

SOCIOPHONETIC VARIATION IN AGULUEZECHUKWU-IGBO

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Abstract

Studies in sociophonetics have demonstrated that speech can be socially differentiated within a speech community based on factors such as age, gender, social status, and level of exposure, among others. This study contributes to advancing this perspective, but does so using a variety of the Igbo language, which has been understudied. The study examines sociophonetic variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo by identifying the phonemes of the dialect. It further investigates the social factors responsible for speech variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo and their implications. Utterances of four native speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo were elicited and compared. Data, which consists of narratives, was obtained through oral interviews with speakers regarding the new yam festival and traditional marriage customs. Recordings were done with the Zoom H1n digital recorder, transferred to *ELAN* for annotations and then to *Praat* for segmentations and measurements. Tokens were then selected and analysed from these speakers' utterances. Findings show that the three social factors examined - gender, age and education are responsible for the speech variation in the speech of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers. Again, the study notes that these variations have a long-term impact on this speech variety, which may lead to some level of language shift or loss. The study concludes that the older generation of this speech variety, linguists and other stakeholders should rise to the challenge of describing and documenting varieties and languages in Nigeria that are under threat to preserve them for posterity.

Keywords: Acoustics, Sociophonetics, Speech variation, Aguluezechukwu dialect, Igbo, Social factors.

Introduction

Language serves as a fundamental means of human communication, essential for interaction and the exchange of knowledge and thoughts. It exists in various forms, including spoken, written, and sign forms, playing a crucial role in national development by enabling people to share perspectives. Languages exhibit diverse varieties, exemplified by the Igbo language, widely spoken in Southeastern Nigeria, encompassing distinct varieties such as Nsukka, Aguluezechukwu, Ekwulobia, Onitsha, Akwa, Ohafia, and Owerri. These varieties are often referred to as dialects. A dialect is a subclass or variation of a broader linguistic system, sharing a common linguistic heritage but featuring distinct regional vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar. Boga (2020) illustrates this by comparing Mancunian as a dialect of English to Nsukka and Ohafia as dialects of Igbo. The emergence of dialects is attributed to various historical, geographical, social, and cultural factors that lead groups of speakers to develop their unique forms of a language over time. Dialects hold significant value in linguistic studies, contributing as much as languages themselves. Linguistic analysis can be approached from multiple perspectives, including phonetics, phonology, sociophonetics, and sociolinguistics.

Despite the inherent role of language in human interaction and its diverse forms, languages are not static; they vary over time. This variability is often a direct result of several social factors, including

but not limited to gender, age, educational qualifications, and geographical region. The field of sociophonetics specifically encompasses the study of these variations, integrating insights from both sociolinguistics and acoustic phonetics to provide a comprehensive understanding of how and why speech changes. It delves into how human linguistic behaviours are influenced by social factors. Prominent scholars, such as Erik Thomas, have extensively researched the intersection of phonetics and sociolinguistics, particularly concerning ethnic and regional variations in American English. Thomas's research highlights historical foundations, contact with other languages and dialects, and geographical mobility as key contributors to these variations. Building upon this understanding, this study is set to systematically analyse the phonemes of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. It aims to identify precise acoustic evidence of differences in pronunciation between older and younger speakers of the dialect, pinpointing other social factors that contribute to speech variations within this specific linguistic community, and ultimately, exposing the implications of these variations on the Aguluezechukwu dialect and its speakers.

To fully understand the complexities of language variation and the role of social factors, it is crucial to establish a robust conceptual framework that integrates several key linguistic disciplines. Phonetics is the systematic study of speech sounds, focusing on their physical nature, how they are produced by the vocal apparatus, transmitted through the air, and perceived by the human ear and brain. Ogden (2017) describes phonetics as concerned with the physical and directly observable aspects of speech sounds. Yule (2018) further explains that speech is produced by controlled airflow through various vocal organs. Phonetics is typically studied through articulatory phonetics (how speech organs produce sounds), acoustic phonetics (the physical properties of sound waves), and auditory phonetics (the perception of sounds). In connection with this, sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics that investigates the intricate relationships between language and society, aiming for a better understanding of language structure and its function in communication. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) highlight how social factors such as gender, age, and educational qualifications influence language use and how language, in turn, reflects and shapes social identities and relationships. They outline four ways language and society can influence each other: social structure influencing linguistic structure (e.g., age-grading phenomenon causing speech variation between older and younger speakers), linguistic structure influencing social structure (e.g., how language shapes social norms and relationships within peer groups), a bi-directional influence where language and society mutually affect each other, and, conversely, the view that they are independent (a perspective notably associated with Noam Chomsky). At the intersection of these two fields lies sociophonetics, which Strelluf (2023) defines as the interface between sociolinguistics and phonetics. It is an interdisciplinary field that studies how social factors like a speaker's gender, age, and educational qualifications influence both the production and perception of speech sounds. Fagyal and Davidson (2022) describe sociophonetics as the study of social-indexical meaning conveyed by speech sounds, examining the varying ways individual speakers use sounds. Zimman (2020) frames sociophonetics as a distinct framework that investigates sound and social meaning, drawing from phonetics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology. This field employs acoustic analysis and perceptual experiments to explore social-phonetic interactions, shedding light on how and why speech changes within a speech community over time.

Some concepts that are relevant to a study of this nature are discussed here. Language variation itself refers to the inherent variability in human languages, meaning that speakers of a particular

language produce the same utterance differently. Awaliyah (2019) describes language variability as a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution, while Nordquist (2019) explains it as different forms of expression influenced by regional, social, or contextual differences, manifesting at phonological, lexical, and morphological levels. This variation can also occur within a single language, giving rise to dialects. A dialect, as noted by Boga (2020), is a subclass of a language, while Awaliyah (2019) sees it as a variant determined by the speaker's background. Dialects share linguistic heritage but have distinct features like regional vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar, and are often mutually intelligible forms of a language. Siregar (2017) defines a dialect as a language variety recognizably used in a specific region. Igbo varieties like Nsukka and Aguluezechukwu are examples of dialects in the Igbo language. Variations can further occur within a dialect due to social factors and interspeaker differences. A speech community is a group of people who share linguistic norms and expectations regarding language use, shaped by shared experiences, practices, or values, rather than strict geographical or ethnic boundaries. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) emphasise that language is both an individual and social possession within a speech community, where linguistic variation is evident despite shared features. Finally, social factors are key sociolinguistic variables influencing linguistic structures. Naseer (2019) specifically highlights education, gender, and age as significant factors. Education influences language variation as educated individuals tend to make choices between standard and non-standard language, affecting vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, with better-educated people often paying more attention to correct pronunciation. Gender affects language variation by influencing language choice between men and women, with differences observed in frequency, intensity, directness, and standardness. Ford (2018) found gender-specific sociophonetic variation in Australian English-speaking children, noting that girls produce higher frequency vowels and fricatives compared to boys, though these characteristics may change with age. Age plays a role by shaping an individual's language through personal experiences, societal influences, and language evolution. Children are often better at acquiring new languages, and older generations tend to use more formal language, while younger generations prefer trendy language, leading to speech variation. Age-related language variation stems from language acquisition, linguistic evolution, cohort effects, and technological influence, making its study crucial for understanding pronunciation and speech patterns within a society.

A number of empirical studies have extensively explored sociophonetic variation across various languages and dialects, providing crucial insights into the interplay between social factors and phonetic features. Zhang (2014) examined the role of social, stylistic, and linguistic factors in tonal variation and change within Wú dialects in China, demonstrating how suburban dialects converge with urban dialects in internally triggered variation but diverge in externally triggered variation. The study identified economic effort and tonal convergence as internal motivations for tonal variations. Spreafico and Vietti (2016) investigated the organisation of /r/-variants in South-Tyrol Italian, revealing that indexical and linguistic factors determine the emergence of distinct allophonic subsystems among Italian-dominant and German-dominant speakers. Trovato (2017) analysed the influence of language contact on labiodentalisation of the phoneme /b/ and labial consonantal variation in Texas Spanish, finding a dynamic relationship between linguistic practices and social determinants, with gender specifically influencing consonantal variation. Ford (2018) conducted research on gender-specific consonant variation, such as epenthetic /j/, word-initial /h/ deletion, and word-final /ŋ/ alveolarisation, in Australian English-speaking primary school children, providing acoustic and quantitative evidence of gender-specific sociophonetic

patterns. Otieno and Mecha (2019) described the vowel system of EkeGusii, an under-described Bantu language, from an acoustic phonetics perspective. Their findings indicated that the acoustic vowel space and spatial features are significantly affected by gender, age, and dialect, with children exhibiting no gender difference in formants but having the highest frequencies, followed by adult females and then adult males. Furthermore, Schulte (2020) combined acoustic phonetic analysis of /t/ realisations with a sociolinguistic study to account for variations in the language of young female Dubliners, identifying a mixture of influencing factors. Finally, Turton and Baranowski (2021) examined sociophonetic variation in the lateral approximant /l/ in Manchester, revealing a monotonic relationship with social class, where higher social class correlated with a lighter /l/. These empirical studies collectively underscore the critical role of sociophonetic analysis in identifying social factors that influence language use and contribute to speech distinctions within various communities.

While the foregoing shows that extensive research has been conducted on language variation within various dialects and speech communities, there remains a notable gap in the detailed sociophonetic analysis of the Igbo language, particularly concerning pronunciation variations in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. Although works such as Egenti and Okoli (2021) have explored tonal substitution in Aguluezechukwu, Ezenwafor (2019) examined vowel harmony peculiarities in Ekwulobia Igbo, a dialect sharing geographical borders with the Aguluezechukwu people. However, none have specifically focused on the sociophonetic variations inherent in its speech patterns. This existing literature highlights the significance of social factors in shaping language use globally, yet a specific and comprehensive examination of their impact on Aguluezechukwu-Igbo is absent. This study aims to fill this critical gap by specifically analysing pronunciation variations among Aguluezechukwu-Igbo native speakers, identifying the social factors responsible for these distinctions. The adoption of acoustic parameters to analyse speech collected from audio recordings, this research will pinpoint how age, gender, and education contribute to observed speech variation among older and younger native speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. The necessity of this work aligns directly with its primary objectives: to identify the phonemes of the Aguluezechukwu dialect and state their distributional patterns; to show acoustic evidence of the social factors responsible for the variation in native speakers' pronunciation; and to discuss the implications of the identified variations on the Aguluezechukwu dialect. This provides invaluable insights for linguists seeking a better understanding of how native speakers of a dialect use language differently, aiding in uncovering communicative patterns and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic diversity and language evolution within a specific speech community.

Theoretical Framework

Some approaches can offer valuable insights into a study of this nature. However, this paper specifically adopts variation theory for its analytical framework. This selection is primarily driven by the theory's inherent ability to account for issues involving speech variation (Hazen 2017). It is uniquely suited for examining sociophonetic variation in Igbo, as it is fundamentally concerned with understanding and explaining the systematic nature of linguistic differences resulting from social or contextual factors. The groundwork for this theory was largely laid by William Labov in the late 1960s, making it a well-established approach for such an investigation.

The application of Variation Theory to this study is rooted in its major tenets, particularly the understanding that variability is inherent in every linguistic system, spanning all levels from word

production to syntactic forms (Barzan & Heydari, 2019). Crucially, the theory categorises language variation into geographical and social forms, with this study focusing keenly on the latter. The explicit rationale for its application in this paper is to reveal the social factors responsible for variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo among its native speakers. Specifically, the research investigates how external factors like age, gender, and educational qualification influence linguistic patterns within the Aguluezechukwu speech community. To do this, the study applies acoustic parameters in its data analysis to precisely measure and thus "faithfully provide the major factor that causes speech variation.

The strength of Variation Theory lies in its capacity to provide insights into how different social factors influence speech patterns, making it crucial to sociophonetic studies (Hazen, 2017). It enables researchers to analyse the intricate intersection of language and society, thereby deepening the understanding of social dynamics and communication patterns within the Aguluezechukwu dialect. However, it is important to acknowledge the theory's shortcomings - it can be challenging to account for all possible variables that influence language variation (Neseer, 2019). This complexity can make it challenging to establish clear and direct correlations between sociolinguistic variables and phonetic features due to the numerous factors that must be considered and controlled. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the theory remains a valuable field of study for comprehending how social variables impact native speakers' pronunciation.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is designed to investigate sociophonetic variation within the Aguluezechukwu-Igbo dialect systematically. The research employs a mixed-method design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The area of study focuses specifically on sociophonetic variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, a town located in the Aguata local government area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Aguluezechukwu comprises seven villages and is surrounded by neighbouring towns such as Ekwulobia, Oko, and Akpo. The study aims to identify distinctive speech sounds in this dialect, examine the social factors contributing to speech variation, acoustically analyse differently produced phonemes, and explain the implications of these variations. For the population of the study, the research targeted native speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo residing in Aguluezechukwu town. A sample size of 20 native speakers was selected, ensuring a heterogeneous representation that included males and females, as well as individuals across a broad age range of 12 to 80 years, with varying levels of education. A purposive sampling technique was utilised for participant selection.

The primary instrument for data collection was the oral interview. During these interviews, respondents provided narratives about the Aguluezechukwu new yam festival and traditional marriage rites. The researcher also observed the speech production of younger and older native speakers during these interactions to identify the causes of speech variation. All interview sessions were meticulously recorded using a Zoom H1n digital audio recorder, supplemented by field notes. The method of data collection involved gathering primary data through personal observation and the aforementioned oral interview sessions. Specifically, four native speakers (representing old and young, male and female groups) were recorded while discussing their cultural practices. Following these initial recordings, a stimulus was employed to elicit specific tokens from their utterances, which were then used for detailed acoustic analysis to pinpoint factors responsible for

speech variation. Regarding the method of data analysis, the study utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative aspect involved a descriptive analysis of the phonology of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, detailing the distribution patterns of the dialect's sound system. For the quantitative aspect, the collected speech tokens were first annotated in ELAN, a linguistic annotation software, and then transferred to Praat for segmentation and measurement. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to extract mean values for acoustic parameters such as F0 (fundamental frequency), F1, F2, F3 (formant frequencies), duration, and intensity. These mean values were subsequently plotted in scatterplot graphs to visually represent the relationships between the measured acoustic features and the categorised social factors of the speakers (gender, age, and education).

Data Analysis

Brief Overview of Aguluezechukwu Sound System

The phonemes of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo are briefly discussed here to establish the segments of the Igbo variety, as it sets a background to looking into the variations of the speakers' pronunciations. The Aguluezechukwu-Igbo has a total of thirty contrastive consonant sounds with additional sounds - /p^h v ʒ/, unlike the Standard Igbo consonant sounds that are 27, with /v/ being optional. This paper chooses to mark the two contrastive tones- High and low in the data, while the phonetic down-step high tone is left unmarked.

Manner of Articulation	Bilabial	Aspirated bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio-Velar	Labialized Velar	Glottal
Plosives	p b	p ^h	t d				k g	kp gb	k ^w g ^w	
Fricative			f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		y			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ					
Nasal	m			n		ɲ	ŋ		ŋ ^w	
Lateral			l							
Roll			r							
Approximant						j			w	

Fig. 1: Aguluezechukwu-Igbo Consonantal Chart

As we said earlier, Aguluezechukwu-Igbo has the voiceless aspirated bilabial plosive, which is phonemic and distinct from the voiceless bilabial plosive in the dialect, as seen in the following (near)minimal pairs:

- /p/ - pá /pá/ ‘carry’ àpà /àpà/ ‘scar’
/p^h/ - pá /p^há/ ‘them’ àpía /àp^hía/ ‘market’

The same can be said of the status of /v/ and /z/ in the dialect. See the following examples of free variation, which show the use of these phonemes.

Aguluezechukwu-Igbo			Standard Igbo		
2. jò	/zò/	‘ugly’	jò	/dʒò/	‘ugly’
ójó	/óʒó/	‘bad’	ójó	/óʔʒó/	‘bad’
vùò	/vwó/	‘leave’	pùò	/pwó/	‘leave’
mvó	/mvó/	‘finger nail’	mbó	/mbó/	‘finger nail’

Looking at the vowel inventory of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, the variety boasts of a rich system that contrasts nine distinct vowels.

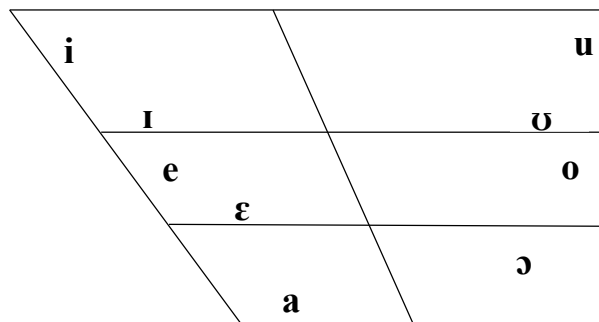


Fig. 2: Aguluezechukwu-Igbo vowel chart

A key differentiator from Standard Igbo, as noted by Ringen (1979) and Zsiga (1992), is the presence of the vowel /ɛ/ in words like:

3. ɛnyɛ /ɛnɛ/ ‘give’
- nɛ /nɛ/ ‘look’
- dɛ /dɛ/ ‘write’

Acoustic Evidence of the Social Factors Responsible for the Variation in Native Speakers’ Pronunciation

Analysis in this section is primarily focused on the selected social factors that can cause variation in the speech of native speakers of the same speech community. In this study, we examine three factors, which include gender, age and education. Tokens from the selected participants’ pronunciations are discussed and compared in scatterplot graphs. The following section categorises selected participants’ pronunciations based on the respondent’s gender, age and education (which we used as a measure for their level of exposure and contact with other languages).

Gender

The demographic profile of respondents based on gender includes two males and two females. Table 1 is a representation of the speakers' pronunciations based on gender.

Table 1: Aguluezechukwu-Igbo Speakers' Pronunciation

Standard Igbo	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (male)	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (Female)	Gloss
bụ /bú/	wú /wó/	wú /wó/ or bú /bú/	is
há /há/	pá / p ^h á /	p ^h á /p ^h á/ or há /há/	them
òzọ /òzọ/	òdọ /òdọ/	òdọ /òdò/ or òzọ /òzọ/	again
nwéghi / η^w éyi/	nwéhe / η^w éhe/ or nwéhi / η^w éhi/	méré ípé né dù or nwéyi /méré íp ^h é η é dò/ or / η^w éji/	there is nothing
ífié /ífié/	íp ^h é /íp ^h é/	íp ^h é /íp ^h é/ or íyé /íjé/	something
pùtá /pòtá/	fùtá /fòtá/	pùtá /pótá/	come out
nwéré / η^w éré/	nwéré / η^w éré/	mèrè /mèrè/	there is
búghì /bóyi/	búhì /bóhi/ or wúhì /wóhi/	wúhù /wóhù/ or búhì /bóhi/	is not
pùọ /pwó/	pùọ /pwó/		leave

Table 1 shows a variety of lexical items used for the same word by the different participants. From these selected words, four tokens were elicited and analysed based on these social factors- gender, age and level of education. Table 2 shows the acoustic mean values of first and second male speakers' F0, F1, F2, F3, duration and intensity.

Table 2: The Acoustic Values of Male Speakers' f0, F1, F2, F3, Duration and Intensity

Male Speakers' Tokens	f0_Hz	F1_Hz	F2_Hz	F3_Hz	Duration_sec	Intensity_dB
wó	93.75	310.17	1408.37	2836.18	0.25	59.32
bó	105.08	486.59	1648.37	2833.35	0.48	69.76
p ^h á	131.31	771.52	1416.14	2658.97	0.24	74.17
fiá	117.79	768.03	1621.33	2608.59	0.4	74.59
òdó	117.88	633.53	1557.09	2726.01	0.38	66.05
òzọ	93.05	501.25	1229.12	2845.58	0.44	73.8
η^w éhe	220.73	489.33	1779.62	2850.25	0.44	62.34
η^w éyi	123.84	401.04	1769.25	2595.49	0.54	79.07
Mean	125.43	545.18	1553.66	2744.3	0.39	69.89

As earlier said, the same tokens were elicited from female speakers' pronunciations of these words in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. Table 3 shows the acoustic mean values of the first female and second female speakers' F0, F1, F2, F3, duration and intensity.

Table 3: The Acoustic Values of Female Speakers' f0, F1, F2, F3, Duration and Intensity

Female Speakers' Tokens	f0_Hz	F1_Hz	F2_Hz	F3_Hz	Duration_secs	Intensity_dB
wó	137.69	472.67	1056.31	2524.67	0.31	58.97
bó	182.08	582.07	1483.41	2943.08	0.43	74.49
p ^h á	151.92	696.09	1821.4	2815.97	0.17	64.54
há	260.54	1116.94	1701.54	2986.73	0.58	84.13
ódò	151.64	643	1364.22	2732.97	0.49	66.54
ózò	234.55	698.8	1460.72	2885.49	0.75	85.67
íphé	160.52	393.23	1616.49	2405.89	0.78	65.88
nwéfi	219.34	482.35	2125.48	2887.82	0.59	81.27
Mean	137.69	393.23	1056.31	2405.89	0.17	58.97

To account for the comparison between male and female speakers' pronunciations of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, the mean values of the pitch, first three formants, duration and intensity were measured. The graph in Figure 3 gives a pictorial representation of this.

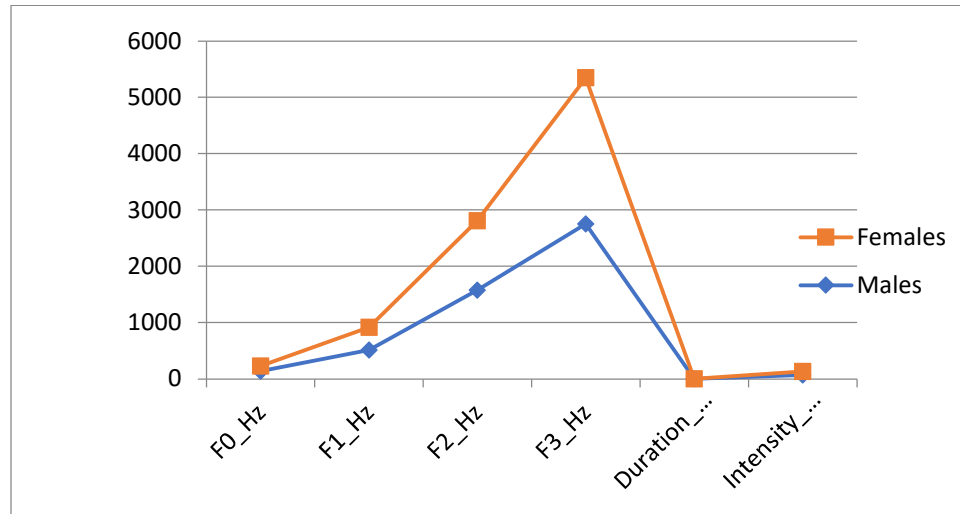


Fig. 3: Scatterplot representing the mean values of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo male and female speakers' pronunciations

The plot in Figure 3 suggests that there are clear differences in the mean F1, F2, and F3 values of the gender-speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. In the graph, the female-gender speakers F1 is higher, as well as F2 and F3, than those of the male speakers' F1, F2 and F3. The female-gender speakers' F1 is 401.04Hz, as against the male-gender speakers' F1, which is 514.067Hz. In F2, the female-gender speakers' F2 is 1229.12Hz against the male-gender speakers' F2, which is 1577.75Hz. In the F3, the female-gender speakers' F3 is 2595.49Hz against the male-gender speakers' F3, which is 2752.33Hz. This proves that gender differences contribute to language variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. It is also obvious from the graph above that F0, duration, and intensity do not show much variation in the male-female speakers' utterances. Whereas the F1, F2, and especially the F3 show significant differences in the male-female speakers' utterances.

Age

In the case of age as a social factor, two older and two younger respondents were selected out of the major respondents. As seen above, there are two older respondents between 80 and 78 years, and younger speakers between 26 years and 24 years.

Table 4: Aguluezechukwu-Igbo older and younger speakers' pronunciation

Standard Igbo	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (older speakers)	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (younger speakers)	Gloss
bù /bù/	wù /wù/	wù /wù/ or bù /bù/	is
há /há/	pá /p ^h á /	pfiá /p ^h á/ or há /há/	them
òzò /òzò/	òdò /òdò/	òdò /òdò/ or òzò /òzò/	again
nwéghi /ŋ ^w éyi/	méré ípé né dù /mére íp ^h é ñé dù/ or nwéhe /ŋ ^w éhe/	nwéhi /ŋ ^w éhi/ or nwéyi /ŋ ^w éji/	there is nothing
íhé /íhé/	íp ^h é /íp ^h é/	íp ^h é /íp ^h é/ or íyé /íyé/ or íhé /íhé/	something
pùtá /pùtá/	fùtá /fùtá/	fùtá /fùtá/ or pùtá /pùtá/	come out
bùghi /bùyi/	wùhù /wùhù/	wùhi /wùhi/ or bùhi /bùhi/	is not
nwèrè /ŋ ^w èrè/	mèrè /mèrè/ (older female)	nwèrè /ŋ ^w èrè/	there is

Table 5: The acoustic values of younger and older speakers' F0, F1, F2, F3, duration and intensity

Speakers	F0_Hz	F1_Hz	F2_Hz	F3_Hz	Duration_secs	Intensity_dB
Old	93.75	310.17	1056.31	2405.89	0.17	58.97
Young	93.05	401.04	1229.12	2595.49	0.4	69.76

Tables 4 and 5 are the tokens and acoustic values measured from the speakers' utterances; however, in this case, the focus is to ascertain if age plays a significant role in the variations in the speakers' utterances. Hence, we also need to represent the acoustic values measured from the younger speakers' utterances to establish a relationship.

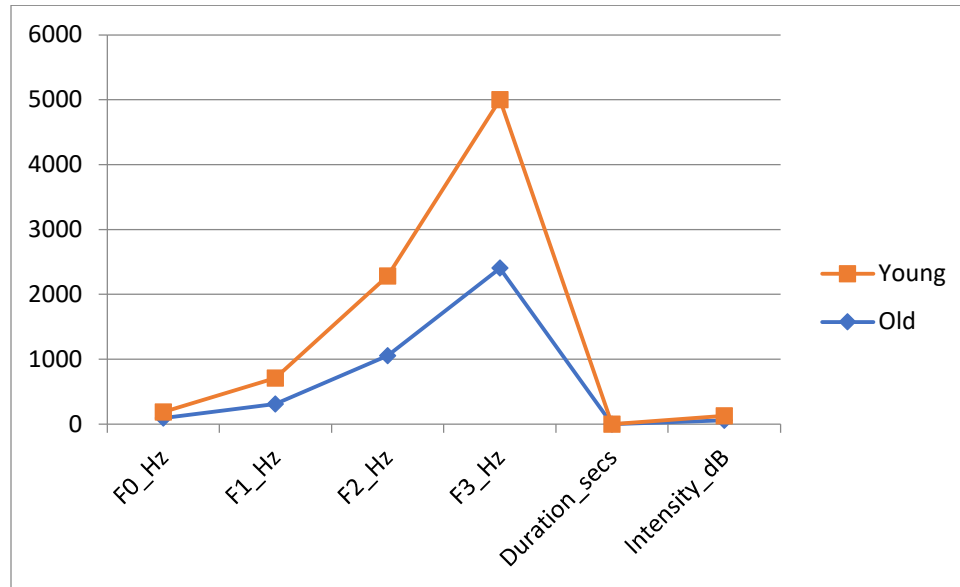


Fig. 4: Scatterplot representing the mean values of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo younger and older speakers' pronunciations

Figure 4 shows that there are differences in the mean F1, F2 and F3 values of the ages of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers. In the graph, the younger speakers' F1 is a bit higher than the older speakers' F1, the younger speakers' F2 is higher than the older speakers' F2, and finally, the younger speakers' F3 is further higher than that of the older speakers' F3. The younger speakers' mean F1 value is 401.04Hz, as against the older speakers' mean F1 value, which is 310.17Hz. Also, the younger speakers' mean F2 value is 1229.12Hz, as against the older speakers' mean F2 value, which is 1056.31Hz. The younger speakers' mean F3 value is 2595.49Hz, as against the older speakers' mean F3 value, which is 2405.89Hz. The above illustration is evidence that age differences contribute to variation in the variety of Igbo. It is also obvious from the graph above that F0, duration and intensity do not show much variation in the male-female speakers' utterances. Whereas the F1, F2, and especially the F3 show differences in the older-younger speakers' utterances.

Education

The demographic profile of respondents based on formal education was categorised into primary and post-primary education. Two of the respondents had formal education beyond primary school, one had only primary education, while the other did not finish primary education. The former and latter were grouped into one category.

Table 5: Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers' pronunciation based on formal education

Standard Igbo	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (primary education)	Aguluezechukwu-Igbo (post-primary education)	Gloss
bú /bó/	wú /wó/	bú /bó/	is
há /há/	pá / p ^h á /	há /há/	them
òzọ /òzọ/	òdọ /òdọ/	òzọ /òzọ/	again
nwéghi /η ^{wé} gi/	méré ípé né dù /méré íp ^h é ηé dọ/ or nwéhe /η ^{wé} he/	nwéhi /η ^{wé} hi/ or nwéyi /η ^{wé} jì/	there is nothing
íhé /íhé/	íp ^h é /íp ^h é/	íhé /íhé/ or íyé /íyé/	something
pùtá /pòtá/	fùtá fùtá/	pùtá /pòtá/	come out
búghí /bóyi/	wùhí /wóhi/	bùhí /bóhi/	is not

Table 6: Comparison of speakers' mean F0, F1, F2, F3, duration and intensity based on level of formal education or exposure

Speakers	F0 Hz	F1 Hz	F2 Hz	F3 Hz	Duration secs	Intensity dB
Primary	93.75	310.17	1408.37	2658.97	0.24	59.32
Post-primary	93.05	393.23	1056.31	2405.89	0.17	58.97

Table 6 shows the comparison of the speakers' mean values of F0, F1, F2, F3, duration and intensity. This comparison was made based on their exposure to formal education. A scatterplot graph is plotted to show the pictorial representation. As shown below:

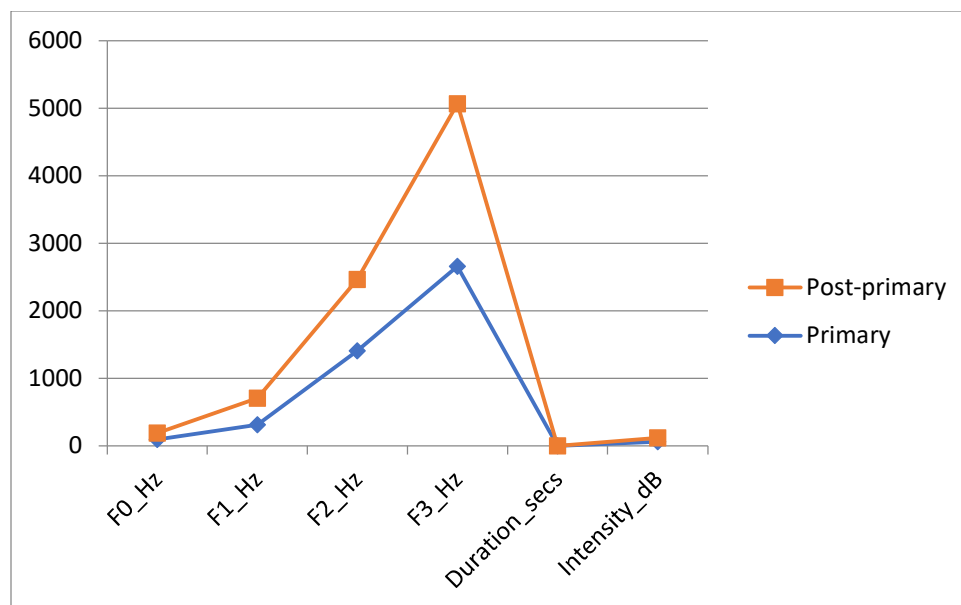


Fig. 5: Scatterplot representing the mean values of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers' pronunciation based on level of education

Table 6 and Figure 5 is the graph show that there are differences in the mean F1, F2 and F3 values in the education level of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers. In the graph above, it is shown that the speakers under the post-primary level of education (F1, F2 and F3) are higher than that of speakers under the primary level of education. Speakers under the post-primary school level of education mean F1 value is 393.23Hz, as against the speaker under the primary level of education, which is 310.17Hz. The speakers under the post-primary level of education mean F2 value is 1056.31Hz against that of the speaker under the primary level of education, which is 1408.37Hz. Also, the speakers under the post-primary level of education mean F3 value is 2405.89Hz against that of the speaker under the primary level of education, which is 2658.97Hz. From the above illustrations, it is also proven that the level of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo speakers' education contributes to speech variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. It is also obvious from the graph above that F0, duration and intensity do not show much variation in the male-female speakers' utterances. Whereas the F1, F2, and especially the F3 show a significant difference in the primary and post-primary level of speakers' utterances.

The Implications of the Identified Variations on the Aguluezechukwu Dialect

▪ Dialect Changes and Death

The result of the study shows that the Aguluezechukwu dialect is gradually going into extinction. The study's findings show that younger native speakers of the Aguluezechukwu dialect of Igbo have created their own way of speaking, which is entirely different from the way older native speakers speak. Also, as a result of contact with other speakers of the Igbo dialect, the younger speakers of the Aguluezechukwu dialect tend to imitate and adjust their dialect, thereby neglecting their own dialect. As can be seen in the age-related factor, younger speakers speak differently as to be compared to the older speakers. If nothing is done to curtail the younger speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, once the present speakers of Aguluezechukwu dialects die, the language

will die with them because it was not passed down to the younger speakers. This will lead to the death of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo.

▪ **Dialect Shift**

From the study findings, it is obvious that the younger speakers are shifting from Aguluezechukwu phoneme to another. The younger speakers tend to use a different phoneme that is obviously different from the normal Aguluezechukwu phoneme. For example, the older speakers say /wó/ 'is' while the younger speakers replace the /w/ voiced labio velar approximant with /b/ voiced bilabial plosives, thereby saying /bó/. The same applies to the 'them' word, the older speakers say /p^há/ but the younger speakers replace the /p^h/ voiceless aspirated bilabial plosives with /fi/ voiced glottal fricative, thereby saying /fiá/. Also, the older speaker and the younger speakers produce the word 'again' differently. The older speakers say /ódò/ while the younger speakers replace the /d/ voiced alveolar plosives with /z/ voiced alveolar fricatives, thereby saying /ózá/. With these modifications of the Aguluezechukwu phoneme, with time, the entire Aguluezechukwu phoneme would all be modified, and the next generation will never know that phoneme like /p^h/ voiceless aspirated bilabial plosives ever existed. The next generation would adapt to the new phoneme /fi/, voiced glottal fricative. Additionally, is the use of méré ípé né dù /mére íp^hé né dò/ or *nwéhe* /ŋ^wéfi/ for the word 'there is nothing' and pá /pá/ for 'them'. We see that the younger speakers use *nwéhi* /ŋ^wéhi/ or *nwéyi* /ŋ^wéji/ and há /há/ respectively. These are some examples, amongst others, of lexical shift in the variety.

▪ **Variation as a Challenge in Dialectical Study**

In the process of the evolving state of the Aguluezechukwu dialect, studying it poses difficulties, and it is also challenging. As a result of the variations within the Aguluezechukwu dialect, it becomes difficult to study this dialect. These variations manifest in their pronunciations and vocabulary. Some words are used differently by native speakers of the dialect, which is dependent mostly on age. From the result of this study, it is observed that the speakers' vocabulary is not only influenced by factors like gender but also by factors such as age and education. All these are challenges that should be resolved by dialectical studies documentation.

Summary of Findings

This study investigates sociophonetic variations in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo spoken in Aguluezechukwu, Anambra State. The study identifies the social factors responsible for speech variations in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo, and it also shows the acoustic evidence of the social factors responsible for the variation in native speakers' pronunciation. The analysis shows that there are significant phonemic distances between the F1, F2 and F3 in the case of the gender factor. In the case of the age factor, there is evidence of differences in the speakers' F1, F2 and F3. Finally, in the case of the education factor, it is obvious that there are differences in the speakers F1, F2 and F3. The study also discovered that there is a change in speech sounds with regard to these social factors.

Again, the study reveals that all three examined social factors - gender, age, and education are responsible for language variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. In gender, females apply more energy in pronouncing a word than males. In age, the younger speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo apply more energy in the pronunciation of a word than the older speakers. In education, the speakers

who have attained a post-primary level of education tend to put more energy into the pronunciation of a word than those who have not.

Finally, the study also reveals that speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo tend to substitute phonemes with another regardless of age, gender and educational qualification. This indicates that it is a result of rural development. As the town develops, different people with different dialects migrate to the town, and these migrants take their own languages. Gradually, the migrant languages will have an effect on the native speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo in the course of interaction. With time, native speakers of Aguluezechukwu-Igbo start using some of the migrant's speech sounds (contact situations), thereby causing speech variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo.

Conclusion

Sociophonetics is the combination of sociolinguistics and phonetics, which is very important in language learning and analysis. This study gives insights into the reason why there is speech variation in Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. Aguluezechukwu town is a developing rural area. As a result of trade, education and missionary purposes, people migrate to the town and thereby causing language contact. This language contact also affects Aguluezechukwu-Igbo. The major implication of this variation on Aguluezechukwu-Igbo is that it will lead to the language's death if nothing is done to improve it. To protect this dialect from going extinct, parents should take it on themselves to teach their children Aguluezechukwu-Igbo and also make it compulsory that they use this dialect as a language of communication. Through this, the dialect will be transferred from one generation to the next. Teachers should also encourage the pupils/students to use Aguluezechukwu-Igbo as a language of communication because it is part of their identity. Also, teachers and caregivers should frown at any child who mocks or makes a jest of children using the Aguluezechukwu-Igbo as a language of communication, and this will reduce the stigmatisation of the Aguluezechukwu dialect of Igbo.

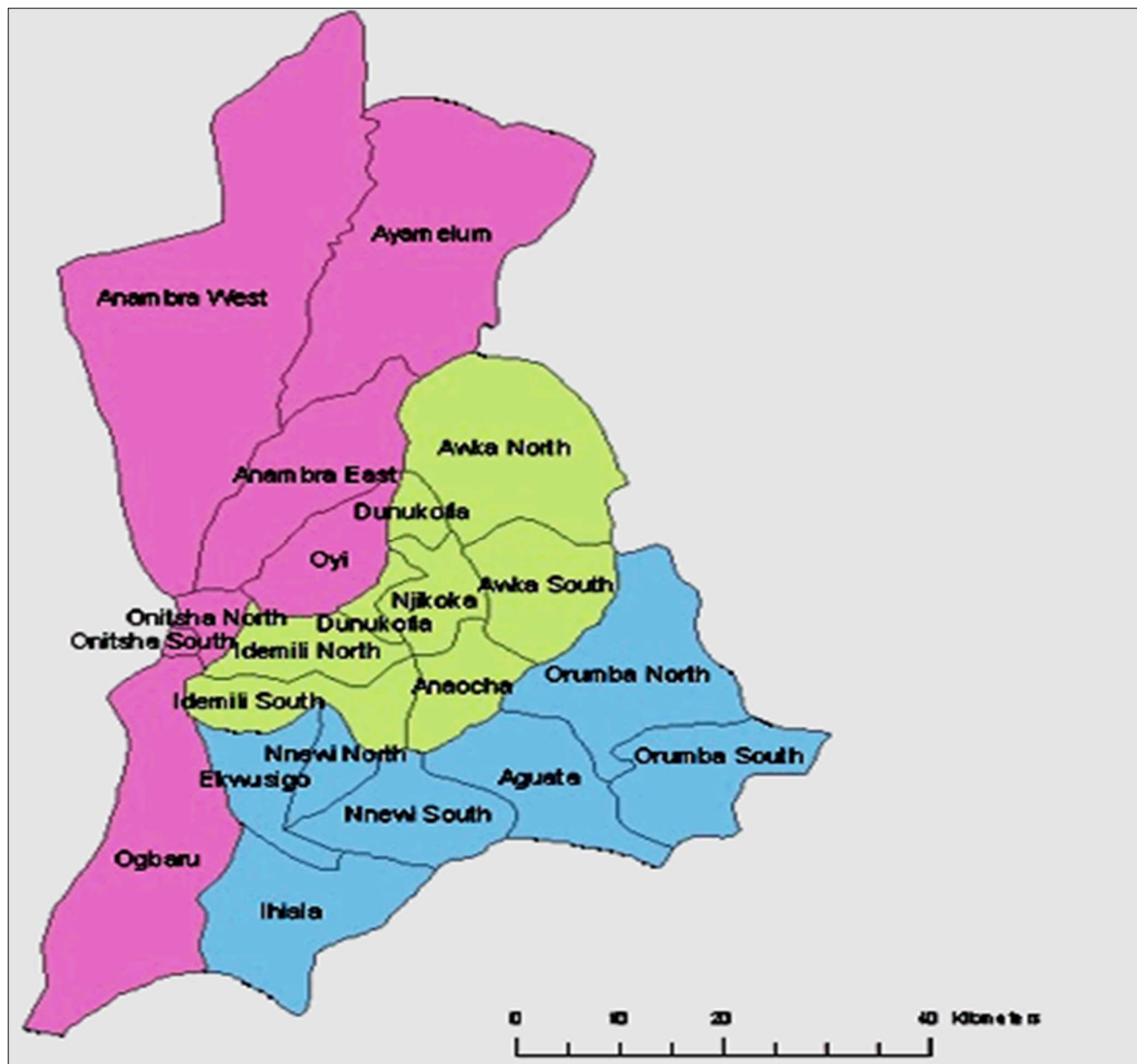
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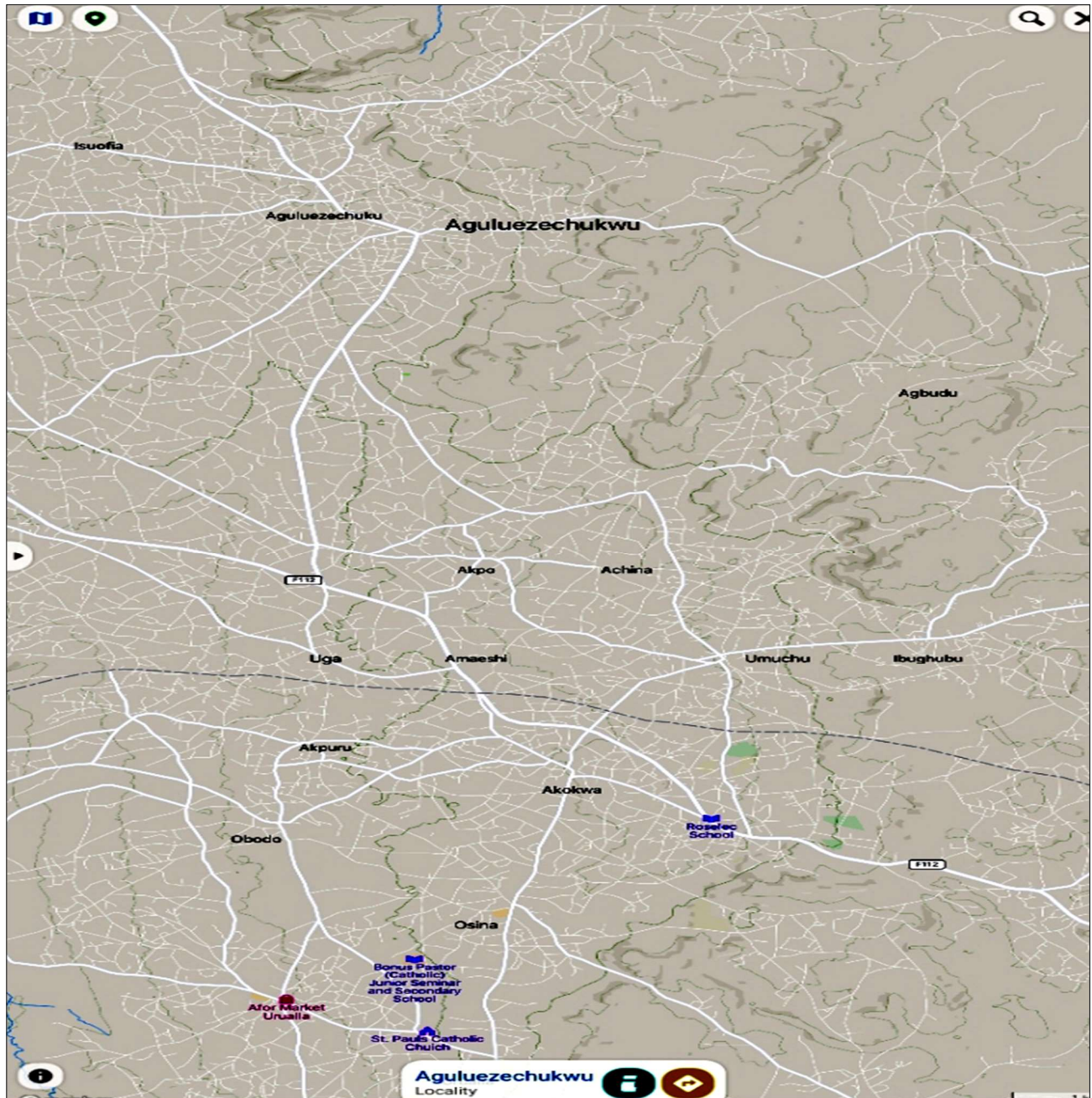
APPENDIX A

THE MAP OF ANAMBRA STATE



Open Street Map of Aguata Local Government Area

This is the Anambra map showing the 21 local Government areas in Anambra State. Aguluezechukwu is under the Aguata local government area in Anambra State, Nigeria.



APPENDIX B

BASIC INFORMATION ON NATIVE SPEAKERS OF AGULUEZECHUKWU-IGBO

Speakers	Occupation	Gender	Age (years)	Education level
First male (Ezenwozo)	Nil	Male	80	Primary
First female (Paulina)	Trader	Female	78	Post-primary
Second male (Chisolu)	Trader	Male	26	Post-primary
Second female (Chidimma)	Teacher	Female	24	Post-primary

This is the metadata regarding the selected participants for this research work.

APPENDIX C

(IGBO EXCERPT OF NEW YAM FESTIVAL IN AGULUEZECHUKWU COMMUNITY)

Iwa ji Aguluezechukwu bụ mmemme omenaala nke a na-eme kwa ụbọsị Saturday ikpeazụ nke August n'afọ ọbụla. Mmemme a na-anọchi anya njedebe nke owuwe iye ubi na mmalite nke usoro ọrụ ọzọ. Tupu ha ewepụta ụbọsị maka mmemme ji ọhụrụ, obodo ọ bụla nke di na Aguluezechukwu ga-ezukọ na ọgbakọ iji wepụta ụbọsị kwesiri ekwesị maka mmemme a.

N'ụbọsị ememme a, a na-adọkwasi iye mkpuchi maọbu oche ndo na ama egwuregwu ebe a ga-eme ememme iwa ji ọhụrụ a. Mpaghara di iche iche ga ezukọ ebe ahụ. Mpaghara nke ọ bụla ga-enwe oche ndo nke ha. Ndi obodo ahụ ga-agbakọta na ama egwuregwu na enwe anuri. Ụfọdụ mmanwu dika Awuka na abia mmemme a. Dika ndi obodo na enwe anuri n'ime onwe ha, ha ga na atụ anya eze obodo. Mgbe eze ga abata, ndi ichie ya ga-aga zute ya. A ga agbakwa mkpọ n'ala iji gosi na eze abatala. A na-atụ anya na eze ga-anọdụ ala n'etiti ndi ikwu ya. Ozugbo eze nọdulu ala, a na-atụ anya na mpaghara ọ bụla ga-ekele eze ma nye ya onyinye. Mgbe onyinye ahụ gasiri, eze ga-eji oji kpee ekpere. Eze ga-agozi ụbọchị ihe omume ahụ, kele Chineke maka ihe owuwe ihe ubi, ọ ga-agozi emume ahụ ma gozikwa ji ahụ. Mgbe nke a gasiri, mmemme ebido. Eze ga-awa ji ahurū n'okū wee tinye ya n'ime efere nke mmanū di n'ime ya, ma rie ya. Ozugbo eze richara ji ahū ahurū n'okū, a ga-ekekoriita ji nke foduru na mpaghara na mpaghara. Ozugbo eze riri ji, ndi obodo nwere ikike imalite iri nke ha.

Na ngwucha mmemme ahū, mpaghara ọ bụla ga-eweputa ji ha maka nlele. A ga-enye mpaghara ahū nke nwere kilo kachasi elu onyinye nke gunyere ọgụ, mma na ego. A ga-ekpe ekpere nke mmechi iye mmemme ahū.

TRANSCRIPTION OF APPENDIX C

/iwa dʒi aguluezetʃuk^wu bu mmemme omenaala ŋke a na-eme k^wa ubosi sɛtɛbei ikpeazu ŋke ɔ:gast na afɔ ɔbul// mmemme a na-anɔtʃi ɔpa njedebe ŋke owuwe ije ubi na mmalite ɔru ɔzo//tupu ha eweputa ubosi maka mmemme dʒi ɔhuru obodo ɔ bula ŋke di na aguluezetʃuk^wu ga ezuko na ɔgbako idʒi weputa ubosi k^wesiri ek^wesi maka mmemme a/

/na ubosi mmemme a a na adɔ k^wasi ije mkputʃi ma ɔbu otʃe ŋdo na ama eg^wureg^wu ebe a ga eme mmemme iwa dʒi ɔhuru a// mpaɣara di itʃe itʃe ga ezuko ebe ahɔ// mpaɣara ŋke ɔbula ga eŋ^we otʃe ndo ŋke ja ja bu na ndi mpaɣara ŋke ɔ bula ga eŋ^we otʃe ndo ŋke fia//ndi obodo afi ga agbakota na ama eg^wureg^wu na eŋ^we aŋori ɔfɔdu mmaŋ^wu dika awoka na abia mmemme a// dika ndi obodo na eŋ^we aŋori na ime oŋ^we fia fia ga na atu ɔpa eze obodo// mgbe eze ga abata ndi itʃie ja ga aga zute ja a ga agbak^wa mkpɔ na ala idʒi gosi na eze abatala a na atu ɔpa na eze ga anɔdu ala na etiti ndi ik^wu ja// ozigbo eze nɔdulɔ ala, a na atu ɔpa na mpaɣara ɔ bula ga ekele eze ma je ja opine // mgbe opine afi gasiri eze ga edʒi ɔzi kpe ekpere // eze ga agozi ubosi ife mmemme afi kele tʃiŋeke maka ife nkete ŋke ubi ɔ ga agozi mmemme afi ma gozik^wa dʒi// mgbe nke a gasiri mmemme ebido//eze ga awa dʒi a huru na ɔku we tiŋe ja na ime efere ŋke mmanu di na ime ja, ma rie ja// ozigbo eze ritʃiara dʒi afi a afuru na ɔku a ga ekekɔrita dʒi ŋke fɔduru na mpaɣara na mpaɣara// ozigbo eze riri dʒi ndi obobdo ŋ^were ikike imalite iri ŋke fia/

/na ŋg^wutʃa mmemme afi mpaɣara ɔ bula ga eweputa dʒi ha maka ŋlɛlɛ// a ga epe mpaɣara afi ŋke ŋ^were kilo katʃasi elu opine ŋke gunere ogo mma ŋa ego// a ga ekpe ekpere ŋke mmetʃi iye mmemme afi//

ENGLISH SUMMARY OF APPENDIX C

The Aguluezechukwu new yam festival is an annual event held every last Saturday of August, marking the end of harvest and the beginning of a new work cycle. Community meetings precede the festival to select a suitable date. On the day of the festival, villagers gather at a field with canopies set up by different wards and kindred. They enjoy dances and masquerade performances while awaiting the arrival of the king, signalled by a gunshot. The king is greeted by each zone with gifts, blesses the occasion by praying and then opens the event by eating roasted yams dipped in palm oil. Afterwards, yams are shared among villagers, and each zone presents their yams for weighing, with the highest-yielding zone receiving a gift. The festival is concluded with a prayer.

APPENDIX D

(IGBO EXCERPT OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE INTRODUCTION IN AGULUEZECHUKWU COMMUNITY)

Alum di na nwunye na obodo Aguluezechukwu nwere usoro abuo nke gunyere-iku aka (ajuju) na ime ego (ugwo ego nwanyi).

Nke mbu wu iku aka (ajuju) nke gunyere nwoke na-alu nwanyi ohuru ga akporo ndi ikwu n'ibe ya gaa na nke ndi be nke nwanyi a ga alu alu. Ha ga eji onyinye dika nkwa ocha na oji. Mgbe ha rutere n'ebe nwanyi a na-alu ohuru, ha ga akowa ebumnobi ha jiri bia. Ndi be nke nwanyi a na-alu ohuru ga-akpo ndi ikwu nke ha oku ibia noyere ha na nzuko ah. Mgbe nke ah gasiri, ndi muru ya ga-akpo nwanyi a ga-alu ka a mara uche nke ya. O buru na nke nwanyi a ga alu ohuru juru aju, a ga-aju onyinye ah mana o buru na nwanyi ah a na-achọ ilu ohuru ekweta, a ga-anabata onyinye ah nwoke na-achọ ilu nwanyi wetere. Ka nke a gasiri, ndi be nke nwoke choro ilu nwaanyi ga

akwado maka nleta nke abuo. Nwoke ahụ na ndi be ha ga-alachigha be ha. Tupu ubosị a haziri ahazi maka nleta nke abuo eruo, ezinaulo abuo ahụ ga-amalite iju ajuju gbasara onodu ezinulo nke ibe ya.

Nke abuo bu ime ego (ikwu ugwo isi nwanyi) gunyere onye na-alu nwanyi ohuru na abia maka nleta nke abuo. Otutu ndi mmadu nke si n'ezinaulo nke nwoke ga-eso nke nwoke na-alu nwanyi ohuru ga na be nke nwanyi o na-achọ ilu. Onye na-alu nwanyi ohuru na ndi be ya ga-enye ezinulo nwunye ya iye ahụ ndi edeputara n'akwukwo nke enyere ha na obibia nke mbu. Ezinaulo nwanyi a na-alu ohuru ga-enyocha iye ndi ahụ eweputara iji mara ma ha dum ezuru oke, mgbe nke a gasiri, ha ga-amalite ime ego. Nna nke nwoke na-alu nwanyi ohuru na ndi umunna ya na nna nke nwanyi a na alu ohuru ga-aba n'ime ulo, ha ga-ekwekoritakwa ego ole a ga-akwu n'isi nwanyi. Mgbe ezinulo abuo ahụ kwekoritara n'otu ego, a ga-akwu ugwo isi nwanyi. Ego a kwuru aputaghị na ha na-azuta nwanyi kama o bu maka ikele nne na nna maka ozuzu ha nyere nwa ha.

TRANSCRIPTION OF APPENDIX D

/alum di na η^wupe na obodo aguluezetfuk^wo η^were usoro abuo nke gunere iku aka /adzudzuo na ime ego ugwo ego η^wani/

/nke mbu wu iku aka adzudzuo nke gunere η^woke na alu η^wani ohuru ga akporo ndi ikwu na ibe ja gaa na nke ndi be nke η^wani a ga alu alu// fia ga edzi onije dika η^wo ofa na ozi//mgbe fia rutere na ulo nke η^wani a na alu ohuru fia ga akowa ebumnobi fia dziri bia/ /ndi be nke η^wani a na alu ohuru ga akpo ndi ikwu fia oku ibia nhere fia na nzuko afu//mgbe nke afu gasiri ndi moru ja ga akpo η^wani a ga alu ka a mara utfe nke ja// o buru na nke η^wani a ga alu ohuru zuru azu a ga azu onije afu mana o buru η^wani afu a na atfo ilu ohuru ekweta a ga anabata onije afu η^woke tforo ilu η^wani ga akwado maka nleta nke abuo// η^woke afu na ndi be fia ga alaghatfi be fia// tupu ubosi a haziri ahazi maka nleta nke abuo eruo ezinaulo abuo afu ga amalite izu azuzu gbasara onodu ezinaulo nke ibe ja/

/nke abuo bu ime ego ikwu ugwo isi η^wani gunere one na alu η^wani ohuru na abia maka nleta nke abuo// ototo ndi mmadu nke si na ezinaulo nke η^woke ga eso nke η^woke na alu η^wani ohuru ga na be nke η^wani o na atfo ilu//one na alu η^wani ohuru na ndi be ja ga ene ezinaulo nwunye ja ije afu ndi edeputara na akwukwo nke enyere fia na obibia nke mbu//ezinaulo η^wani a na alu ohuru ga epotfa ije ndi afu eweputara idzi mara ma fia dum ezuru oke/mgbe nke a gasiri fia ga amalite ime ego// nna nke η^woke na alu η^wani ohuru na ndi umunna ja na nna nke η^wani a na alu ohuru ga aba na ime ulo fia ga ekwekoritakwa ego ole a ga akwu na isi η^wani // mgbe ezinaulo abuo ekwekorita na otu ego a ga akwu ugwo isi η^wani//ego a kwuru aputayi na fia na azuta η^wani kama o bu maka ikele nne na nna maka ozuzu fia nere η^wa fia/

ENGLISH SUMMARY OF APPENDIX D

In the traditional marriage introduction of Aguluezechukwu community, the process involves two stages: "iku aka" (inquiry) and "ime ego" (bride price payment). During the inquiry, the groom's party visits the bride's family with gifts and seeks her consent. If accepted, an engagement list is presented, and background checks are made. In the bride price stage, the groom's extended family accompanies him for the formal presentation of items from the list. Negotiations on the bride price follow; after that, the bride price is paid. The bride price payment stands as a gesture of appreciation, not as a purchase.