A Phonological Analysis of Prophet Odumeje's Sermons and Public Speeches

Franca Okumo Ph.D
Department of Linguistics, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State.
okumoff@fuotuoke.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1023-4211

Abstract
This paper looks at the phonological features of Prophet Odumeje's (a Nigerian charismatic preacher known for his unique oratory style, that is characterized by phonological creativities and code-switching) sermons and public speeches. It examines the phonological patterns and phonostylistic features in his speeches and the sociolinguistic implications. This paper analyzes how his speech patterns reflect and shape his identity, religious charisma, and audience engagement. Using a purposive sampling method, the researcher elicits data from online platforms, transliterates and transcribes them to show at a glance, the phonological processes and phonostylistic features in his speeches. Employing a sociophonetics and stylistics theoretical frameworks, the study identifies specific phonological features and discusses their impact on communication skills and audience perception. A qualitative approach was employed in the analysis of the data. The findings show that the preacher uses phonological processes such as metathesis, omission, insertion, addition of strident (overgeneralization of the rule of pluralization), wrong repetition of certain syllables, alliteration, assonance, code switching and code mixing amongst others. Patterns such as substitution and the use of stress that adds a dramatic feature to his words were observed. The researcher spots that the phonological structure of the L1 interferes with that of his L2. This is in line with Okumo (2018) which notes that the phonological structure of the L1 is subconsciously applied to that of the target language. The frequency of occurrence of these processes confirm that there is a gap in the L2.
Keywords: phonological patterns, metathesis, insertion, addition of strident, substitution, assessment

1.   Introduction
Over the years, charismatic leaders have capitalized on advancements in media technology to expand their reach and followership and maximize their impact. In recent times, studies shed light on the techniques employed by preachers, emphasizing the power of language and its ability to manipulate and persuade their audiences to engage in their content. This research aims to explore how the controversial preacher, prophet Odumeje, uses phonological and phonostylistic features to portray his communicative abilities through the use of foregrounding of some features. These features are used as a deviation to create his unique comic style which attracts the traffic of his audience to him. The nature of his oration act as a persuasive language mechanism and construct a unique identity for him. Language is an essential tool for religious leaders to convey messages and maintain a connection with their audience. Among contemporary Nigerian pastors, Prophet Odumeje has gained prominence for his dramatic and unconventional preaching style. His sermons often incorporate elements of performance, humor, and linguistic resourcefulness, which resonate with his diverse audience. Despite his popularity, there is limited academic inquiry into the linguistic features of his speeches, particularly their phonological aspects. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the phonological processes and phonostylistic structures in his sermons and public speeches. The study identifies and analyzes the phonological features present in Prophet Odumeje's sermons and speeches, examine how these phonological elements contribute to his style of deviation and audience engagement and explores the sociolinguistic implications of his speech patterns within the Nigerian religious context.
To do this, the following research questions shall guide the study:
1. What are the prominent phonological features in Prophet Odumeje's sermons and public speeches?
2. How do these features enhance the effectiveness of his communication and engagement?
3. What do his phonological choices reveal about his identity and his audience's linguistic expectations?

2.   Review of Literature
Language is very important to all, hence, cannot be ignored. It is the medium through which we engage in our day to day activities. It acts as a channel of social control and power. Hence, every communication is systematically structured to carry out the particular communicative role. The communicative or performative role that a language conveys depends on the features that are foregrounded to push forth the style that is desired. Phonological features can be used to characterize a certain style that may be as a power tool to persuade or pull your audience towards you. The stylistic use of sounds can form the basis of a persuasive and unique conversation. According to Omachonu (2000), phonology studies the way a language speaker systematically utilizes a selection of sounds in

order to express meanings. These sounds are well organized and combined in an acceptable manner to form utterances. Crystal (2005) focuses on the variations that occur when we produce sounds. These variations which influence pronunciation patterns and how speakers adapt their speech may be due to variables such as region, ethnicity, gender and social class. Labov (1972) gives insight into the nuanced ways phonological deviations can signal group membership and social stratification. Phonological choices can index social roles and identities. This is what sociophonetics is all about, showing the connections between social factors and speech sounds. This is in line with Eckert (2008) who emphasizes the performative aspect of identity where speakers actively construct social meanings through phonetic choices.

It is the concern of Phonology to study the speech sounds and the processes by which segment are combine to produce a mutually intelligible utterance. It studies the application of the rules that govern the production of sounds in a language. English, just like other languages has an organized structure, thus, a systematic analysis of any speech will give us a better understanding of how speech sounds functions and vary from one speaker to another (Katamba 1989, Yul-Ifode 2014)

In religious discourse, the language and performative style may be shaped by the preacher's cultural and social contexts to achieve his goals. The multilingual context in Nigerian, influences the clerics' phonological patterns. Gut (2005) notes that the coexistence of English, Pidgin and indigenous languages have led to distinctive phonological features such as: vowel harmony, tonal variation and consonant cluster simplification. Preachers thus, navigate these resources to reach their varied audiences. This helps them gain accessibility by all and active engagements. The use of phonological and stylistic features in sermons are used to convey authority and evoke responses from the listeners. Prophet Odumeje often uses these features to evoke emotional intensity and high performance energy that show his spiritual power. His style of presentation characterized by repetition, emphatic stress, chanting, wrong pronunciations, amongst others conveys the message and engages the people.

Studies on religious communication in Nigeria have largely focused on lexical choices, code-switching, and discourse strategies. However, limited attention has been paid to phonological features, particularly in the context of charismatic preachers like Prophet Odumeje. This study thus, bridges this gap by providing a systematic analysis of the phonological and stylistic features in his speech and their communicative implications. The study hence, examines the phonological patterns and phonostylistic features employed by prophet Odumeje in his speeches and the sociolinguistic implications. It provides insights into how phonological strategies can be used to create a unique communicative identity that connects with the audiences and how language can be used in shaping the charisma of religious leaders.

3.   Methodology
This study employs a purposive sampling method in the elicitation of data. This method of data collection is preferred since it deliberately selects his public speeches from social media platforms, data that present at a glance, diverse contexts and linguistic styles (e.g., English, Igbo, Pidgin English) that show phonostylistic deviations. Sociophonetic and Stylistic frameworks were adopted which examine the interaction between social factors and phonological variation and the use of sound as a tool for artistic and persuasive communication. These frameworks align well with the objectives, as they allow an in-depth investigation of how Prophet Odumeje's phonological choices contribute to his unique style of speaking and audience impact. Qualitative approach was adopted for the analysis of the data. It transliterates and gives a phonetic transcription of selected speeches using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to capture phonetic details which include segmental and suprasegmental features of audio recordings of the sermons and public speeches and examines them to identify the phonological processes, patterns and styles employed by the cleric.
This methodology employed ensures a comprehensive analysis of Prophet Odumeje's phonostylistic features. It links the linguistic patterns to their stylistic and sociolinguistic functions. Through the lens of sociophonetics and stylistic analysis, this methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the unique features of his sermons and public speeches.

4.   Result and Discussion
This session discusses the sound patterns and phonetic features of his language use

4.1   Phonological Features in Prophet Odumeje's Sermons and Public Speeches
Prophet Odumeje's speeches are characterized by a unique phonological style that blends language, tone and style that deviate from the norm. These styles, contribute to his charismatic appeal and engagements by his viewers. Odumeje is known for his colourful and often controversial statements, which have become popular phrases in Nigerian public sphere. A phonological analysis of Odumeje's popular phrases would examine the sound patterns and phonetic features of his language use. His phonological creativity makes his speeches a form of linguistic

performance that balances spirituality, entertainment, and cultural expressions. Below are the key phonological processes and features frequently observed in his sermons and public speeches:

4.1.1 Addition of Stridents (overgeneralization of the rule of pluralisation)

According to Okumo (2024), there are phonological rules which determine what sounds should occur in a particular environment or after certain sounds. Phonological rules help the grammar of a language to know the pronunciation of an utterance or a word as in the case with the rules of pluralization. Phonological processes ensure that sounds are smoothly produced in utterances to make it pleasing to the ear. Understanding these patterns is crucial for learners aiming to master the nuanced communication skills required for proficiency. English derive their plural morphemes for nouns by the rule of assimilation for phonologically conditioned plural morphemes whilst grammatically conditioned plural morphemes can apply the zero morpheme rule or the rule of suppletion.

In Prophet Odumeje's sermons, he deviates from the standard English forms by adding an additional plural suffix to the plural morpheme already derived through suppletion. This is a case of overgeneralisation of the rule of plurality. This is seen in the speech data below:

Excerpt 1

*Young **mens** and their fellow young **mens** are doing things with fellow young **mens**, who go marry other **womens***
The addition of a redundant plural marker 's' to *men* and *women* creates a non-standard form. This is an overgeneralization of the plural rule to irregular plural nouns that shows hypercorrection. This pattern may also be due to the influence from pidgin or from the L1 or may be deliberate by the speaker to create a comic or dramatic effect to his delivery. The use of "***mens***" instead of "**men**" and "***womens***" instead of "**women**" deviates to create a meaning of not just plurality but the emphasis on the large number of men and women and the societal issues with youth relationships and responsibilities.

4.1.2 Lateralisation

In the production of a lateral sound, airflows are allowed to escape through the sides of the tongue (Browman & Goldstein 1995, Ladefoged & Maddleson, 1996). Lateralisation occurs when there is a lowering of the sides of the tongue. It involves a change from a [- lateral] sound to a [+ lateral] sound. This process is identified in the speech data as shown below in excerpt 2

Excerpt 2

Line 1:	"I don't want to be ***dlamatic***
Line 2:	"When I joke, my joke is ***dangelous***"
Line3:	"Let everybody ***limove*** politics in this election
Line 4:	"Let's vote the right person, weather Ibo, Hausa or ***Yoloba***
Line 5:	"when you ***lun*** a ***lace***…
Line 6:	"it is a ***litual*** that you did
Line 7:	"I ***overlule*** the judgement"
Line 8:	"***Bling*** him here"
Line 9:	"You must ***liplizent*** your country well"
Line 10:	"I smile but my smile is too ***dangerlouz***"
Line 11:	"Are you in ***Ulop***?"
Line 12:	"I can be bold to dance madiness and ***ladical*** rike my father davis to our Lord Jesus Christ than to be ashamed to dance before God, and when you dance ***ladical*** they say this guy is stupid, but when you dance ***ladical*** in a club they say you are a guy"

From the excerpt in different contexts, we see a regular pattern of replacing the labial velar approximant, /r/ with the alveolar lateral approximant, /l/. The frequency of replacement signals a negative L1 transfer from the speaker to L2 English. This is in line with Okumo (2018) and Alabi (2007) who note that the phonological structure of the L1 is subconsciously applied to that of the target language since second language learners adopt sounds in their language repertoire to replace sounds that are close in approximation. In a similar study, Kamalu et al. (2022) say that a bilingual naturally acquires his mother tongue first, before he learns his second language. In other words, he is already a linguistic adult in his mother tongue (MT) before learning his second language (L2). For this reason, it is expected of him to reassign most aspects of his mother tongue linguistic experience to the L2. The consistency of these processes confirm that there is a gap in the L2 of the speaker.

It was discovered that the speaker had difficulty differentiating the central approximant, /r/ from the lateral approximant /l/. As shown in the excerpt, the distinction between /r/ and /l/ was lost in the speaker's speech in words like:

Run - lun, rubbish - lubbish, remove - lemove, dangerous - dangelous, borrowed - bollowed, created - cleated, already - aleady, release - lelease, sorcerer - sorsoler, America - Amelika, security - seclulity, resources - leysources, doctorate - doctollate, prospering - plospelling, chloroquine - chlloquine, thyriod - tyloid, prove - plove, sprite - splite.

4.1.3   Code-Switching and Phonological Adaptation

Prophet Odumeje frequently alternates between English, Igbo, and Pidgin English with each language bringing its own phonological features to enrich his oratory style. He uses Igbo features of tonal variation to convey meanings and emphasize cultural identity whilst the use of pidgin offers an informal and expressive phonological undertone to connect with his varied audience. He often modifies English words to align with the phonotactics of Igbo or Pidgin, creating localized pronunciations that intrigues his audience. The excerpts in 3 below illustrate this point:

Excerpt 3
Line1:   They say you are a guy, you kill it, ***nwanne*** you kill it, you did not kill it, you are a disappointment.
Line 2:   Everything I speak is who I am, I don't hide myself, I don't pretend, ***nwanne idaa anu ife, idaa afu uzo, Ana aza call na sambisa forest, maka gini, maka onwu mmadu, Ana ahu oka na*** filling station, ***onye battery foro one bar, ona agba game*** (brother, if you fail to hear something, you fail to see the way…)
Line3:   The penis of the man, the manhood, the ***sucrutum***, is not working, no performance, no demonstration, no action, no activities, no movies
         Ebube gelato
Line 4:   "***I feely lonely ,I feely clying***"
Line 5:   "Something will be making noise ***kpororo***...."

From the data in excerpt 3, line 1, 2,3 and 4, we see the preacher switching from English to Igbo to express a concept that perhaps feels more comfortable in his mother tongue or perhaps might not be adequately captured in English. He uses his mother tongue to convey emotionally charged ideas through the use of Igbo proverbs. This shows comfort and cultural connection with his audience since they share common linguistic background.

In line 4, "***feely***" for "**feel**" and "***clying***" for "**crying**", shows the adaptation of the preacher's linguistic style and background whilst in line 5, he switches to an onomatopoeic sound in his MT, "***kpororo***" to add a playful melodic quality to his oration.

4.1.4   Methathesis

This is a phonological process that exchanges or switches adjacent sounds. According to Fromkin & Rodman (1978), this is a phonological process in which phonemes are switched or placed wrongly.

Excerpt 4
Line 1:   "I'm Indabosky with heavenly ***cerfiticate***

From the data above, the preacher exchanges /f/ for /t/ resulting in ***cerfiticate***. This inverted word reinforces his unique identity.

4.1.5   Substitution

This is the replacement of a sound with another. It is the process whereby a speaker replaces sound not found in his or her L1 sound system with a sound that is available. Alabi (2007) opines that it is a phonological interference caused by language contact. From the data below, there is a substitution of /l/ for /l/.

The data in excerpt 2, from line 1-12 which show lateralization, also show substitution. The preacher consistently substitutes the lateral approximant for the central approximant. As shown below:

Run - lun, rubbish - lubbish, remove - lemove, dangerous - dangelous, borrowed - bollowed, created - cleated, already - aleady, release - lelease, sorcerer - sorsoler, America - Amelika, security - seclulity, resources - leysources, doctorate - doctollate, prospering - plospelling, chloroquine - chlloquine, thyriod - tyloid, prove - plove, sprite - splite.

Excerpt 5
Line 1:   I say money ***rocate*** them, Euro ***rocate*** them, ponds and ***dorra rocate*** them.
Line 2:   I ***play*** (Pray) but my joke is too dangerous
Line 3:   Illiterate – inniterate, pleases - Preases

In excerpt 5, line 1 and 2, /r/ is substituted for /l/ in "***rocate***" for "**locate**", "***dora***" for "**Dollar**" and "***play***" for "**pray**"
The preacher doesn't only substitute /l/ for /r/ but also /r/ for /l/. This two sounds are thus used interchangeably by the preacher. In line 3, he exchanges /n/ for /l/ in ***inniterate*** instead of **illiterate** and "**preases**" instead of "**pleases**"

4.1.6   Insertion

This is the imposition of vowels in words for the simplification of consonant clusters. The preacher's speech is characterized by insertion. Insertion is done to fit words into the phonological pattern of the speaker into that of his L1 which does permit cluster and nouns ending with consonants.

Excerpt 6
Line 1:   the ***sucrutum*** is not working
Line 2:   I can be bold to dance ***madiness***
Line 3:   Colonial ***Vilusi*** will never see lion family
Line 4:   Jezors is ***kihelin*** the load wait for him to finish ***kiihelin***

The preacher inserts a vowel in line 1-3 to break off the clusters to make the words fit into the phonological inventory of the preacher. The same epenthetic vowel insertion is observed in line 5 in the word "*kihelin*" The preacher can insert at any environment. From the data above, the insertion is at the initial as seen in line 1 and 4, medial position in line 2 and final positions in line 3.

4.1.7   Deletion

Another feature that was apparent in the speaker's speech was the deletion of phonemes, most especially consonant sounds at the end of a word. Instances of this are seen in the pronunciation of words like:

Chris(t), abou(t), radica(l), contro(l), ow(n), brin(g), learne(d), collea(ge), a(ll), apprecia(te), foo(l), le(t), shou(t), an(d), presiden(t), a(m), do(ub)ting, spiritua(l), agains(t)…

This process could be as a result of mother tongue interference which does not permit final consonant hence, in order to fit into the phonological pattern of the speaker, he subconsciously applies the process of consonant deletion for simplification of articulation.

4.1.8   Modulation of intonation to enhance emotional impact

Prophet Odumeje often employs overstated intonation patterns to induce strong emotional responses from his audience. His pitch modulations are used to accentuate key points, amplify his usual dramatic approach of speaking, and sustain his audience's commitment. He regularly alternates between rising intonation to pose rhetorical questions and falling intonation to assert his authority or conclude emphatic statements as shown in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 7

I shall be a voice that speak rouder for the Christianity, I shall be a terror that the kingdom of darkness shall fear, everyone can never be preaching love, I am not a man of preacher of love, am a war, I am a fight, I am the indaboski Pahose.

I am not a preacher, I am not a pastor, I am not a father, reverend father, I am a liquid metal, I die many years ago, like my father die 2000 years ago, the almighty Jesus, my father die and lesuleted, that is why he is still alive today, I die too that is why I am a dead man, like father like son.

4.1.9   Vowel Elongation

Key words are often emphasized through the elongation of vowels, as in "Faaaaiiith!" or "Poooower!" or "Waaar!" This technique draws attention to critical parts of his message whilst creating a symbolic image in the minds of the people of how powerful he is. The musical quality of the pitch of his voice captivates the audience' attention and leaves a hypnotic effect on them.

From the forgoing, the phonological features employed by the preacher are used stylistically to achieve rhetorical effects. The following stylistic features are prevalent with his speeches:

4.2   Stylistic Features

This session examines the phonostylistic features employed by the preacher in creating a phonological deviation.

4.2.1   Alliteration and Assonance

Whilst alliteration Repetition of initial consonant sounds, as in phrases like "Powerful Prophet" or "Liquid Leader", adds a poetic rhythm and aids retention, assonance which is the repetition of vowel sounds within phrases, such as "Holy Ghost Control", create a melodious quality.

The following excerpt shows alliteration and assonance:

Excerpt 8

Line 1:   Every **tim** am **tellin** you **toda** abou(t) jezors chrais(t) am **not** confessin **it**

Line 2:   They say Igbo **people** are the **people** that love money, now locate them,

Line 3:   Everi **bodi bollowed** a professor and doctolate an also all dis **bollowed** cerfiticate.

Line 4:   An **conin** out and sayi we are so learne **colli, colli colli** we are docture, as far la dis contri is nor movin forwod, all of us are initrate...

Line 5:   E say I am in **u**, **u** are in me, we are one, wan means u are lay God…

Line 6:   I am a **sikiness killer,** I am a **diseas**e destwoyer

Line 7:   Many **people** have **been** using China to talk tu me…`

Line 8:   he is a **masta plana dan** u,

Line 9:   you **kill it**, nwanne you **kill it**, you did not **kill it**, you are a disappointment.

The data in excerpt 8, line 1-4 shows the repetition of the initial consonants in the words that are embolden such as the repition of the consonant /t/ in line 1, repetition of /p/ in line 2, /b/ in line 3 and /k/ in line 4. This indicates the use of alliteration. Assonance is seen in line 5-9 in the repetition of the sound /u/ in line 5, /ɪ/ in lines 6 and 9, /ɪː/ in 7, and /a/ in line 8. This shows the use of assonance. The preacher also utilizes repetition of words as in line 9, "kill it."

The use of alliteration and assonance create a deliberate approach to handling issues. He uses repetition for emphasis to reinforce his message to address his critics and to ensure that his listeners retain the message. This also leaves a soothing effect on the audience

4.2.2   Sound Symbolism

Odumeje often incorporates Onomatopoeic expression to imitate and dramatize the sounds he describes in his messages and paint a clear picture in the minds of the people. This evokes emotions of excitement, energy, or urgency that makes the message more relatable and easy to remember and also serve as metaphors for spiritual power. He mimics the sound of a drum or explosion to add emphasis and onomatopoeic sound of clapping to engage the audience. Below are examples of onomatopoeia used in his speeches:

Excerpt 9

'Boom, boom, boom!' This imitates the sound of a drum. It adds energy to the message.

Kpa, kpa, kpa! (clapping). This create a lively atmosphere.

Gbim, gbim, gbim! It imitates the sound of hitting laying emphasis on the need to take actions.

Chaku, chaku, chaku! It illustrates cutting ties with negative influences.

The frequent use of sound symbolism devices such as the use of onomatopoeic sounds, alliteration, assonance and repetition contribute to the persuasive and engaging speech style of the charismatic preacher that captivates and impacts his listeners.

4.2.3   Phonological Deviations

Phonological deviation is the deliberate manipulation of sounds to create meaning, convey emotions or emphasis. The preacher uses deliberate mispronunciations by occasionally altering standard pronunciations for comedic or rhetorical effect, creating memorable expressions. For example, he intentionally stresses an unusual syllable to amuse or surprise his audience and at other times, he uses a blend of Nigerian pidgin or his mother tongue. He has a unique idiosyncratic speech like "Indaboski Bahose" that demonstrate creative phonological play, blending sounds in a way that is both unpredictable and captivating. Excerpt 1 shows a deviation from the standard rule of pluralization. Below are more examples in excerpt 10 below:

Excerpt 10

Where did you people come down from? ....eh eh ...

Are you doing doctor?

I can't hear you...

Your fellow man nnah deceived you

Don't jump on my alter, get out everybody, everybody stop touching my flowers

Are you in Ulop?

Are you in Emerica?

This is who I am

I have bring down the dollars

If you don't like me, don't like me.

I am a fight

I am a war

Let me know what is your problem

I am a Holy Ghost pastor and a Holy Ghost prophet.

Something will be making noise kpororo....

I am the liquid metal, the indaboski bahose, the dabus kabah, the rebadu, the supre and the lamande, I am the bitoshe, I am the war himself, I am the fight, I am the battle and I am the liquid metal

From the data above, the emboldened sentences show a deviation from standard English. This foregrounds his unique style of communication. These strategies create a dynamic and engaging speech style that reinforces his charismatic identity and strengthens his connection with his congregants.

Conclusion

Prophet Odumeje's phonological creativity is a vital component of his communicative success. He employs the use of phonological deviations as a deliberate stylistic choice to distinguish himself as a preacher. By foregrounding a pattern of non-standard English, exaggerated application of prosody, and the strategic sound patterns, he breaks the conventional norms and so set a unique pattern for himself. The phonological features are used stylistically to achieve rhetorical effects of emphasis, humour, emotions and engagement with his audience by levseraging on sound patterns. It provides insights into how phonological strategies can be employed to create a unique communicative identity and connect with the audience. It highlights the role of language in shaping the charisma of religious leaders, offering implications for linguistic studies, communication, and religious studies

The findings reveal that Prophet Odumeje's speeches are characterized by frequent code-switching between English, Igbo, and Pidgin English, dramatic intonation patterns that enhance emotional impact, rhythmic repetition and alliteration, which make his messages memorable, phonological exaggerations (e.g., elongation of vowels, consonant strengthening) to emphasize key points, pluralization, substitution, insertion and deletion amongst others.

The sociolinguistic implication of the phonological features engaged by the preacher, served several purposes ranging from audience engagement to identity construction as a charismatic and unconventional religious leader, cultural resonance, exertion of authority and enhancement of the entertainment value of his messages. The phonological creativity makes Prophet Odumeje's speeches a form of linguistic performance that blends spirituality, entertainment, and cultural expression. By undertaking this unique study of prophet Odumeje's speeches, the study looked at how phonological features can be foregrounded creating a deviation from the norm thereby presenting a distinct style. By combining phonological analysis with stylistic and sociocultural perspectives, this study provides a lens for understanding the unique features of his sermons and public speeches.

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