

MINIMALISM: TONE IN IGBO

Eugene Uchechukwu Ejiofor, PhD

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages

Faculty of Humanities

Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil

Kano State

Email: nkegenee@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper reviews the present application of tone in the Igbo language. The review is subjected to the framework of the Chomsky an minimalist programme. It is discovered that tone marking in the Igbo language has not fared better in the study and promotion of the language. This development makes it necessary for us to revisit the application of tone in the Igbo language, especially as it relates to its classification. Hence, this paper acknowledges the roles of tone in the Igbo language and proposes the re-classification of tone in the language as a phonemic feature of vocalic and syllabic nasal segments. This would be against its present classification as a supra-segmental feature. To encourage hands-free usage of the language for better socio-economic activities of its users, the paper also proposes the need to allow the application of tone in the Igbo language to exist only in the phonetic forms of the language.

Introduction

As the title indicates, this paper is about the subjection of the Igbo language to the basic thrust of the Chomskyan minimalist programme (though a syntactic theory). The minimalist programme is a syntactic theory of grammar which believes that grammars are minimally complex, perfect system of optimal design. (Ejiofor 2010). It is introduced by Chomsky (1995, 1998, 2001, 2002) to eliminate all the transformational rules used in Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG), and make syntactic description very simple (by extension, make every grammatical description very simple). The development of the minimalist programme has contributed immensely to the avoidance of complexities in linguistic analyses with its view that language is a perfect system with an optimal design, in the sense that natural language grammars create structures which are designed to interface perfectly with other components of the mind (i.e. speech and thought systems). Carnie (2007 p.355) upholds this view with the claim that "the Minimalist Programme is motivated not only by the search for explanatory adequacy but also for a certain level of formal simplicity and elegance". The minimalist programme ensures that linguistic theory should provide grammar which makes use of the minimal theoretical

apparatus required or that grammar should be as simple as possible. In the words of Nweke (2011, p.15):

The aim of developing this new syntactic analysis is for syntacticians to employ only the minimum apparatus required for the description and accounting for the structure of sentences in all languages. This programme is designed to remove any nonessential and superfluous apparatus which may constitute a problem in syntactic description, and only to make use of the minimum essential apparatus during the analysis. With the latest approach to the study of grammar, the minimalist programme had carefully removed many of the concepts that existed in earlier syntactic theories such as Phrase Structural Grammar, Transformational Generative Grammar and Government and Binding Theory. For example, the concept of surface and deep structure in Transformational Generative Syntax and the concept of D and S structures in GB theory have been eliminated by the Minimalist Programme. All the earlier transformational rules such as Dative Movement Rules, Equivalent Noun Phrase Deletions, Affix Hopping Rules, Reflexivisation Rules, have been screened out from the dictionary of the Minimalist Programme. The concept of case assignment and their governors which is a major aspect of GB theory has been erased by minimalist approach to syntactic analysis.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the major thrust of the minimalist programme is the removal of any technicality in the presentation or analysis of any grammar. There is no doubt that orthographic tone marking of words and grammatical structures in the Igbo language are some of the technicalities that are hindering the progression and promotion of study and documentation in the Igbo language. In this study, we shall review some literature on tone, present and analyze issues relating to the application of tone marks in Igbo, and state the summary and conclusion.

Literature Review

By estimate, about 70% of the world's languages are tonal languages, and more than 1,000 languages in Africa alone are tonal languages. (Yip 2007; Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2011). O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011 p.652) define tone as 'pitch movement in spoken utterances that is related to differences in word meaning'. Katamba (1993, p.29) simply puts it that tone is the 'contrastive use of relative pitch'. Agbedo (2000 p.57-58) puts it this way 'in some other languages, especially African languages, pitch differences are applied to words to distinguish two or more words whose composition in terms of consonants and vowels is the same. Pitch differences used in those ways are called tones, and these languages are known as tone languages. On languages, Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2011, p.596) view a tone language as 'a language in which the tone or pitch on a syllable is phonemic; so that words with identical segments but different tones are different

words'. Yip (2007, p.229) gives his definition of a tone language as "a language is a tone language if the pitch of the word can change the meaning of the word - not just its nuances, but its core meaning", while O' Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011, p.652) say that a tone language is: 'a language in which differences in word meaning are signaled by differences in pitch'. One glaring thing about tone from the above definitions is that tone involves the use of pitch to cause lexical contrasts. This is made clearer with the position of Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2011, p.213) that 'in a tone language, it is not the absolute pitch of the syllables that is important but the relations among the pitches of different syllables' and that 'tones generally have a lexical function, that is, they create differences among words'.

However, apart from its contrastive role on lexical items, tone has been discovered to have some grammatical functions in some languages. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2011, p.213-214) use the following example from the Edo language to illustrate this:

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|------|----|----------------------|------|
| 1. | òtá gbè | èbé | vs | òtá gbé | èbé |
| | Ota write+PRES+TRANS | book | | Ota write+PAST+TRANS | book |
| | 'Ota writes a book' | | | 'Ota wrote a book' | |

Katamba (1993 p.29) also gives a similar example with the following structures:

- | | | | | | |
|----|--------|---------------|----|--------|------------------|
| 2. | àsíiká | 's/he fries' | vs | àsííká | 'one who fries' |
| | àsómá | 's/he reads' | vs | àsómá | 'one who reads' |
| | agóbá | 's/he chases' | | agóbá | 'one who chases' |

The issues on the application of tone in Igbo have been controversial. Recommendation of the Standard Committee of SPILC Volume 1 justifies this with its testimony that 'members of the committee disagreed on the subject'.

Tone and other phonological processes like stress and intonation are classified as prosodies or supra-segmental features. This implies that tone, stress and intonation operate independently of segments. They can undergo changes or be deleted but their changes and deletion do not affect the segments they are associated with. We have assumed that stress is prosody, i.e. it is a phonological element that is not an inherent feature of consonants or vowels but rather a property of the entire word. Hence, it can hop from syllable to syllable when stratum 1 suffixes are added as in [3]:

- | | | |
|----|-----------|-------------|
| 3. | democrat | demo`cratic |
| | pompous | pom`posity |
| | adjective | adjec`tival |

If stress were an integral part of the segments in a syllable, it would not enjoy such mobility and independence.

Tone as a prosodic feature operates independently of its bearing segments. This is acknowledged by Yip (2007 p.235) in'tone is notorious for its independence from the segments on which it is realized ..., and this fact led Goldsmith (1976a) to propose that tone should be represented auto segmentally, on a separate tier from the segments but linked to them by association lines.'

To account for the separate levels of tone and its association with a segment, Goldsmith (1976a, 1990), Clement and Ford (1979),and Pulleyblank (1986) introduced autosegmental phonology. In autosegmental phonology, they termed the syllabic consonant, vowel, mora or syllable that bears tone as Tone Bearing Unit (TBU). On the constraints or rules governing the association of a tone and a segment, Katamba (1993, p.158) cites the Well Formedness Condition (WFC) formulated by some phonologists as illustrated below:

In order to account for the constraints on the linking of elements on various tiers, autosegmental phonology has always incorporated Mapping Principles, which are claimed to be part of Universal Grammar. Mapping principles go under the names of Universal Linking Conventions (Pulleyblank, 1986) and the Well-formedness Condition (Phonotactic) (WFC) (Goldsmith, 1976b, 1990; Clements and Ford, 1979).

The WFC (for tone) is expressed by Goldsmith (1990, p. 319) thus:

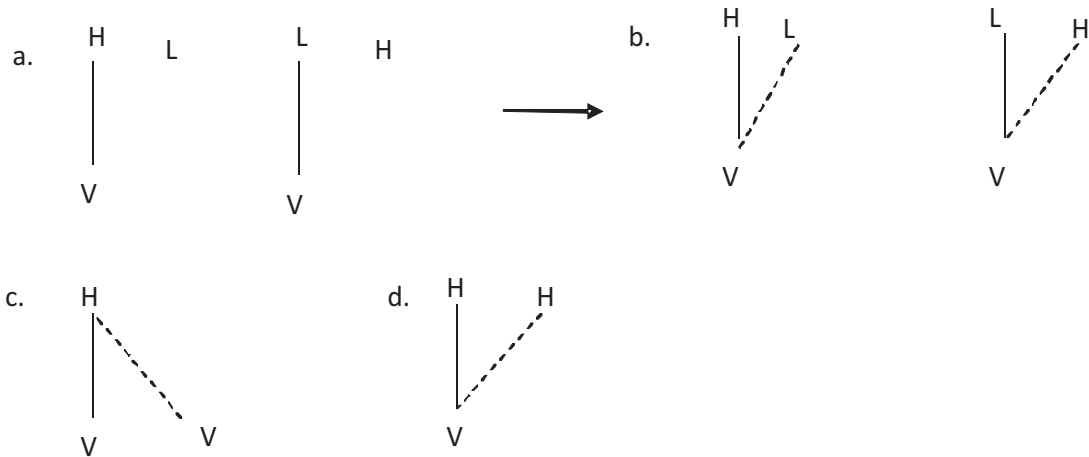
4. a. All vowels are associated with at least one tone
- b. All tones are associated with at least one vowel
- c. Association lines do not cross

This is also stated by Yip (2007 p.236) with the addition of one more condition:

- d. Association proceeds one-to-one, left-to-right.

The above rules lead to the following linear associations of tones and segments:

5.



Issues on Tone Marking in the Igbo language

No doubt, many linguists have in one way or another acknowledged that tone marking in Igbo is problematic. An instance of such acknowledgements is seen in Mbah (2015, p.1), which identifies tone as 'one of the most problematic aspects of the Igbo language teaching and learning'. The challenges posed by tone marking against the speedy development of Igbo language can be well appreciated with the following fact-revealing tables adapted from Mbah (2015):

Table 1.

Year	Category of Student	No. of students	Course IGB 308	No. of Question	No of Question on Tone	No. of Students Who Attempted Questions on Tone
2007	Regular	56		5	1	9
	Sandwich	51		5	1	12
2008	Regular	36		5	1	9
	Sandwich	44		5	1	8
2009	Regular	31		5	1	8
	Sandwich	60		5	1	9
2010	Regular	51		5	1	6
	Sandwich	18		5	1	9
2011	Regular	30		5	1	5
	Sandwich	44		5	1	10

Mbah (2015) uses table 1 to show the distribution of students who attempted questions on tone in the course(s) under review in the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka from 2007-2011. According to the study, examination was chosen because he believed that students prepared themselves well to put in their best in their course of study. For the interest of this study, let us include the percentage of students who attempted questions on tone in the respective years.

Table 2.

Year	Category of Student	No. of students	Course IGB 308	No. of Question	No of Question on Tone	No. of Students Who Attempted Questions on Tone	Percentage of Students Who Attempted Questions on Tone
2007	Regular	56		5	1	9	16 %
	Sandwich	51		5	1	12	24 %
2008	Regular	36		5	1	9	25 %
	Sandwich	44		5	1	8	18 %
2009	Regular	31		5	1	8	26 %
	Sandwich	60		5	1	9	15 %
2010	Regular	51		5	1	6	12 %
	Sandwich	18		5	1	9	50 %
2011	Regular	30		5	1	5	17 %
	Sandwich	44		5	1	10	23 %
						Percentage Average	23% = 20%

Table 2 shows that the average of students who attempted questions on tone marking in ten different examinations for five consecutive years is 20%, which is far below a pass mark. Moreover, Mbah (2015) gives the performance of the students who attempted questions on tone using the table below:

Table 3

Year	Category of Student	No. of students	Course IGB 308	No. of Students Who Attempted Questions on Tone	No. of Students with Pass Grades in Question on Tone	No. of Students with Fail Grades in Question on Tone
2007	Regular	56		9	3	6
	Sandwich	51		12	8	4
2008	Regular	36		9	4	5
	Sandwich	44		8	2	6
2009	Regular	31		8	5	3
	Sandwich	60		9	3	6
2010	Regular	51		6	2	4
	Sandwich	18		9	3	6
2011	Regular	30		5	2	3
	Sandwich	44		10	5	5

Because of the interest of this paper, let us also modify table 3 to table 4.

Table 4.

Year	Category of Student	No. of Students Who Attempted Questions on Tone	No. of Students with Pass Grades in Question on Tone	Percentage of Students with Pass Grades in Question on Tone	No. of Students with Fail Grades in Question on Tone	Percentage of Students with Fail Grades in Question on Tone
2007	Regular	9	3	33%	6	67%
	Sandwich	12	8	67%	4	33%
2008	Regular	9	4	44%	5	56%
	Sandwich	8	2	25%	6	75%
2009	Regular	8	5	63%	3	37%
	Sandwich	9	3	33%	6	67%
2010	Regular	6	2	33%	4	67%
	Sandwich	9	3	33%	6	67%
2011	Regular	5	2	40%	3	60%
	Sandwich	10	5	50%	5	50%
				Average Percentage = 40%		58% = 60%

Apart from the fact that a very low percentage of the students answered questions on tone as shown in tables 1 and 2, the percentage of students who got pass marks on tone is also low (i.e., 40%). This means that even among those who are interested in tone, a greater percentage of them do not have a good command of the application of tone.

Errors in Tone Marking in the Igbo language

Thirty Linguistics/Igbo students of the Imo State University (IMSU) were randomly selected and given the following Igbo words and phrases to tone mark:

i.	ajùjunchụpụta	'questionnaire'
ii.	ntozù nzerè	'qualification'
iii.	isiahụrī	'subject'
iv.	ozururùhà	'popular'
v.	èbù	'wasp'
vi.	àlà	'land'
vii.	èbùàlà	'wasp of the land'
viii.	ụkà	'sunday'
ix.	Èké	'first market day'
x.	ụkàèké	'sunday of eke market day'

It is revealing to note that none of the students was able to score 100%. The few highest scorers scored not more than 60%. It is also interesting to note that none of the students was able to properly tone mark questions iii, vii and x.

Surely, tone marking is technical. Apart from the performances of the students who were asked to tone mark the above-given words and phrases, this paper observed keenly how each of the students spent not less than three minutes to tone mark a word. It took them lots of minutes to hum both the tones of the words they rightly tone marked and the ones they wrongly tone marked. This resulted in lots of cancellations and mutilations on their papers.

The Phonemic State of Tone

Another issue with tone is that it is said to be phonemic. The proponents of the phonemic state of Igbo tone use instances such as the following minimal pairs of words to buttress their claim:

6. a. ákwá - cry	7.a. àkwá - egg
b. ákwà - cloth	b. àkwà - bed
8.. a. élú - high	9.a. úkwù - waist
b. èlù – palm kernel pomade	b. úkwú – big

The differences in tone at the second syllables in examples 6a b, 7a b, 8a b, as well as 9a b respectively result in different words. However, we should be reminded that minimal pairs

are generally used to identify the *phonemes* in a language. For instance, the change of meaning in:

10. a. pin /pin/
- b. sin /sin/

clearly shows that /p/ and /s/ are phonemes in English. This is because their replacements for each other in a word environment result in the realization of two different words in English. Bearing in mind that a phoneme is any contrastive speech sound (symbol), if the change of tones in a word environment as in 6, 7, 8 and 9 above do result in different words, then those tones should be listed among the Igbo phonemes. Hence, we should ordinarily have presented the high tone and the low tone as phonemes in Igbo. But this is not the case. The reasons are not farfetched. Tone is neither a segment nor has any articulatory process; it cannot be realized in isolation just as we can realize /p/ and /s/ in isolation. What then should be the proper state of tone?

Adapting the Merger Principle of the Minimalist Programme

Generally, the true state of tone is controversial. Yip (2007 p. 236) confirms this in with claim that 'it is not always clear whether tones associate to segments, syllables or moras'. This paper is of the view that rather than placing tone as being phonemic, tone should be placed as one of the phonemic features of the Igbo vowels and syllabic nasals. In other words, tone should be seen as a feature of vocalic and syllabic nasal segments. This has become necessary as studies have shown that tone in Igbo is not operating independently of the vowels and syllabic nasals, which is a very important feature of suprasegmentals/prosodies. In other words, the application of tone in Igbo is different from the application of tone in other languages where tone is really operating independently of the segments. Some examples of such languages and the independent operation of tone can be appreciated from the following extract:

In Chilungu [Bantu] (Bickmore 1996), there is unbounded H spread from the infinitival prefix /ku-/ to all except the last syllable of the verb. ... In Shona (Odden 1984, Downing 2003a) segments reduplicate but tones do not. In Chizigula [Bantu] (Kenstowicz and Kisseberth 1990), H tone migrates from the verb root to the penultimate syllable of the word. It may thus end up three or more syllables away from its source. ... a tone may spread onto a span of toneless syllables, or onto a neighboring toned syllable to create a contour, or it may assimilate to or dissimilate from an adjacent tone. Yip (2007 p.236-237).

In the above, we can see the free movement of the high tone (H) in Bantu languages like Chilungu and Chizigula. H moves from any syllable and falls at any syllable without affecting the segments. We can also take note of the ability of tone to reduplicate in some languages like Shona, as well as the claim by Yip that tone may spread onto a span of

toneless syllables or onto a neighbouring toned syllable to create a contour extract. Yip also believes that tone may assimilate to or dissimilate from an adjacent tone. The Igbo language has nothing like a toneless syllable, and of course, does not operate tone in any of the above supra-segmental manners. Hence, it should not be grouped accordingly. Agbedo (2000, p.58) may have confirmed this in his distinction of the operation of prosodies (exemplified with intonation) from that of Igbo tone in the following: "the difference between the two uses of pitch features derive from the fact that in intonation languages (like English), pitch sequences are the property of sentences and parts of sentence wherein the lexical content of a sentence does not affect the pitch sequences. In tone languages whereby the pitch levels or the rising and falling pitches are properties of the words as lexical items, the substitution of a different word in a sentence may change the pitch sequence, if the two words concerned are different in tonal composition".

Tone plays a great role in Igbo. For instance, the role of tone in the following constructions adapted from Obiamalu (2013 pp.21-22) can never be over-emphasized:

11. a. ɸ ya è-li nniɸ
 3SANTNOM-eat food
 'S/He will eat food'
- b. ɸ ya e-li nnī.
 3SANT.NEGNOM-eat food
 'S/He will not eat'
12. a. ɸ ya è-be ɸɸà`
 3SANTNOM-cry cry
 'S/He will cry'
- b. ɸ ya e-be ɸɸà`
 3SANT.NEG NOM-cry cry
 'S/He will not cry'

The structures in 11 (a and b) and 12 (a and b) could not have been differentiated from each other, if not for tone. In 11 (a and b), it is the change from a high tone on the anticipative marker 'ya' and the nominalizing prefix 'e-' to low tones that results in two different structures - affirmative (S/He will eat food) and negative (S/He will not eat food). Similarly, the change from affirmative (S/He will cry) to negative (S/He will not cry) in 12 (a and b) is as a result of the change from high to low tone on the anticipative marker 'ya' and the nominalizing prefix 'e-'. But for the change of tones, the structures would have been one. However, in view of the spirit of this paper which is 'minimalizing' the technicalities involved in tone marking in Igbo, there is a great need to modify the application of tone marking in Igbo for better appreciation of the roles of tone in the language.

As earlier stated, while tone can bring about a change in the meaning of a word, it is not classified as a phoneme because it cannot be realized in isolation like every other

phoneme. To solve this problem of the floating state of tone, a tone should not be separated from the Igbo phonemes. In other words, the use of tone as a supra-segmental feature should be re-visited. Tone should not be seen as being supra-imposed on syllables; it should rather be seen as a distinctive feature of a phoneme. That is, as the tone is applied to vowels and syllabic nasals; and as there is nothing like a toneless vowel, every vowel and syllabic nasal in Igbo should be accompanied by a specific tone. This will lead to the increase of the Igbo vowels from the present eight:

/i I e a u o u/ to twenty-four: /í ì ï ð Ì Ì é è ẽ ù ù ù ó ó o ɔ ɔ ù ù ù ù ù ù ù ù

It will also increase the bilabial nasal from one to four: / m m̄ m̄ m̄

And alveolar nasal from one to four: / n n̄ n̄ n̄.

This will make it easier not only in the application of tone, but also simplify the learning of tone by the L2 learners of Igbo. The proposal will make it easier for the learners of Igbo to unconsciously learn and register the application of tone while learning the sound inventory (phonemes) of Igbo. Logically, this will not necessarily be a new approach to the teaching and learning of the Igbo language sound system. Phonetics and phonology teachers of Igbo have been unconsciously and partially teaching the Igbo phonemes with tone. There is no way a teacher can teach and pronounce, for instance, /ɔ/ without realizing it with a tone (i.e. either as /ɔ́/, /ɔ̀/ or /ɔ̄/). However, the new thing about it is that tone, which is presently not being emphasized and indicated in the description of Igbo phonemes, will be given attention.

The implication of the Merger

No doubt, the above proposal must have raised a question on the difference between the present state of tone and its merger with the phonemes. 'What has actually been minimalized?' The merger in 11 (a, b) and 12 (a, b) will still be realized as:

13. a. ɔ́ yà è-línnī̄. 3SANT NOM-eat food 'S/He will eat food'	b. ɔ́ yá 3SANT.NEG NOM-eat food 'S/He will not eat'
14. a. ɔ́ yà è-bé ɔ́rɔ̀. 3SANT NOM-cry cry 'S/He will cry'	b. ɔ́ yá é-bé ɔ́rɔ̀. 3SANT.NEG NOM-cry cry 'S/He will not cry'

The merger of tone and phoneme would deystify the ambiguities surrounding the understanding of tone in Igbo. Merging tone and phonemes would enable the learners of Igbo to learn the various realizations of tone at the point of learning the sound systems of the language. No doubt, the present system of learning the sound systems and later going for learning tone is distractive and complicated. For instance, it will be easier for a learner of the language who has acquired /m̄ n̄ ē á/ at the point of learning the sound inventory of

Igbo to produce /m̀m̀ékàngwáá/ than a learner who learnt /m n e a a/ and later learnt tone. While the latter would need to hum the syllables of the word before placing the tone marks (which would likely be subjective), the learner of the merged phoneme/tone would simply coin the word with already acquired and assimilated speech sounds.

Proposed Orthographic Representation of the Merger

The merging proposal proffered by this paper would be more injurious to the language if the statuesque orthographic representation of tone marks were to be maintained. The injury can easily be noticed by comparing examples 11 and 12 as adapted from Obiamalu (2013 pp.21-22) and 13 and 14 as realized from the merger principle.

The comparison shows that the high tones that are left unmarked in 11 and 12 are forced to be marked in 13 and 14, which results in more tone marks in 13 and 14. The compulsion in the placement of high tones in 13 and 14 is a result of the fact that each of the vocalic phonemes in them is glued to a tone. This brings to the limelight the un-popular use of 'orthographic phonemes' in Igbo. That is, non-separation of the Igbo orthography from the Igbo phonemes. As this paper is advocating for the merger of phonemes and tone, it is also calling for the separation of the phonemes from the orthography. This will give room for the flexibility of phonemes and their orthographic representations as will be discussed later in the course of this paper.

In view of the difference between the orthography and the phonemes, the merged tone and phoneme should be made to exist only in the phonetic form. This will give room for the non-placement of tone marks in the orthographic forms. For instance, with the removal of tone marks in the orthographic representation, the structures adapted from Obiamalu (2013 p.21-22) will be realized as follows:

15.a. ⁱ ụ ya e-li nni. 3SANTNOM-eat food 'S/He will eat food'	15.a. ⁱⁱ ./újà è-línnĩ/
b. ⁱ ụ ya e-li nni. 3SANT.NEG NOM-eat food 'S/He will not eat'	b. ⁱⁱ ./újá é-línnĩ/
16.a. ⁱ ụ yae-be ụrụ 3SANTNOM-cry cry 'S/He will cry'	16.a. ⁱⁱ ./újà è-béúrụ/
b. ⁱⁱ ụ ya e-be ụrụ 3SANT.NEG NOM-cry cry 'S/He will not cry'	b. ⁱⁱ ./újá é-béúrụ/

Structures 15 and 16 show the removal of the technicalities involved in the tone marking of structures 11 and 12. However, the removal of tone marks in the orthographic forms does

not in any way affect the realization of those structures. The only difference is that while the reader still applies the right pitch during the pronunciations of those structures, the writer is relieved of the technicalities and subjectivity of tone marking the structures. Moreover, this paper is mindful of the fact that the established tone rules, especially the associative tones, should consequently be merged with the phonological rules of Igbo. [[[

On how the reader would be able to identify the right pitch to use, the pitch can be determined by the dialect and the context of discourse. On dialect of discourse for instance, while the structures in 15 and 16 are not found among the Orlu dialect users, they do exist in the Nnewi dialect, as stated in Obiamalu (2013). That is, while an Orlu dialect user will find it very difficult in realizing those structures, an Nnewi dialect user can easily realize them. Hence, an Nnewi dialect user can differentiate structure 15 from structure 16 based on the context in which they are used. An Nnewi dialect user does not need tone marks to know the different uses of "ụ ya e-li nni" in the following dialogue: (please note that the dialect of discourse may not completely be Nnewi)

Speaker A¹: I nwereikeikụwa ma Emeka ụ ya e-li nni tupo o jebeụkaụ

Speaker B¹: mba, ụ ya e-li nni tupo o jebeụka.

Speaker A²: mana ụ ya e-li nni n'ụtụtụ aụ

Speaker B²: Ee, ụ ya e-li nni n'ụtụtụ a.

We have 'ụ ya e-li nni' in the four different utterances of the two speakers (A and B). However, no (Nnewi) reader of the short dialogue will ever have any problem in applying the right pitch (tone) on the different uses of 'ụ ya e-li nni'. While the two uses of 'ụ ya e-li nni' by speaker 'A' have one question structure but different meanings (based on the Nnewi dialect), the two uses of 'ụ ya e-li nni' by speaker 'B' means two different things as well, and are consequently realized differently. While the first use of 'ụ ya e-li nni' by speaker 'A' is asking, "Will Emeka eat food"; its second use by the speaker is asking in negation, "Won't Emeka eat food". Similarly, while the first use of 'ụ ya e-li nni' by speaker 'B' is a negation, its second use is an affirmation. That is, while the first use of 'ụ ya e-li nni' by speaker 'B' means "Emeka will not eat food", the second use means "Emeka will eat food". Hence, the position of this paper is that, as the reader can read and understand the above dialogue without any reference to the application of tone marks, the application of tone marks should be left with the phonetic transcriptions of those structures for purposes of analysis and referencing as shown below.

Speaker A ¹ :Emeka ụ ya e-li nni	/éméká ụjá è-lí nniụ	"Will Emeka eat food"
Speaker B ¹ : ... ụ ya e-li nni	/ụjá-lí nniụ	"Emeka will not eat food"
Speaker A ² : ... ụ ya e-li nni	/ụjá é-lí nniụ	"Won't Emeka eat food"
Speaker B ² : ... ụ ya e-li nni	/ụjá è-lí nniụ	"Emeka will eat food"

Summary and Conclusion

This paper reviews different literature on the meaning of tone and tone language. It also discusses some issues on tone marking in the Igbo language; investigates some technicalities in the application of tone marks in the Igbo language; and makes propositions for the merger of Igbo tones with vowels and syllabic consonants. It also calls for the application of tone marks only in the phonetic transcriptions as a phonological rule.

Moreover, this paper is of the view that if the above propositions are to be adopted in line with the principle of the Minimalist Programme, the present technicalities that are preventing the speedy development of the language will be forgotten. That is to say that the gap between Igbo and other developed languages like English and French will be bridged.

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