

One language, two phonologies: the case of nasals in Ciyao

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Defined as the study of human speech sounds in terms of their “physical properties and the physiological aspects of speech production and perception” (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonetics 3/21/2009), Phonetics differs from Phonology in that this is the “study of language-specific systems and patterns of sound and gesture, relating such concerns with other levels and aspects of language” (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonetics 3/21/2009). This suggests that while human languages may share phonetic features, each one of them is expected to have its own phonology. This paper is aimed at studying the phonology of nasals in Ciyao, despite the fact that this topic has been the object of description and analysis in many works in on Bantu languages in general and in Ciyao in particular (Bleek 1862, Harries 1949, Hyman 2003, Hyman and Ngunga 1997, Mutaka 2000, Ngunga 1996, 2000, Sanderson 1954, Whiteley 1966, to mention just a few). In these studies, important statements have been made on phonological processes such as nasal effacement before continuants, voiceless stop voicing after a nasal, distinction between moraic and syllabic nasals, nasal assimilation to the place of the following consonant, and other phonological processes. At least one of these phonological processes are expected to take place when a nasal occurs adjacent to another segment in Ciyao. What seems to have not been looked at is the behavior the relationship between the phonological processes and the class of the word where the nasal and the adjacent segment occur. In other words, in this language, some phonological processes seem to be sensitive to word class. The present paper aims at proving this point analyzing the behavior of nasal in Ciyao, a Bantu language (P21 in Guthrie’s 1967-71 classification) spoken in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania, in order to show to prove the possibility of existing more than one nasal-related phonology in Ciyao.