

## ASPECTS OF THE PHONOLOGY OF ÌYÀYÚ DIALECT IN ÌDÓ-ÀNÍ, ONDO STATE

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### Abstract

This study examined the phonological structure of Ìyàyú in Ìdó-Àní, Òsé Local Government Area of Oṅdó State. Ìdó-Àní is made up of six quarters which are Ìyàyú, Àmùsìgbò, Àkò, Ìsèwà, Ìsùré and Òwáàní. Iyayu belongs to Edoid family, a sub-group of North Western Edoid, while other five quarters are mutually intelligible, with close affinity with Yoruba Language. The population of the study comprised all adults of 60 years and above who are native speakers of the dialect in the town. Thirty (30) elderly natives, male and female, were randomly selected for the study. The study investigated Ìyàyú dialect spoken in Ìyàyú quarter. Specifically, the study examined the sound systems of Ìyàyú dialect and three phonological processes in the dialect which are labialization, nasalization and vowel harmony. Data were collected from 30 elderly native speakers of 60 years and above, using the adapted 1700 Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) word list as the instrument. Qualitative analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The analysis revealed that there are twenty-three (23) consonants, seven (7) oral vowels and five (5) nasal vowels in Ìyàyú dialect unlike other neighbourhood speech forms; that the dialect does not permit consonant cluster and does not allow consonant word final. Also, it was revealed that nouns in Iyayu dialect are vowel initials and verbs are consonant initials, V and CV are syllabic structures in the dialect. The study shows that labialization process in the dialect occurs through assimilation of the feature [+ round], and that nasality bearing vowel is deleted alongside with its nasal feature, among others.

**Keywords:** Consonant, Dialect, Phonology, Phonetics, Phonological Processes.

### Introduction

Ìdó-Àní is located within a Yorùbá speaking state in Oṅdó State. The community, according to Ìkòtún and Sòyoyè (2002), is made up of six quarters which are: Ìyàyú, Amùsìgbó, Àkò, Ìsèwà, Ìsùré and Òwáàní. The dialects spoken in each quarter is known by the name of the quarter; that is, Ìyàyú quarter speaks Ìyàyú, Amùsìgbó quarter speaks Amùsìgbó and Àkò speaks Àkò in that order. Each quarter claims that it speaks a dialect that is distinct from the other quarters.

However, the researchers observe that the language spoken in five of the quarters are mutually intelligible and are also mutually intelligible with Yorùbá language while Ìyàyú quarter speaks a dialect that is not mutually intelligible with the ones spoken in the other quarters. Mutual intelligibility is a test used by linguists to decide whether two linguistic communities speak different languages or different dialects of the same language, (Arokoyo, 2007).

Ìdóàní is one of the towns in Ọ̀sẹ́ local government area of Oñdó State with its headquarters in Ifón which is made up of Ọ̀kẹ̀lùsẹ́, Ìjàngbà, Imòrú, Uté, Ifón in the north and Ìdó-àní, Ìdógún, and Ìmerì in the south. The major activities of this region are yam, cocoa and plantain farming. It has an area of 1,465 km and a population of 144,901 as at 2006 census, (everipedia.org/wiki/ose%2c-Nigeria). The town is a conglomeration of many ethnic groups. Visits to Ìdó-àní revealed that each of the communities has about two speech forms in their linguistic repertoire. Thus, Ìkòtún (2006) reported that the codes that are in use in the community (Ìdó-Àní) include standard Yorùbá, Amùsìgbó and Ìyàyú. He also stated that there is mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and Amùsìgbó, but that there is no mutual intelligibility between Yorùbá and Ìyàyú because Ìyàyú is a different speech form. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that these different groups came together in the course of their migration. This suggests that their speech forms must have been influenced by their previous locations or due to the proximity of the languages in their present location.

According to oral narration, Ìyàyú people migrated from Sósan, a town in the Àkókó South-East Local Government area of Oñdó State to Ìdó-àní about four hundred years ago. Ìkòtún and Sóyoyè (2002) also reported that Ìsùrẹ́ people migrated from Ifẹ́ and settled at the present location in 1921; Àkò people who formerly lived in Ọ̀wákẹ́ moved to their present site which now forms part of Ìdó-àní town. In addition, Ọ̀wáàní people claimed to have migrated from Benin about three hundred years ago and that in 1920, they finally settled at the present location. Also, the Ìsẹ̀wà people, another quarter in Ìdó-àní, are said to have left Benin many years ago and had stayed in different places before they finally settled down at the present location called Ìsẹ̀wà in the year 1950.

Among these communities, Ìyàyú, as reported by Ìkòtún (ibid), seems to be a community with distinct dialect/code. Other quarters speak dialects that are mutually intelligible and can be regarded as dialects of Yorùbá Language. The lexical items presented below show how close the other speech forms are, and how different Ìyàyú is.

S/N	Ìyàyú	Amùsìgbó	Àkò	Ìsẹ̀wà	Ìsùrẹ́	Ọ̀wáàni	Gloss
1.	ùpẹ	ɔdũ	ɔdũ	ɔdũ	ɔdũ	ɔdũ	festival
2.	okì	ɔdʒà	ɔdʒà	ɔdʒà	ɔdʒà	ɔdʒà	market
3.	usoso	ugbó	ugbó	ugbó	ugbó	ugbó	forest
4.	ogù	ɔfɔɔ	eku	èkúté	èkúté	èkútélé	rat
5.	ofòfò	ɛfũ	fũfũ	ɛfũ	ɛfũ	ɛfũ	white
6.	odʒò	edʒi	edʒi	edʒi	edʒi	edʒi	rain
7.	ɔwàsì	ɔkùrĩ	ɔkùrĩ	ɔkùrĩ	ɔkùrĩ	ɔkùrĩ	man
8.	edè	ńdʒɛ	odʒídʒɛ	oódʒɛ	oũdʒɛ	oũdʒɛ	food
9.	isédò	ohú	odʒú	odʒú	odʒú	ohú	eye
10.	ofèfè	òjì	òjì	afèfè	afèfè	òjì	air

Communities in Nigeria are regarded as multilingual communities because there is no community where its people speak less than two languages. Supporting this, Babátundé (1997) notes that most West African countries are clear examples of multilingual societies and that most educated Nigerians speak more than two languages. Ìdó-àní is not an exception to this observation because each of the six ethnic groups

in the community has its own speech form. Apart from the indigenous speech forms of each of the groups, there are other speech forms that are in use by a small group, mainly educated people within the community. These include English, Yorùbá and Pidgin, which are commonly used in the marketplace, ceremonial occasions, worship centres, public functions to mention a few.

In most of the official and formal

gatherings, such as schools, entertainment arena, religion centres, English and Yorùbá languages are the most dominant codes. Ìyàyú is mostly used in informal education as a way of indoctrinating the young ones into the values and ethics of the speech community. It also serves as means of instruction at home. Forsocio-cultural activities, Qláiyá (2012) listed some of the Ìyàyú traditional festivals to include Ujógbó or Ughòghò festival, and Ìgwùlè among others. Presently, the dialect is used without code-mixing by native speakers who are over sixty (60) years of age and above while most natives below the age range usually code mix or code switch with English, Pidgin and Yorùbá languages. This shows that there is a gradual loss of the native lexicons that ought to be transmitted to the younger ones and preserved for future generations.

The younger ones in the speech community have been influenced by western education and can no longer speak the language without code-mixing with Yorùbá or English language. Also, Yorùbá and English are more frequently spoken in social gatherings and any other important formal meetings such as schools and religious centres. All these suggest that Ìyàyú is an endangered language. However, there seems to be little or no research work on the grammatical structure of the dialect due to apparently insufficient focus. In addition, the phonological processes of the dialect seem not to have been adequately documented. This research work therefore, investigated the phonological analysis of Ìyàyú dialect. The study described the sound system and the phonological processes that are in operation in Ìyàyú dialect, spoken in one of the six quarters of Ìdó-Àní in Òsé Local Government Area of Òndó State.

### **Objectives**

The aim of this study was to investigate the phonological aspects of Iyayu dialect. Specifically, the research:

- i. identified the sound systems of Ìyàyú dialect, and
- ii. examined the various phonological processes in Ìyàyú dialect;

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were

raised to guide the study:

- i. What are the sound systems of Ìyàyú dialect?
- ii. What are the various phonological processes present in Ìyàyú dialect?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research work is based on two theories of phonology. They are Generative Phonology (GP) and Autosegmental Phonology (AP). GP theory was propounded by Chomsky in 1956 and the AP theory was propounded by Goldsmith in 1976. Generative phonology accounts for the principles determining the pronunciation of words, phrases and sentences of a language, and to what extent are those principles derived from more general principles determining the organization in respect of all human languages. In his contribution, Halima (2025) reports that Generative Phonology theory is based on the assignment of accurate phonetic representations to utterances as a reflection of native speakers' internalized grammar. Generative Phonology was therefore adopted to account for segmental features in the phonological analysis of the language, which is a theory that captures the interaction of sounds as contained in the mental system of the native speakers of a language while Autosegmental Phonology was adopted to account for suprasegmental features such as tone, nasality and vowel harmony in the dialect.

### **Literature Review**

A dialect is a sub-set of a language. Thus, Barnabas and Utibe (2024) summarise a dialect to be a variety of a language which could be unwritten or non-standard forms of speech associated with the people lacking prestige or formal education and culturally subordinated to other groups. Available literature on the three phonological processes of interest to this study is presented below:

### **Labialisation**

Labialisation is a phonological process that has to do with the acquisition of lip-rounding by a consonant in specific environment. Abíódún (2010) observes that labialization occurs when a consonant that is produced without lip rounding becomes rounded due to the influence of a rounded vowel, mostly 'u' after it. He explains that the

process involves the super-imposition of lip rounding on a non-rounded consonant. Abiódún (2010) has shown that labialization occurs in Èbirà

and Ukaan. Labialized consonants are normally represented with superscript (<sup>w</sup>) on the relevant segment e.g (k<sup>w</sup>ik) ‘quick’.

Below are examples of labialized words in Èbirà as presented in Abiódún, (2010:52):

tu	→	ɛvʷ	t <sup>w</sup> ɛvʷ	‘to beat a goat’
tu	→	ozí	t <sup>w</sup> ozí	‘to beat a child’
hu	→	ècè	h <sup>w</sup> ècè	‘to drink wine’
du	→	ɛvú	d <sup>w</sup> ɛvú	‘to chase a goat’
du	→	àzà	d <sup>w</sup> àzà	‘to chase people’

### Nasalisation

Nasalisation is a phonological process that indicates the acquisition of nasality by an oral segment, normally in the environment of a nasal segment. Abiódún (2010) observes that an oral phoneme may acquire nasality and thereby become nasalized in the environment of a nasal segment. He noted that it is common in most Nigerian languages for oral vowels to become nasalized when they occur after a nasal consonant, and that such acquisition of nasality is called vowel nasalization. Also, Yul-Ifode (1999) also remarks that in some languages, nasalization of vowels may be regressive, while in a few others, it is both progressive and regressive. In the latter case, the author notes that vowels may be nasalized before and after a nasal consonant. For instance, in Odual, vowels are nasalized before and after nasal consonants. Consider the following examples:

/ɛmu/	‘head’	[ɛ̃mũ]
/onom/	‘to bite’	[õnõm]

In the above examples of vowel nasalization, assimilation is contiguous, working over two segments, a nasal and vowel next to each other in string. Scholars like Fadoro (2013), Owóyelé (2016) and Aina-Adebayo (2025) have observed the manifestation of nasalization in Akoko, Ûhànmi and Ûkwè and Moba and Ado dialects respectively. Yul-Ifode (1999) also observes that in some languages, consonants are the only nasal segments while vowels are always oral. He however noted that when such vowels occur after the nasal consonants, the vowels take on the nasal quality of the consonant and cited the following examples from Igbo language where vowels after nasal consonants are nasalized:

imi	→	imĩ	‘nose’
íné	→	íně	‘mother’
áná	→	ánã	‘eye’
ànó	→	ànõ	‘four’

The above examples show progressive assimilation. Nasalization of vowels may be regressive while in a few cases, it is both progressive and regressive.

### Vowel Harmony

This is a phonological process by which vowels co-occur or align based on shared phonological features. Abiódún (2010), reports that vowel harmony is a feature of African languages. He defines vowel harmony as a phonological phenomenon in which a span of vowels within a derived or underived word exhibits a single value for some phonological

(vowel) feature which may relate to height, roundness, retracted tongue root. Also, Bakovic in Mabaso (2013) defines vowel harmony as a process by which vowels in adjacent syllables in some domain (typically a word) agree with each other in terms of some distinctive feature(s).

Abiódún (1991) explains that a language is said to operate full vowel harmony system where vowels in one set are not found in any other

sets. He notes that in languages like Ìgbò, Èbìrà, Igede and others, both underived or root words and those derived through affixation obey vowel harmony rule. Also, partial or incomplete vowel harmony is in operation when the vowels in a language fall into two or more harmonic sets with overlaps, that is, the same vowels are found in the different harmonic sets.

### **Tone**

Tone is the use of pitch in language to distinguish lexical or grammatical meaning. The language under study uses pitch to express emotional and other paralinguistic information and convey emphasis and contrast. It is not all languages that use tone to distinguish words or their inflections. Languages that do have these features are called tonal languages and the distinctive tone pattern of such a language is sometimes called toneme.

Many language scholars have worked on tone and tone languages. Among them are Abíódún and Ajíbóyè, (2008), Yip (2002), and Abíódún (2010 revised). According to Iloene (2010), tone is the pitch by which a sound is made and that tone is mostly a feature of the syllabic vowels. Aziza (2010) also notes that Ùrhòbò has two basic tones, namely, the low (L) tone and the high (H) tone. The author however pointed out that there is also a third pitch which is called a down-stepped high tone (‘H). The down-stepped high tone is found only after the high tone and that there are also two gliding tones (HL) falling and (LH) rising but they are sequences of the basic tones found in some grammatical contexts. In his contribution, Olúmúyiwá (1997) reports that the domain of tone is the syllable, even though it is indicated on vowels and can also be indicated on syllabic consonant in Yorùbá. He gives the following example: **ó ù ló** ‘he is going’.

The foregoing review, several scholars have worked on phonological analysis of different languages and dialects which are helpful since they deepen the researcher’s understanding of phonetics and phonology required for the analysis of Ìyàyú data. As there seems to be no research work that has been carried out on the grammar of the speech form, despite the fact that phonological analysis of some neighbouring towns have been

carried out.

Different studies have been conducted by linguistics scholars on Ìdó-àní, Edoid family language, dialects and phonology. Among the scholars are Ìkòtún (2006) who conducts research on code-mixing and linguistic borrowing in Yorùbá, of which Ìdó-àní is a part; Arokoyo (2007) carries out a study on the phonology of the Okun dialects, Oláiyá (2012) studies Oríkì of Ìdó-àní. Clopper (2021) works on perception of dialect variation, Oladeji (2024) investigates a comparative study of focus construction in Moba and Majee dialects of Yoruba language, Olawuyi (2024) who works on intra-dialectal phonological variations in the Igbomina dialect of Yoruba, Aturamu (2024) studies deletion and assimilation processes in three selected Yoruba dialects and Arowosegbe (2025) works on the role of Yoruba dialects in selected Yoruba novels, among others.

However, a close observation of previous studies reveals that none of the researchers has worked on the phonology of Ìyàyú dialect. Thus, there seems to be little or no empirical studies to preserve this dialect for future generations that can lead to extinction. Therefore, the present study investigates the phonological processes and the sound systems of Ìyàyú dialect.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this study is a survey type. The instrument for data gathering is the adapted 1700 wordlist of the Summer Institutes of Linguistics (SIL), Dallas Texas. This adapted wordlist was used to elicit data from the native speakers of the language. The researchers modified the original word list to reflect the local environment and the culture of the people so as to get adequate data on the dialect. Phrases and sentences were also formed by the researchers while the informants of the languages under study were asked to pronounce them in their native (Ìyàyú) dialect.

For data gathering, interviews were conducted in the speech community (Ìyàyú) using the adapted instrument on elders whose ages are 60 years and above. Thirty (30) elders from the speech community, including male and female, were randomly selected and interviewed using the adapted wordlist. The old native speakers were

selected because they speak pure Ìyàyú dialect than the young generations who always code-mix with English language. Techno ipad 10D phone was used to record the data. The device automatically saves each recording and allows easy play back. This affords the researchers the opportunity to listen to the recorded interview and

transcribe appropriately in the course of transcription and analysis.

Also the researchers made use of materials in libraries in some universities that offer courses in Linguistics and Nigerian languages. The internet was also accessed for relevant information on the research work.

## Data Analysis

### Sound Systems of Ìyàyú Dialect

This section presents the sound inventory of Ìyàyú dialect. It also presents the distribution of consonants, vowels and the structure of the syllable of the dialect.

### The Consonant Systems of Ìyàyú

A close study of the consonant system of the dialect reveals that there are twenty-three (23) phonetic consonant sounds in Ìyàyú. The consonants are presented in the chart below:

**Table 1: Consonant Chart of Ìyàyú dialect**

Place/ Manner	Bilabial	Labio- Dental	Alveolar	Palatal Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labia- Velar	Labia- lised Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			k g	kp gb	k <sup>w</sup> g <sup>w</sup>	
Nasal	m		n						
Fricative		f v	s z			j			h
Affricate				ɟʒ					
Lateral			l						
Trill			r						
Approximant					y	w			

The consonants attested in the dialect can occur in two different positions. They can occur in word-initial position and word-medial position. Some of the consonants in table 1 above are illustrated in the real life usage of the native speakers below:

### [b]: voiced bilabial plosive

	Ìyàyú	
Word initial	bi	'oil'
	bàtà	'shoe'
	buè	'cut'
Word medial	èbelá	'cow'
	òbòmì	'lizard'
	òbá	'hand'

**[p]: voiceless bilabial plosive**

	<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
Word initial	pabò	‘clap’
Word medial	ùpè	‘festival’
	àpamá	‘purse’
	úpó	‘river’

**[d]: voiced alveolar plosive**

	<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
Word medial	ɔde	‘hunter’
	odódé	‘path’
	oódã	‘one’
	ededukùmã	‘tax’

**[t]: voiceless alveolar plosive**

	<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
Word medial	títóì	‘squeeze’
	etànì	‘fire’
	etìní	‘fish’
	ótà	‘God’
	iteminã	‘breath’

**[g]: voiced velar plosive**

	<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
Word medial	digògò	‘stagger’
	idìgò	‘pant’
	ogù	‘rat’
	àlégù	‘ladder’

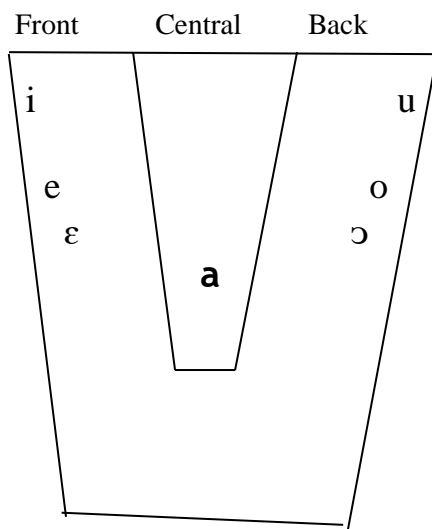
**[g<sup>w</sup>]: voiced labialized velar plosive**

	<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
	g <sup>w</sup> ù	‘die’
	ɖɔg <sup>w</sup> ù	‘eat rat’
	eég <sup>w</sup> ú	‘fence’

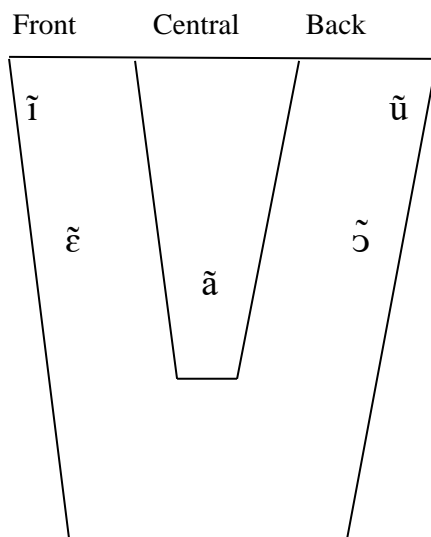
### The Vowel System of Ìyàyú

Ìyàyú dialect manifests seven (7) oral vowels (which are: i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, a) and five (5) nasal vowels, (which are ã, õ, ẽ, ẽ̃, ã̃) as presented in the chart below:

#### Oral Vowel Chart of Ìyàyú



#### Nasal Vowel Chart of Ìyàyú



Some of the vowels are further described and exemplified in actual words below:

**[i]: close front unrounded oral vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
abiyá	‘armpit’
ibìà	‘fat’
idigò	‘pant’

**[e]: half closed front unrounded oral vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
ekè	‘clay’
eégū	‘fence’
édè	‘tick (of dog)’

**[ɛ]: half open front unrounded oral vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
ésèní	‘five’
enàmí	‘goat’
ekpé	‘lion’

**[ĩ]: close front unrounded nasal vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
etĩní	‘fish’
ĩtā	‘house fly’
mĩnā	‘see’

**[ɛ̃]: half open front unrounded nasal vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
kanākē	dig
bisē	‘lie (down)’
akē	‘mud’

**[ã]: mid open unrounded nasal vowel**

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	
kāní	‘fight’
etāní	‘fire’
etānífetāní	‘fire wood’

From the above presentation, it can be observed that all vowels occur freely at the word initial, medial and final positions including nasal vowels.

**The Syllable Structure of Ìyàyú Dialect**

Hornby (2015) defines syllable as any of the units into which a word is divided, containing a vowel sound and usually one or more consonants. According to Olúmúyíwá (1997), a syllable is described as an intermediate level of phonological organization. By this, the author means a level that is intermediate between individual segmental units – consonants and vowels – and their combination into words. Generally, the syllable consists of two major divisions. These are rhyme and coda. A close observation of the dialect reveals that two of the syllable structures listed below are attested. They are:

- V - a vowel
- CV - consonant + vowel

The syllable structures of Ìyàyú are presented below in actual word in the speech, among others.

<b>Ìyàyú</b>	<b>Syllable Structure</b>	<b>English</b>
e-sɔ	V-CV	‘ear’
yɔ-ɔ	CV-V	‘go’
bi-à	CV-V	‘to born’
da-vĩ	CV-CV	‘at home’
kè-yɔ	CV-CV	‘don’t go’
o-tù-nũ	V-CV-CV	‘in-law’
ò-wò-rò	V-CV-CV	‘crab’
e-ti-nĩ	V-CV-CV	‘fish’



- i. a progressive spread of the nasal feature to the right.
- ii. that the nasal feature is deleted across the word boundary in verb + noun construction in Ìyàyú dialect.
- iii. nasality spread progressively from left to the right within a syllable; and
- iv. when nasality bearing vowel is deleted, it gets deleted along with its nasality feature.

### Vowel Harmony

The analysis of the data collected does not exhibit vowel harmony system as the dialect appears to have lost restrictions in vowel co-occurrence.

Examples are:

Ìyàyú		Ìyàyú	
ovɔ̃	‘sun’	ejè	‘blood’
ekě	‘clay’	edè	‘food’
bonɔ̃	‘sew’	oobɔ̃	‘hand’
ókà	‘heart’	tówɔ̃	‘greet’
ótà	‘God’	béri	‘grave’

The data above reveals that there is no restriction in the co-occurrence of vowels in VCV and VCVC word structures because the language operates a full vowel harmony system.

From the analysis, it is reported that the dialect does not operate any harmonic system in respect to either  $\pm$  ATR, +/- high, +/- back, +/- tense, and +/- round.

However, there appears to be a few restrictions in the co-occurrence of vowels in the dialect. For instance, vowel [i] cannot co-occur as vowel initial with vowel [u] in a ‘vcv’ vowel structure. Also, vowel [ɔ̃] cannot co-occur as initial vowel with vowels [e] or [o] in a ‘vcv’ structure. This implies that such structure as stated below is not acceptable in Ìyàyú dialect:

V <sub>1</sub>	C	V <sub>2</sub> :
	i - C - u	
	ɔ̃ - C - e	
	ɔ̃ - C - o	

The restrictions observed in the data above suggest that there is possibly a vowel harmony system in the diachronic form of the dialect. However, the harmony restriction has been eroded in its present form. The few restrictions observed are likely to be traces of the previous existence of vowel harmony in the language.

### Systematic Phonetic Tones in Ìyàyú

A careful examination of Ìyàyú dialect systematic phonetic level reveals that the dialect has high, low and mid tones.

- i. The high tone is realized phonetically in Ìyàyú dialect. It can be found in word initial, medial and final positions as shown in the following examples.

Word initial	Word Medial	Word Final
úbù ‘boundary’	aátu ‘antelope’	odúdú ‘baby’
áfè ‘birds’	eéí ‘elephant’	aká ‘eagle’
‘cock crow’	béri ‘grave’	óhò
édè ‘dog’s tick’	eéni ‘four’	owú ‘jealous’
éwà ‘door’	oóbó ‘hand’	ebé ‘leaf’
		upó ‘urine’

ii. The low tone is common and has free occurrence in the dialect. It appears in word initial, medial and final positions as can be seen in the data presented below:

Word initial	Word Medial	Word Final
èdò 'liver'	aòji 'mirror'	edè 'food'
òyanì 'owner'	idìgò 'pant'	okì 'market'
àpamá 'purse'	òhāmì 'farm'	hò 'grind'
èbelá 'cow'	odàmì 'soup'	odzù 'hat'
ùpè 'festival'	ukùmà 'head'	nēē 'pass excreta'

iii. The mid tone is also found in Ìyàyú dialect. There is no restriction as to where it can appear or occur. The following are examples of the manifestations of mid tone in the dialect.

Word initial	Word Medial	Word Final
wasí 'strong'	dàrcì 'beg'	òdè 'thief'
òsamovìe 'queen'	buè 'cut'	afé 'birds'
bòbì 'remove'	kòò 'divide'	sése 'hot'
minòì 'see'	òyanì 'owner'	óde 'hunter'
otá 'squirrel'	bòbì 'remove'	zã 'roast'

### Functions of Tone in Ìyàyú

Tone performs both lexical and grammatical functions. Tone performs lexical functions in a language when lexical items with identical segmental phonemes are distinguished on account of tonemes. The illustrations below demonstrate the lexical function of tone in Ìyàyú.

di 'at'	úbù 'boundary'
dí 'to have'	ubú 'swim'
odè 'cloth'	édè 'dog's tick'
otã 'visitor/New'	ukì 'moon'

Tone performs grammatical function when it is used to distinguish meaning between phrases and sentences. In Ìyàyú for instance, tone distinguishes between present or present continuous and past tense. Consider the following examples.

mēmèbìní	-	'I drummed'
mēmèbìní		'I am drumming'
mīyòhāmì		'I am going to farm'
mīyòhāmì		'I went to farm'
wàwà ḍzètìní		'you eat fish'
wáwá ḍzètìní		'you ate fish'
míkázé		'I am coming'
mīkázé		'I came or I have come'

A close observation of the above examples reveals that tone differences in each of the pairs of the same element differentiate the meaning of the two sentences.

### Discussion of Findings

Our research into the phonology of the Ìyàyú dialect indicates a system that is both complex and distinctive. Perhaps most immediate is the robustness of the inventory which contains 23 consonants, 7 oral vowels, and 5 nasal vowels. This stands in contrast to its neighbours in Ìdó-Àní,

whose sound systems, with their eighteen consonants and seven vowels, are mostly like Standard Yoruba. Also, this negates the findings of Abiodun (1991) who studied vowel harmony in Igede and reported that Igede has nine phonetic oral and seven phonetic nasal vowels and that there is no marked difference in the behaviour of the oral

and the nasal vowels in relation to the harmony constraint. The findings reveal that consonants are not allowed to occur at the word-final and as well no consonant cluster is allowed so that every syllable is opened, ending in a vowel. Oral and nasal vowels, in contrast, flow freely and can occur in any of the three positions within a word (that is, initial middle and final). We also reported a striking morpho-phonological pattern in which case, all nouns start with a vowel, and all verbs begin with a consonant. In her study, Aturamu (2024) reports that the Central Yoruba dialects operate a nine-complete vowel harmony while this current study operates a seven oral vowel system and a partial vowel harmony system. This makes for a basic grammatical division in the dialect. Hence, the syllable structures are exquisitely simple, with only V and CV patterns, and the nasal vowels count as complete syllables on their own.

Labialisation is an active process by which velar consonants such as /g/ and /k/ take on lip-rounding from the following vowel to produce segments like [g<sup>w</sup>]. It was revealed that the process for accounting for labialisation in Iyayu dialect is assimilation of the feature [+round]. This means that velar consonants normally assimilate the feature of lip rounding of the rounded vowel that follows them. This process is referred to as assimilation-deletion analysis. Supporting the finding above, Owoyele (2016) in his study also reports that the rounded vowel that triggers assimilation is deleted. That is, after the consonant preceding the vowel must have acquired the lip-rounding feature. Thus, the current study also aligns with the Generative Phonology rule which states that a high back vowel that induces the labialisation process is normally deleted after a labialised segment.

Nasalisation is another prominent feature whereby vowels (except, /e/ and /o/) take on a nasal quality when following the consonants /m/ or /n/. Thus, nasality is progressive, and our analysis shows that if a nasalised vowel is deleted, its nasal feature is lost. The analysis of the data revealed a progressive spread of the nasal feature to the right, that the nasal feature is deleted across the word boundary in verb + noun construction. It was also found out that nasality-bearing vowel is deleted

alongside with its nasal feature. However, Egbokhare as cited in Abiodun (2010) in his study on Emai reports that an oral vowel may become nasalised if a nasal/nasalised vowel that occurs before it is deleted. By this, the findings of Egbokhare in Abiodun is at variance with the findings of this study.

The findings on vowel harmony system reveal that there is no restriction in vowel co-occurrence in VCV and VCVC word structures except for few instances where vowel [i] cannot co-occur as vowel initial with vowel [u] in a structure and vowel [ɔ] cannot co-occur as initial vowel with [e] or [o] in a VCV structure. In view of the prevalence of the phenomenon in related languages, it was found out that Ìyàyú does not operate a systematic vowel harmony. The fact that vowels with opposing features freely co-occur suggests that any historical harmony system has eroded, leaving only a few residual restrictions as evidence of its former existence. The study of Elugbe as reported in Owoyele (2016) reveals that Uhanmi and Ukwe, which also belong to Edoid family language, appear to have lost every restriction on vowel co-occurrence and thus show no evidence of vowel harmony. This finding is partially at variance with the finding of the study. The study also found out that Ìyàyú is a tonal language with three functional pitch levels. They are High [´], Mid [ˊ], and Low [ˋ]. These tones are functionally load-carriers. They are used lexically and grammatically for distinguishing words which are segmentally identical.

### Conclusion

This study examined the aspects of the phonology of the Iyayu dialect in Ido-Ani, Ondo State with specific focus on the sound systems and three phonological processes. The processes are labialization, nasalisation and vowel harmony. The findings of the study show that the dialect possesses a well-structured consonant and vowel inventories which are distinct from Yoruba dialects. The findings also revealed that the three phonological processes show systematic patterns that distinguished Iyayu from other neighbouring quarters within Ido-Ani. The study has contributed to the Generative Phonology theory in strengthening the principles determining the

organisation and assignment of accurate phonetic representations to utterances as a reflection of native speakers' internalised grammar. The implication of the study is on the improved understanding of dialectal diversity that is attested within Yoruba speaking nation. In view of the fact that a study cannot cover all areas of a dialect, linguistics scholars may further study other aspects of the phonology of the dialect such as acoustic and morphophonemics of the dialect as well as

comparative analysis of the dialect with other Edoid or Yoruboid dialects. It is concluded this study has provided detailed information on the three phonological processes and has filled an identified gap that existed in available studies on Edoid language. It has also established that the study will serve as a source of reference point for contemporary and upcoming linguistic scholars across the globe.

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