

Morpheme-specific domains of nasalization in Ebrié

Systems involving unbounded, or iterative, feature spreading are relatively common cross-linguistically, and have formed the basis for many frameworks in phonology: in such systems, a feature spreads and applies to all possible targets within a given domain (e.g. van der Hulst and van der Weijer 1995). Recently, more attention has been paid to bounded spreading patterns, in which the spreading of a feature is limited in some way (e.g. Jurgec 2011, Kavitskaya & McCollum 2018, McCollum 2021). However, such analyses do not predict the coexistence of both iterative and non-iterative patterns involving the same feature within a single language. In Ebrié [Kwa: Côte d’Ivoire], we find such a case: based on data collected with native speakers, I show that the domain of nasal spreading is dependent on the identity of the triggering morpheme. Following some nasal morphemes, like the second person plural subject pronoun, the domain of nasal spreading is a single segment to the right (2). Following other morphemes, however, the domain of nasalization is much larger and involves the entire verb complex, including both auxiliaries and verbs (3). Nasality is contrastive for vowels in Ebrié, but not for consonants: nasal consonants are in complementary distribution with oral sonorants. As demonstrated in (1-3), the bilabial implosive alternates with [m] and the lateral approximant with [n]. Following a nasal subject pronoun, progressive nasalization takes place: whether that nasalization applies locally or iteratively, however, depends on the identity of the trigger. Only subject pronouns trigger the nasalization of following material: other morphemes with nasal vowels, like proper nouns or possessive pronouns, never do.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| (1) aká ɓa le ɓá
Aka FUT NEG come
‘Aka will not come.’ | (2) ǎ ma le ɓá
2PL FUT NEG come
‘You will not come.’ | (3) ǎ mā nē má
3SG FUT NEG come
‘He will not come.’ |
|--|--|---|

Following a second person plural subject pronoun, nasalization is strictly local (5). After a third person singular subject pronoun, however, we observe what I term long-distance nasalization: the initial segment of each item within the verb complex nasalizes (6).

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| (4) aká gɛ lo ɓɔ wo
Aka can go greet 3PL
‘Aka can go greet them.’ | (5) ǎ ŋgɛ lo ɓɔ wo
2PL can go greet 3PL
‘You can go greet them.’ | (6) ǎ ŋgɛ no mɔ wo
3SG can go greet 3PL
‘He can go greet them.’ |
|---|--|---|

In this paper, I propose that the difference in domains of nasalization is actually attributable to a distinction in morphological structure between singular and plural pronouns. I present both phonological and morphosyntactic evidence showing that singular pronouns are best analyzed as proclitics, while plural pronouns are independent. The differences in nasalization patterns fall out from this analysis: I propose that nasalization in Ebrié is always local within the word, and that utterances like (6) involve the elision of an underlying proclitic before each verb. This analysis is additionally supported by evidence from inter-speaker variation in the domain of nasalization. This work contributes to the current discussion of iterative and non-iterative harmony: prior literature (Kaplan 2008) has argued that non-iterative harmony is epiphenomenal, and can instead be derived from independent phonological constraint interactions. In this work, I demonstrate that apparent non-iterativity in nasal harmony in Ebrié can in fact be attributed mainly to the morphology, rather than the phonology, contrary to typical analyses of harmony. Additionally, this work serves as a useful contribution to the typological literature, as I describe this uncommon distinction between surface local and long-distance nasalization patterns in Ebrié. Drawing on ongoing work with native speakers of Ebrié, I investigate the morpheme specificity of nasalization patterns in the language and conclude that this phonological process is deeply tied to morphological structure.