

This thesis presents a multi-tiered analysis of vowel compensatory lengthening in Ekegusii, a Bantu language spoken in south western Kenya by about 1.7 million people. A synchronic evidence for hiatus resolution strategies is provided in order to meet the following objectives: to identify and describe the vowels that are lengthened compensatorily in Ekegusii, to determine the morphophonemic processes that trigger compensatory lengthening in Ekegusii, to investigate the role of the Ekegusii syllable structure in determining compensatory lengthening and to find out how Autosegmental Phonology Theory accounts for the process.

To achieve the above objectives, the study adopted a qualitative research design. Data in the form of nominals and verbals were purposively sampled from four Ekegusii texts. The researcher relied on his native speaker intuition and verification from other native speakers to purposively sample the data used in the study. A word list was created from this selection and then presented to four other native speakers of the language for verification of the pronunciation. The speech of the independent reviewers was audio recorded. The analyses in this study have employed a dynamic, non-linear approach to phonological representations as advanced in Autosegmental Phonology Theory and CV Phonology.

The findings of the study have revealed that all the seven basic Ekegusii vowels undergo compensatory lengthening when their phonetic environments are altered. Vowel compensatory lengthening is further brought out as a surface realisation of the operation of the morphophonemic processes of glide formation, upper-mid vowel raising, vowel deletion and prenasalisation which form a conspiracy to eliminate ill-formed sequences created by the morphological process of affixation. The height of the first vowel and whether it is followed by another vowel or a consonant as well as the type of consonant determines which strategy is used to eliminate the hiatus. The changes occasioned by the application of the above morphophonemic processes are viewed as resyllabification operations. The processes occur due to the requirement to parse words into Ekegusii's CV syllable structure. Within an Autosegmental Phonology framework, such changes have been looked at as the effect of disassociating segments from their timing tier positions and reassociating the empty timing tiers to nearby segments. That length has the ability of hopping from one timing tier to another, point to its independence as a suprasegmental feature. While only a fraction of the surface realizations of vowel sequences is described in this study, it represents a crucial addition to the literature on Ekegusii prosodic analysis.

The researcher recommends that writers of Ekegusii texts include the aspect of compensatory lengthening in their writing to facilitate effective reading in the language. Research into the teaching of segmental and suprasegmental aspects of Ekegusii in primary schools in Gusii be carried out to find out the teachers' knowledge of this aspect of Ekegusii phonology. Further research is also needed to account for compensatory lengthening in all the word classes and phonological phrases in Ekegusii and closely related languages.