. This theory is not a rule based theory. It is an abridged theory that uses constraints rather than rules to derive the output from the input. The next section gives a brief review of Optimality Theory as proposed by Prince and Smolensky (1993).

2.1 Theoretical Assumptions: Optimality Theory (OT)

Optimality Theory (henceforth OT) is a framework in theoretical linguistics used to formalise analyses in phonology and other areas of linguistics. Its core is the assumption that linguistic generalizations should be described using a set of violable constraints on surface representations which are ranked in terms of their importance. This framework took centre stage in linguistics during the 1990s. It was introduced by Prince and Smolensky (1993) and has been developed by many other scholars most notably McCarthy (1993, 1995, 2000, 2002).

2.2 Basic Principles of OT

Five basic principles are crucial for Optimality Theory. The first is **violability.** That is an optimal output may violate some constraints but the violation is minimal. This amounts to asserting that any surface form is only optimal, relative to other candidates and that there is no absolute correctness or incorrectness. This implies that an output may be optimal in context A but not in context B.

The second principle is **constraint ranking** which implies that there is a dominant relation among constraints. Since all constraints are assumed to be universal and present in the Universal Grammar, language-particular behaviour is accounted for by different ranking. In other words, a particular output may be accepted in one case but not in another depending on the ranking of the constraints in relation to other constraints.

The third principle is **inclusiveness**. All candidate analyses must participate in the evaluation process. All candidates must be accessed by the *Eval.* (Evaluator) and there are no special rules or repair strategies for particular candidate.

Fourth is the **Universality** of the constraints. This implies that all constraints in OT are universal and can be found in all languages. However, the ranking differs and this is what account for variations in languages.

The fifth principle is referred to as **parallelism**. This amounts to asserting that all constraints and all members of a candidate set are supplied to the function *Eval* in a parallel

fashion. In other words, the relation between input and output is parallel and not derivational. This principle contrasts with the rule based theoretical framework.

We shall be making use of these principles in the analysis of our data in subsequent sections. The next section discusses a review of Yorùbá tonal system and behaviour.

3.1 Review of Yorùbá Tone Behaviour

Standard Yorùbá (henceforth SY) has three phonemically distinctive tones which are H(igh), M(id) and L(ow), Bámgbóṣé (1990), Akinlabi & Liberman (2001) among others. Floating tone as well as rising and falling tones are derived as a result of phonological processes that may occur across morpheme boundary or in the string of sentences. Going by the underspecification framework of Akinlabi (1984), Pulleyblank (1986) and others, only two of the three tones (H and L) need to be specified underlyingly while the third (M) only manifests by default on the surface. In other words, mid tone is assigned to any toneless vowel after all other rules have applied. Based on Akinlabí's (1984) and Pulleyblank's (1986) binary features for a 3-tone language, the High tone is [+ Upper Register and + Raised] while the Low tone is [– Upper Register and – Raised]. The Mid tone is maximally unmarked for these features.

Every syllable in Yorùbá bears a tone and these tones contrast significantly in the language. These tones are shown below with examples from the SY language:

High tone (´)

3. (a) /rá/ 'to get lost'
   (b) /gbá/ 'to sweep'

Mid tone (which is unmarked)

4. (a) /ra/ 'to rub'
   (b) /ọmọ/ 'child'

Low tone (`)

5. (a) /rà/ 'to rot'
   (b) /Ìlà/ 'name of a town'

Tones are capable of bringing about change in the meaning of words in Yorùbá language. Examples of tone distinctiveness are given below in Yorùbá where a change in the tone of the same word brings about the change in its meaning;

6. (a) lọ́ /lọ́/ 'to plant'
   (b) lọ /lọ/ 'go'
   (c) lọ̀ /lọ̀/ 'grind'

Among the three tones in the SY, High tone does not occur in the initial syllable of a noun except if the word is a borrowed word from other language (Bámgbósé 1990). Apart from the three level tones that are attested in Yorùbá language, there are contour tones such as the Rising and the Falling tones which are derived either by morphologically conditioned rule or syntactically conditioned rules. The Rising tone results when the tone that precedes a High tone is low in a two-syllable word as we have in the following example,

Standard Yorùbá

7. (a) ọ̀fẹ̀ ⟶ [ɔ̀fɛ̌] 'free of charge'
   (b) ìwé ⟶ [ìwě] 'book'
   (c) àlá ⟶ [àlă] 'dream'
   (d) ilé èyí ⟶ [ilé jǐ] 'this house'
   (e) oní + ọ̀run ⟶ [ọlórũ] 'Owner of Heaven (God)'

In examples 7 (a – d), the final syllable has Rising tone. The Rising tone in Yorùbá is conditioned by the presence of low tone in the preceding syllable. To account for example (d) above, the effect of the preceding Low tone takes place before the deletion of the segment that bore it. In other words, if the preceding syllable is not a low toned syllable, the gliding tone cannot occur. In the case of example (e), deletion of V_1 across morpheme boundary retains the High tone which later concatenates with the Low tone of V_2 to form a falling tone. However, Bámgbósé (1990) opines that there is no need for gliding tones as some tones also glide from Mid upward and some glide from Mid downward.

There are six patterns of tone in Yorùbá bisyllabic words, these are MH, MM, ML, LH, LM and LL as in the following words;

MH as shown in (8) below:

8. (a) ọlá /ọlá/ 'wealth'
   (b) adé /adé/ 'crown'
   (c) ọkọ́ /ọkọ́/ 'hoe'

MM as in

9. (a) ọmọ /ọmọ/ 'child'
   (b) ẹja /ɛʤa/ 'fish'
   (c) asọ /aʃọ/ 'cloth'

ML as in

10. (a) ọbệ /ọbẹ̀/ 'soup'
    (b) ebè /ebè/ 'heap'
    (c) ẹsệ/ẹsẹ̀/ 'leg'

LH as in

11. (a) àdá /àdá/ 'cutlass'
    (b) ọ̀gá/Ïgá/ 'master'
    (c) ìdí /ìdí/ 'buttock'

LM as in

12. (a) ọ̀la /Ïla/ 'tomorrow'
    (b) ẹ̀san /ẹ̀sã/ 'reward'
    (c) ìwo /ìwo/ 'horn' (for animals)

LL as in

13. (a) ọ̀yà /Ïjà/ 'grass cutter' or 'wage'
    (b) àgbà/àgbà/ 'elder'
    (c) ìwà /ìwà/ 'behaviour'

From the above examples, it is clear that in Standard Yorùbá, the High (H) tone does not occur on initial vowel at word initial position except if the word is a borrowed word, (Bámgbósé 1990, p 42). In Ôpìn-Èkìtì, apart from the fact that the High tone does not occur initially in a bisyllabic word as we have it in the Standard Yorùbá, consonants do not begin a nominal word. Consonant-initial nouns in other languages or the SY are pronounced in Ôpìn-Èkìtì with a mid-toned vowel (i) insertion at word initial. This is also attested in other variants of Èkìtì dialects as well as some languages like Emai. (Egbokhare 1990). This is exemplified in the data below:

14.

	SY	Phonetic form	Ôpìn-Èkìtì	Phonetic forms	Gloss
a.	pákó	[kpákó]	ipákó	[ikpákó]	'plank'
b.	títì	[títì]	itítì	[itítì]	'road'
c.	pápá	[kpákpá]	ipápá	[ikpákpá]	'desert' (N)
d.	dígí	[dígí]	idígí	[idígí]	'mirror'
e.	síléètì	[síléètì]	isíléètì	[isíléètì]	'slate'
f.	bàbá	[bàbá]	ibaba	[ibaba]	'father'

The forms in Ôpìn-Èkìtì as shown above are also the same in other variants of Èkìtì dialect. In the next section, we examine the theoretical framework that is used in this work. This is central to the analysis of data in the work.

4. Optimality Theory and Tone Analysis

One central OT assumption is that only constraints should be used to characterize linguistic generalizations. There are no substantive rules or transformations. A set of potential surface forms (candidates) are evaluated by the grammar and one is chosen as the optimal candidate (the output) because it violates a language's constraints in the least bad way. All constraints are violable and languages rank them in order of importance, so it is worse to violate a high-ranked constraint than a low-ranked one.

OT analyses are formulated in a tableau. The top row of this tableau shows the input (the underlying representation) and the constraints in ranked order from the left to right. The first column shows the set of candidates one of which is chosen as the optimal output (indicated by a pointing finger). The other columns show constraint violations each receiving one asterisk. The 'fatal' violation (which rules a candidate out) is indicated by an exclamation mark. There are two basic types of constraint: Markedness and Faithfulness constraints. Markedness constraints penalize candidates which contain marked structures while Faithfulness require identity between input and the output.

The basic constraints governing tonal distributions are the well-formedness conditions (WFC) as proposed by Goldsmith (1976). These conditions can be incorporated into OT as a set of faithfulness constraints ((McCarthy; McCarthy and Prince)

The faithfulness constraints on tonal distributions are stated below:

15.

a. PARSE TONE: A tone must be incorporated into prosodic structure
b. FILL-μ: A mora must be filled by a tone.
c. LINEARITY: $String_1$ reflects the precedence structure of $String_2$ and vice versa.
d. UNIFORMITY: No element of $String_2$ has multiple correspondents in $String_1$.
e. LEXTONE: A tone that is present in an output must be present in an input.
f. HDBIN: A mora must bear two tones x and y, iff it is a syllable head (i.e., a nuclear mora).

The PARSETONE constraint (15a) requires that every tone is to be parsed onto a prosodic anchor. The FILL-μ constraint (15b) demands all moras to be filled by a tone. The LINEARITY constraint (15c) prevents association lines from crossing (a constraint derived from Autosegmental Phonology). The UNIFORMITY constraint (15d) prohibits a multiple linking between tones and tone-bearing units (that is, no two tones must be linked with a single tone bearing unit and vice versa). The LEXTONE constraint (15e) requires that any tone that is present in the input must be present in output while HDBIN constraint (15f) requires a nuclear mora to bear two tones.

We also extend our constraints to tonal hierarchy and propose that tones are differentiated in terms of their intrinsic sonority. Assuming that a H tone is more sonorous than a L tone, their sonority difference can be encoded into the hierarchy. The feature [+UPPER] and [-RAISED] are used to represent them respectively (Pulleyblank 1986). The interaction of the faithfulness constraint UNIFORMITY and Head Binarity defines two types of tonal systems: ranking UNIFORMITY above HDBIN allows level tones while the reverse ranking gives the contour tones only. On a general note, OT assumes that Universal Grammar (UG) contains two functions namely; *Gen* and *Eval*. The Gen generates any amount of output candidates (featural or prosodic) for a given input while the Eval evaluates all members of a candidate set and chooses an optimal output based on a set of ranked constraints. This approach reduces, to a great extent, the complexity of determining underlying representations in standard generative phonology since the grammar focuses on outputs rather than the inputs.

5.0 The High Tone

The High Tone in the SY is regarded as the strongest of the three tones that exist in the language. What this implies is that when two vowels are contiguous across morpheme boundary, there is the possibility that one of the vowels will be deleted to avoid hiatus vowel. If the deleted vowel bears a High tone and the retained vowel bears a Mid or Low tone, the tone will be deleted while the High tone of the deleted vowel would relink on the surviving vowel thereby displacing the Mid or Low tone on it. The examples below illustrate the strength of High tone in the Standard Yorùbá.

16. (a) gbé + adé ⟶ gbádé
carry crown 'carry the crown'
(b) dá + ọgbọ́n ⟶ dọ́gbọ́n
create wisdom 'plan wisely'

The interaction of the faithfulness constraint UNIFORMITY and Head Binarity defines two types of tonal systems: ranking HDBIN above UNIFORMITY allows contour tones while the reverse ranking gives level tones only.

Table I

Input gbé + adé	UNIFORMITY	LEXTONE	HDBIN
a. Gbàdé		*!	
b. Gbadé		*!	
c. gbádé ☞	√	*	

As shown in the above tableau, the first vowel (V_1) across morpheme boundary (which is /é/) is deleted but its tone does not delete along with it but rather concatenates with the second vowel (V2) across morpheme boundary and then displaces the tone borne by this second vowel (V2) because it is stronger than it.

Bámgbósé (1990, p.43) observes that though two syllables may have the same high tone underlyingly, these tones may be different from each other considering the morphological outcome of each of these tones. We shall consider the following examples to illustrate the difference that may occur between two High tones.

17. i. (a) apá /akpá/ 'hand'
(b) àpá /àkpá/ 'scar'
ii. (a) igbá /igbá/ 'calabash'
(b) ìgbá /ìgbá/ 'garden egg'
iii. (a) ọrẹ́ /ọrẹ́/ 'cane'
(b) ọ̀rẹ́ /ọ̀rẹ́/ 'friend'

The second syllable of each set of the words above have the High tone which looks similar but different. The difference cannot be noticed and pointed out until additional morphemes are attached to each of the words. All tonal specifications are built up from a small number of level tone primitives, such as High and Low, with rises and falls treated as Low+High or High+Low sequences respectively. Consider the following morphological constructions:

18. i. a. oní + apá ⟶ alápá /alákpá/ 'owner of hand'
b. Oní + àpá ⟶ alápă /alákpă/ 'owner of scar'
ii. a. Oní + igbá ⟶ onígbá /onígbá/ 'owner of calabash'
b. Oní + ìgbá ⟶ onigbă /onígbă/ 'owner of garden egg'
iii. a. Oní + örë ⟶ ölõrë /ƉIÑrØ/ 'owner of cane'
b. Oní + ôrë ⟶ ölõrĕ /ƉIÑrŬ/ 'someone who has friend'
iv. a. oní + öta ⟶ ölõta /ƉIÑta/ 'owner of bullet'
b. oní + ôtá ⟶ ölõtă /ƉIÑtă/ 'someone who has enemy'

In the above data, certain phonological processes have taken place at the segmental level before the outputs are derived. These include vowel elision, n~l rule and assimilation. We shall not be concerned with the details of these processes but concentrate on tonal process. The tone of the deleted vowel did not delete with it but rather survives the deletion and later concatenates with

the tone of the following contiguous Tone Bearing Unit (TBU) which makes the final syllable to have a rising tone.

Pulleyblank's (1986) autosegmental analysis for tone spreading is that the H tone is floating when its vowel is deleted. This then spreads onto the following syllable and the L tone is delinked. This approach is also supported by Bámgbósé (1990), Akinlabi and Liberman (2001) among others. As observed by Akinlabi and Liberman, 'tone polarization and polarized tone epenthesis are like the epenthesis of vowels and consonants in rescuing forbidden or marked syllable structures'.

Following our analysis in data (7), when a Low tone is contiguous to a High tone across morpheme boundary and followed by a Mid tone, dèletion of the Low tone leaves a phonetic trace on the final Mid tone such that it tends to surface on the final Tone Bearing Unit as we have in the following data:

19. (a) /oní/ + /àwo/ ⟶ [aláwō] 'owner of breakable plate'
    (b) /oní/ + /àgbön/ ⟶ [alágbō̈n] 'owner of coconut'
    (c) /oní + ìbön/ ⟶ [oníbō̈n] 'owner of gun'

The analysis for the above data is that the Low tone combines with the Mid tone on the final Tone Bearing Unit. This is indicated by the grave and macron combined on the final vowel.

In the following section, we shall briefly talk about Tonal Hierarchy and Syllable Structure and then examine Tonal Hierarchy in Ôpìn-Ekìtì.

6.0 Tonal Hierarchy and Syllable Structure

Tonal Hierarchy is one of the crucial ways through which prosodic structure governs the distribution of supra-segments and their arrangement within the syllable follows a clear pattern: As we have sonority hierarchy in the segmental level where the most sonorous segment occupies the peak position, while the less sonorous ones occur towards the margins, tonal prominence also entails the position of stress. In other words, tonal prominence scale has the higher tone more prominent than the lower tone.

The specific arrangement of segments within the syllable in an alternating pattern of sonority crests is known as the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP). The Sonority Sequencing Principle posits the following statements:

20. (a) In every syllable, there is exactly one peak of sonority, contained in the nucleus.
    (b) Syllable margins exhibit a unidirectional sonority slope, rising toward the nucleus.

The robust tendency of most languages to systematically enforce the SSP in their inventory of possible syllable types constitutes evidence that some notion of sonority must be encoded in the universal constraints component CON.

7.0 Tonal Hierarchy in Ôpìn-Èkìtì

High tone has been acclaimed to be greater than the Low tone in the literature. Ajíbóyè (2004) observes, "On which tone to delete, the claim in the literature is that when there is H and L concatenation, the L deletes and the H survives because the tonal hierarchy in Yorùbá is H>L".

This claim has been made decades ago and it is still upheld till date (cf. Chumbow 1982; Pulleyblank 2004). However, in Ọpìn-Èkìtì dialect, the Low tone does not delete. Rather than deleting the L tone in favour of H, the High tone either deletes or the High and Low tones coalesce to Mid tone. The examples in data (21) in the next sub-section give detail of High tone deletion in Ọpìn-Èkìtì. In addition, the environment of the High tone deletion is not restricted to morphological construction alone, it also cut across syntactic construction.

7.1 Morphologically-conditioned deletion

The possessive pronominal in Ọpìn-Èkìtì dialect is 'ení' meaning 'owner of'. When this possessive pronoun is added to a noun with Low tone on the first vowel, the V1 across morpheme boundary (that is the last vowel of the possessive pronoun) is deleted together with its High tone provided the final or next tone is a High or Mid.

Poss. + N construction.

21. (a) H + L H

/ení + àkpá/ ⟶ [alàkpá] 'owner of scar'
/ení + ôrë/ ⟶ [ọlôrë] 'owner of friend'
/ení + àdán/ ⟶ [alàdán] 'owner of bat'
/ení + àdá/ ⟶ [alàdá] 'owner of cutlass'
/ení + ôpá/ ⟶ [ölôpá] 'police'
/ení + ùgbá/ ⟶ [olùgbá] 'owner of locust bean'

(b) H + L M

/ení + ào/ ⟶ [alào] 'owner of plate'
/ení + àgbön/ ⟶ [alàgbön] 'owner of coconut'
/ení + òde/ ⟶ [olòde] 'celebrant'
/ení + àtẹ/ ⟶ [alàtẹ] 'seller of assorted goods'

In data (21a), the pattern of the tone occurrence is H+LH where we are concerned about the tones across morpheme boundary and the following tone. The High tone across morpheme boundary deletes while the Low tone is retained. Here we argue that prominence is given to the Low tone over the High tone in Ôpìn-Èkìtì. This phenomenon is very rear in other dialects of the language as well as other languages of the world.

In data (21b) as well, the pattern of the tone occurrence is H+LM. We still maintain our argument that Low tone is perceived to be stronger than the High tone. This is why it survives deletion and the High tone is deleted instead. The Tonal Sonority Hierarchy in this dialect is:

(22) Tonal Alignment Constraint (TAC)

*NUCμ/[-RSD] >> *NUCμ/[+UPR]

Where L tone is more sonorous than a H tone.

The effect of the above constraints is exemplified in the following table:

Table II

Input ení + àkpá	LINEARITY	*NUCμ[- RSD]	* NUCμ[+UPR]
a. Alákpá	√	*	√
b. alákpă	**!		
c. alàkpá ☞	√	√	*

The table shows the tonal hierarchy in Ọ̀pìn-Èkìtì. The L tone is more sonorous than the H tone and so it takes precedence over it when they are contiguous and there is need to delete one.

7.2 Syntactically-Conditioned deletion

When there is verb and object Noun Phrase (NP) combination, the final vowel of the verb or the first vowel of the NP may be deleted. (We are not really concerned about which vowel goes here). This deletion leaves the tone borne by either of the vowel floating depending on whether the tone is High or Low tone. If the tone is High, it is deleted along with the vowel if the tone of the following vowel is Low.

(23) Verb + Noun

(a) /sá + ẹ̀gẹ́/ ⟶ [sàgẹ́] 'dry cassava'
(b) /yún + èkó/ ⟶ [yèkó] 'go to Lagos'
(c) /wá + ọ̀fẹ́/ ⟶ [wọ̀fẹ́] 'look for free of charge'
(d) /wá + ìwé/ ⟶ [wàwé] 'look for book'
(e) /ʤó + ùgbo/ ⟶ [ʤògbó] 'burn the bush'
(f) /wá + ẹ̀kọ́/ ⟶ [wẹ̀kọ́] 'look for education

The table below illustrates the above derivation where high tone deletes to pave way for the low tone. This is not different from the earlier derivation in the previous tableau as shown in tableau III:

Table III

Input sá + ẹ̀gẹ́	LINEARITY	*NUCμ/[-RSD]	*NUCμ/[+UPR]
a. ságẹ́	√	*	√
b. ságẹ̌	**!		
c. sàgẹ́ ☞	√	√	*

The Low tone in this dialect is given priority when it is contiguous to a High tone across morpheme boundary. This implies that the High tone has to be deleted in favour of the Low tone.

8.0 Tone Coalescence in Ọ̀pìn-Èkìtì

Coalescence is defined as a phonological process whereby two adjoining or contiguous segments converge or fuse into one element such that the new segment is phonologically distinct from the input segments (Bámisilê 1994). Coalescence is a phonological process that can occur either at the segmental level or at the tonal level. Examples of segmental coalescence in Standard Yorùbá are given below;

24 (a) ibi + ìjẹ ⟶ ibùjẹ 'eating place'
(b) gbọ́ + ìró ⟶ gbúròó 'hear sound, hear from someone'
(c) ogún + èje ⟶ ogóje 'one hundred and forty'
(d) dá + ọpẹ́ ⟶ dúpẹ́ 'give thanks'

The same phonological process exemplified above can apply to tone where two contiguous tones fuse to become a new tone. This is referred to as High-Low Simplification in some other literature (Ajíbóyè et al 2011). If the tone after the High tone across the morpheme boundary is a Low tone, the two tones coalesce to a mid tone provided the tone of the next syllable is low. However, if the tone is High or Mid, the High tone is deleted in favour of the Low tone. This derivation is both morphologically and syntactically conditioned in Ôpìn-Èkìtì, this means that it is realizable word-internal as well as within a sentence. To derive this within a word, we can realize it with the possessive morpheme of 'ení' which means 'owner of' added as a prefix to a noun word initially. This is presented in the following morphological structure.

25. [Poss + N]

(a) /ení + ọ̀nà/ ⟶ [ọ̈lọ̀nà] 'owner of the road'
(b) /ení + ẹ̀gbẹ̀/ ⟶ [ẹ̈lẹ̀gbẹ̀] 'the King of Êgbê town'
(c) /ení + ọ̀ffà/ ⟶ [ọ̈lọ̀fà] 'the King of Offa town'
(d) /ení + àyà/ ⟶ [alayà] 'owner of chest'
(e) /ení + ẹ̀ṣẹ̀/ ⟶ [ẹ̀lẹ̀sê] 'sinner'
(f) /ení + èkpè/ ⟶ [elekpè] 'one who curses'
(g) /ení + èdè/ ⟶ [eledè] 'owner of language'

At the syntactic level however, we can realize a coalescence of High and Low tone when a High-toned verb is added to a Low-toned object Noun Phrase as in data (26) or when a prepositional particle is added to a Noun Phrase as in data (27). This is shown in the examples below.

26. Verb + Obj NP

(a) fẹ́ + àgbò ⟶ fagbò 'want ram'
(b) Sẹ́ + èkpè ⟶ sekpè 'curse' (v)
(c) Dá + àṣà ⟶ daṣà 'use a slang'
(d) Dé + Ôffà ⟶ dọfà 'arrive at Offa'
(e) /dá + ọ̀ràn/ ⟶ [daràn] 'commit an offence'

27. [Prep + N]

(a) /ní + ônà/ ⟶ [lọnà] 'at the road'

(b) /sí + òkè/ ⟶ [sokè] 'to up'

(c) /ní + ẹ̀kẹ̀/ ⟶ [lẹ̀kẹ̀] 'at the side'

(d) /ní + ùgbà/ ⟶ [lugbà] 'at the time'

The above data show that the Low tone can not be deleted in favour of the High tone, rather than deleting it for the High tone, it coalesces into a Mid tone as we have seen in the data.

8.1 High Tone and Mid Tone Combination

When the High and Mid tones are combined across morpheme boundary, the High tone takes precedence over the Mid tone. This occurs irrespective of the tone that follows the mid tone. The data below further explain this phenomenon.

28. Poss. + N

(a) /ení + ao/ ⟶ [aláo]
Owner cult 'herbalist'

(b) /ení + ẹran/ ⟶ [ẹlẹ́ran]
Owner meat 'meat dealer/seller'

(c) /ení + ajọ̀/ ⟶ [alájọ̀]
Owner joy 'celebrant'

(d) /ení + ẹsè/ ⟶ [elésè]
Owner leg 'owner of leg'

In all the examples given above, the vowels that the morphology puts in contact with each other bear the tone sequence HM, that is, the vowels across morpheme boundary. This sequence is systematically resolved in favour of the H-tone (Akinlabi 1984). The sequence of HL across morpheme boundary in the Standard dialect result in deletion of the Low tone while the High tone is retained. This is also what is obtainable when the sequence of HM is realized across morpheme boundary.

9.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have examined the phenomenon of tonal configuration in Ọ̀pìn-Èkìtì variety of Èkìtì dialect of Yorùbá language and it is concluded that the Low tone is considerably stronger than the High tone because the High tone is always deleted across morpheme boundary when it is contiguous to a Low tone. Moreover, the influence of tone in this dialect is from right to left as we observe in the work that the tone of the next syllable after morpheme boundary has effect on the process that takes place across morpheme boundary. Rather than deleting the Low tone in a sequence of HL tone, the High tone deletes. However, sequence of HL in some other cases results to coalescence. This phenomenon does not occur in the standard variety of the language or any other dialects of Yorùbá.

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