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Denasalisation in the Spoken French of Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners in Selected Universities in South West of Nigeria

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Abstract

Denasalisation is a lexical phenomenon brought into play during the process of lexicalisation while nasalisation is a natural process which occurs when an oral sound is modified in the environment of an adjacent nasal sound. Little attention is paid to the former because phonologists admit that nasalisation is more natural during speech production. This paper, therefore, examined denasalisation in the spoken French of 50 Ijebu Undergraduate French Learners (IUFLs) in Selected Universities in South West of Nigeria with a view to establishing instances of denasalisation in their spoken French. Data collection for this study was through tape-recording of participants' production of 30 sentences containing French vowel and consonant sounds. Goldsmith's Autosegmental phonology blended with distinctive feature theory was used to analyse instances of denasalisation in the data collected. The study revealed instances of denasalisation of nasal sounds at initial and final positions in the spoken French of the IUFLs.

Key Words: IUFLs, Denasalisation, Autosegmental Phonology, French as Foreign language

Introduction

The study of French as a foreign language has gained great consideration on both national and international scales because of the complexity of language contacts and the mother tongue. The case of Nigeria is particularly complicated because of several dialectal (mother tongues) influence with acquisition of French as second foreign language in Nigeria. The influence of Ijebu as a dialect of Yoruba language on the pronunciation of the ijebu learners of french has not been given adequate attention. Therefore, this study examined instances of denasalisation as one of the influence of ijebu dialect on the spoken French of ijebuphones learning French as a foreign language in selected universities in the Southwest of Nigeria.

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Denasalisation

Most phonologists believe that, of the two processes of nasalisation and denasalisation, the former is the more common and therefore the more natural. Accordingly, when faced with a choice between the two processes as a possible explanation for observed phenomena in natural languages, they almost always prefer nasalisation alternative and try as much as possible to avoid proposing solutions involving denasalisation (Awobuluyi & Oyebade 1995). Egbokhare (1990) postulated that both nasalisation and denasalisation occur in Emai, a language spoken in Edo state and this we have also observed in the spoken French of Ijebu undergraduate French learners. Here, Egbokhare opined that the process of denasalisation is a lexical phenomenon brought into play during the process of lexicalisation (Egbokhare1990, p. 246).

Another manifestation of denasalisation was observed in a situation where the loss of nasality followed vowel deletion in Kakanda whenever there is a morpheme boundary and the consonant which is auto syllabic with the (underlying) nasal vowel is not itself nasal (Oyebade1988, pp. 2-3, Awobuluyi & Oyebade 1995, p. 17). Denasalisation could emerge from assimilation which is characterised by the absence of (underlying present) nasality at the surface after the process of vowel assimilation has taken place (Awobuluyi & Oyebade 1995, p. 18) while a vowel may also assimilate consonant features which could result into vowel nasalisation (Oyebade 1988, p. 61). This study examined denasalisation in the spoken French of Ijebu undergraduate French learners in selected Universities in Nigeria with a view to establishing instances of denasalisation of nasal French sounds at the initial and final positions in the spoken French of the IUFLs.

Methodology

The participants for this study were purposively selected from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Osun State University, Ikire Campus, Osun State and Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. The participants were selected from 400 level because it is believed that they have attained a considerable level of proficiency in French language. The data collection was through tape-recording of participants' production of 30 sentences containing both French vowel and consonant sounds. The subjects chosen for this study were 50 undergraduate learners of French of Ijebu origin in Ogun State of Nigeria: 19 from Olabisi Onabanjo University, 15 from Tai Solarin University of Education, 10 from Osun State University and 6 from the University of Ibadan. Most participants were from Ogun state Universities because it has been discovered that students who are natives of Ijebu prefer to attend their state Universities (Iyiola 2015).

Autosegmental Phonology and Data Analysis

The analysis in this aspect shall be based on two phonological theories namely: Distinctive Feature Theory as propounded by Chomsky and Halle (1968) and Autosegmental Theory of Phonology as propounded by Goldsmith (1976, 1990). It must be pointed out that Autosegmental model is a direct outgrowth of the generative research programme developed in Chomsky and Halle (1968; Goldsmith 1990, p. 217). Using the distinctive features that a phoneme is made up will help to treat the process of denasalisation in this research.

Distinctive Feature Theory (henceforth DFT) assumes that a phoneme is divisible into indivisible elements. That is, a phoneme is a bundle of distinctive features. DFT has its genesis in the works of Trubetzkoy (1939) and Jakobson, Fant and Halle (1952). Chomsky and Halle (1968) reviewed these works and proposed a major revision of the theory by replacing acoustically-defined phonological features with a set of features that have articulatory correlates in most cases (Katamba 1992: 42; Iyiola: 2015). The distinctive features are grouped as Major class features, Cavity features, Tongue body features, Tongue root features, Laryngeal features, Manner features and Prosodic features. (Chomsky & Halle 1968, Katamba 1992, Salawu 2007, Iyiola: 2014). In order to put the analysis into a graphic

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representation form, some of the views of Autosegmental model shall be employed. Goldsmith (1990: 8) explains the different approach of this theory from the generative method of representation.

> Autosegmental representation differs from familiar generative and traditional phonemic representation in that it consists of two or more tiers of segments. In the picture given us by classical generative phonology - and, indeed, most theories of phonology and phonological representation – phonological representations consist of a string of segments. In autosegmental representation, however, we posit two or more parallel tiers of phonological segments. Each tier itself consists of a string of segments, but the segments on each tier differ with regard to what features are specified in them.

Within this theory, each tier consists of segments that are independent of the other segments in another tier. Each tier is associated with the other level of tier through the means of association lines which are governed under the Association Convention though modified by us to effect the principle of well-formedness. In this research, we have employed three types of tiers due to the modification namely CV tier, nasalisation tier (-nas) and the Segmental tier in the analysis of the data. The full specification of the distinctive features for the French vocalic segments involved in denasalisation of the data collected is presented in the table below:

Data Analysis

Below are the instances of denasalisation in the spoken French of the IUFLs.

Words that are denasalised and their phonetic description

Gloss	**Phonetic Rep.**	**Variable**	**Data Collected**
Bonjour	/bɔ̃ʒuʁ/	/ɔ̃/	/bɔnʒuʁ/
Français	/fʁãsɛ/	/ã/	/fʁansɛ/
Adam	/adã/	/ã/	/adam/
Lundi	/lœ̃di/	/œ̃/	/lɛndi/
Ampoule	/ãpul/	/ã/	/ampul/
Manche	/mãʃ/	/ã/	/manʃ/
Pompe	/pɔ̃p/	/ɔ̃/	/pɔmp/
Bombe	/bɔ̃b/	/ɔ̃/	/bɔmb/
Bonbon	/bɔ̃bɔ̃/	/ɔ̃/	/bɔnbɔ̃/
Janvier	/ʒãvje/	/ã/	/ʒanvje/
Champion	/ʃãpjɔ̃/	/ã/	/ ʃampjɔ̃ /
Ambulant	/ãbɥlã/	/ã/	/ambɥlã/
Oncle	/ɔ̃kl/	/ɔ̃/	/ɔnkl/

Below is the Autosegmental analysis of denasalisation in the spoken French of the IUFLs.

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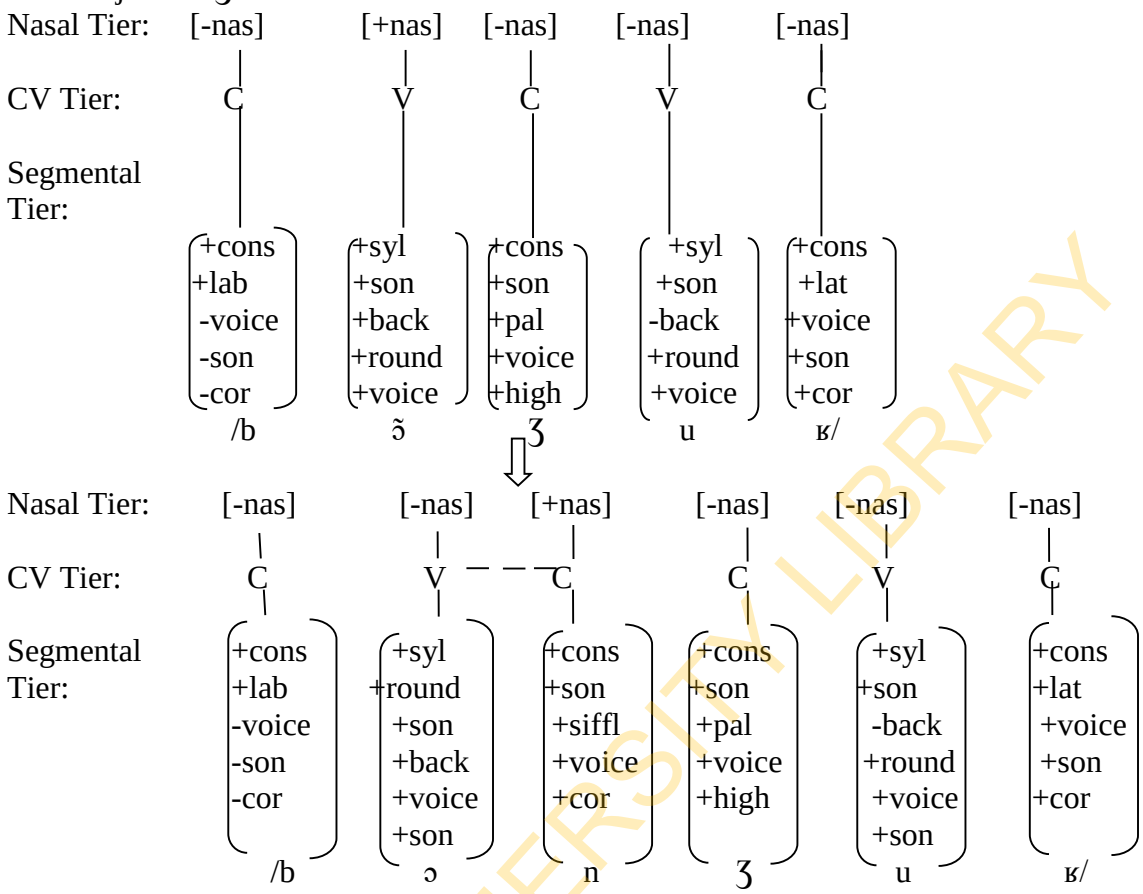
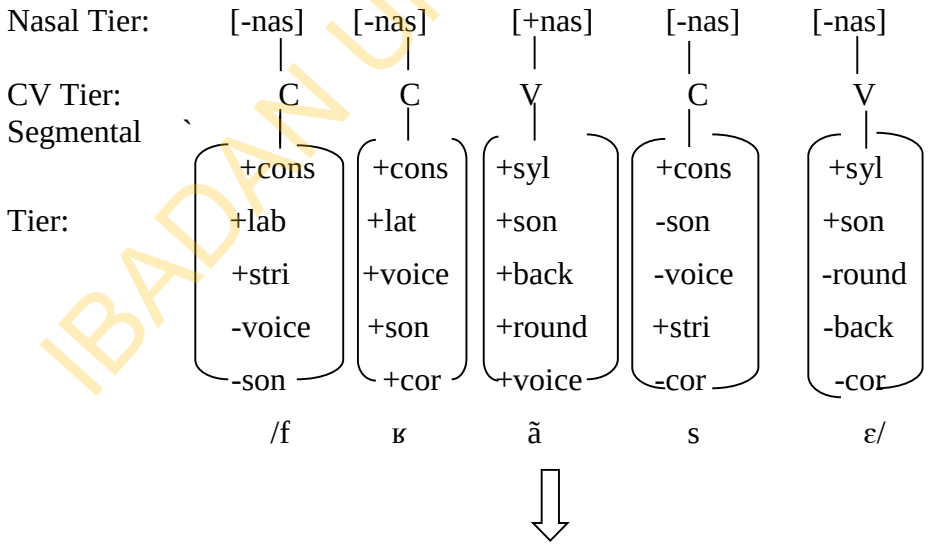
1.0. Bonjour /bɔ̃ʒuʁ/



1.1. Français /fʁãsɛ/



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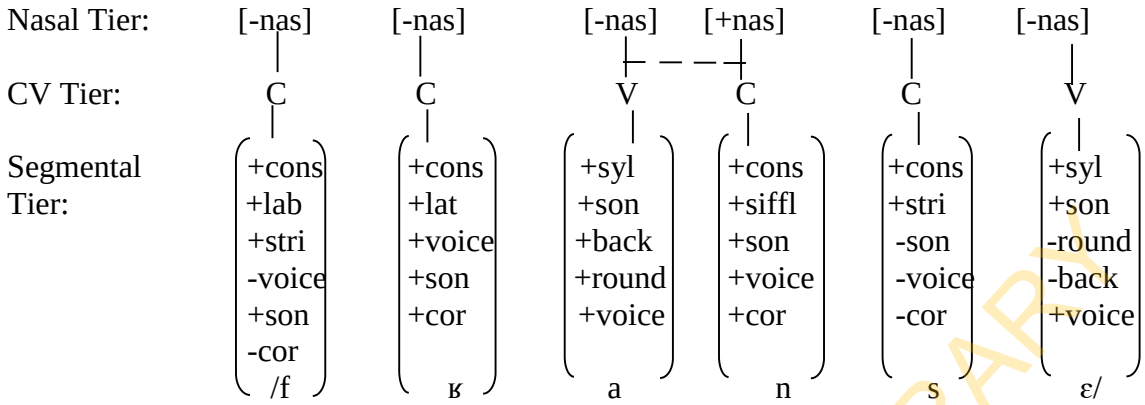
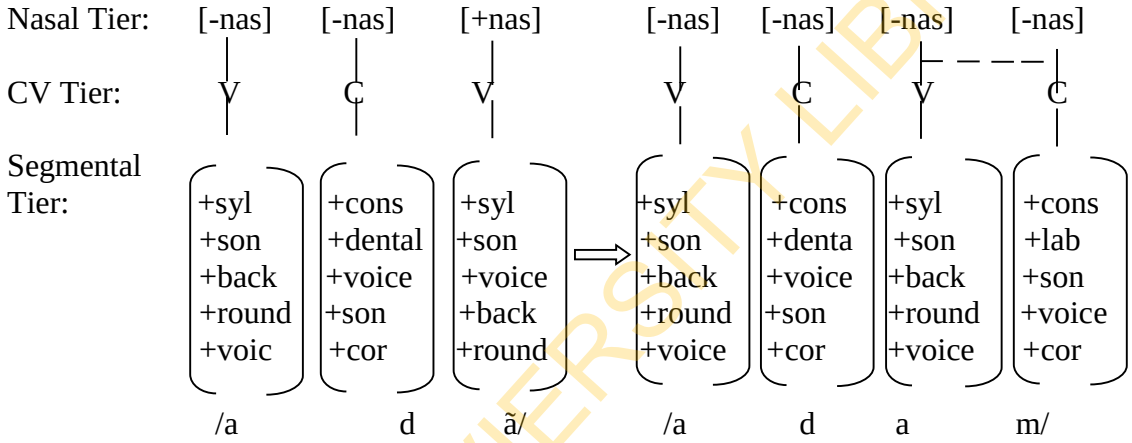
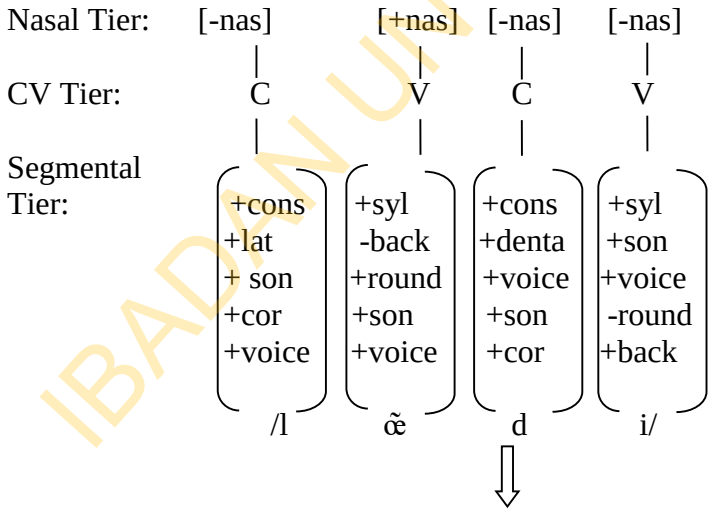


1.2. Adam /adã/



1.3. Lundi /lœ̃di/



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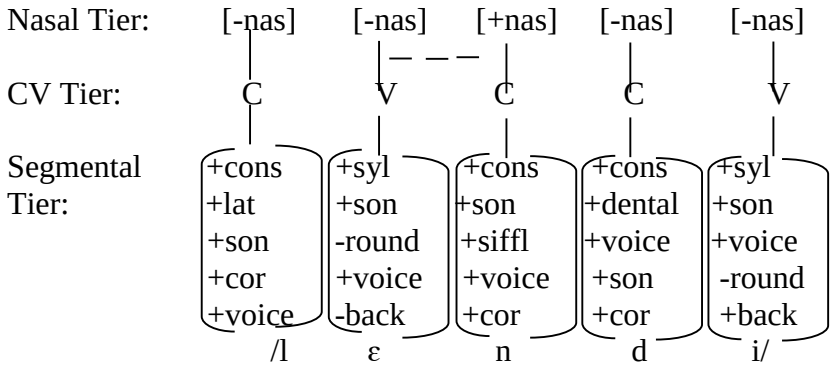
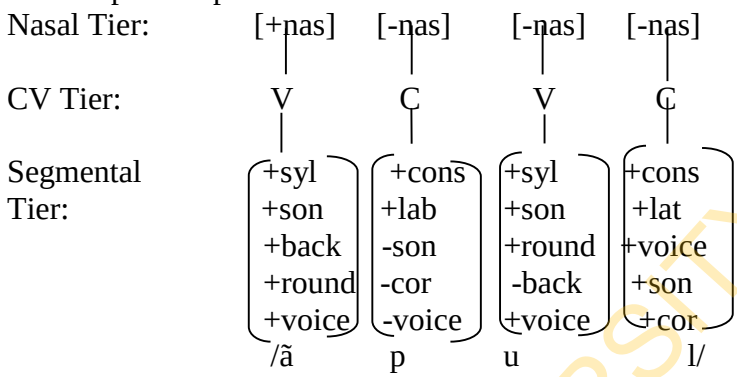
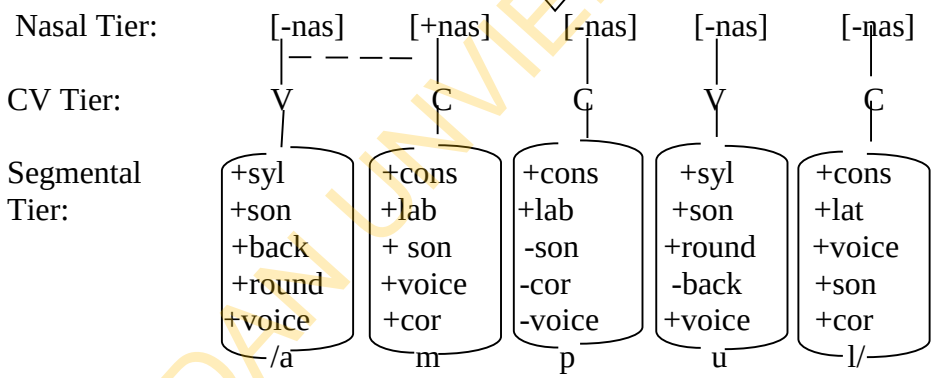
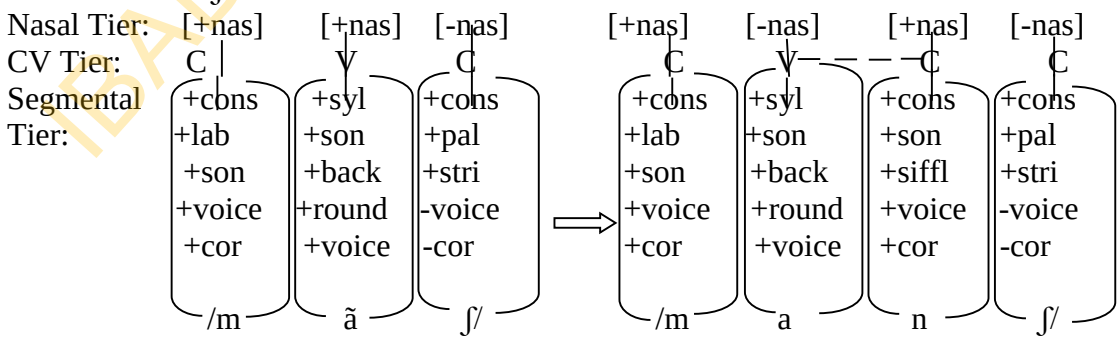


1.4. Ampoule /ãpul/





1.5. Manche/mãʃ/



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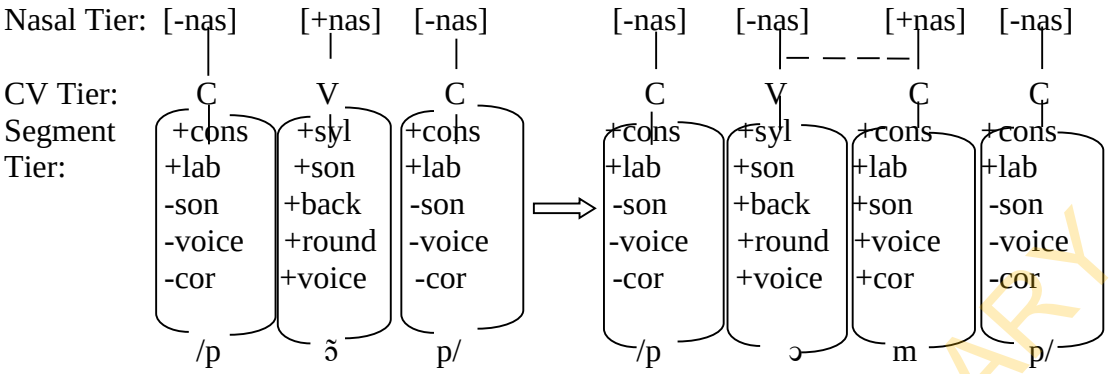
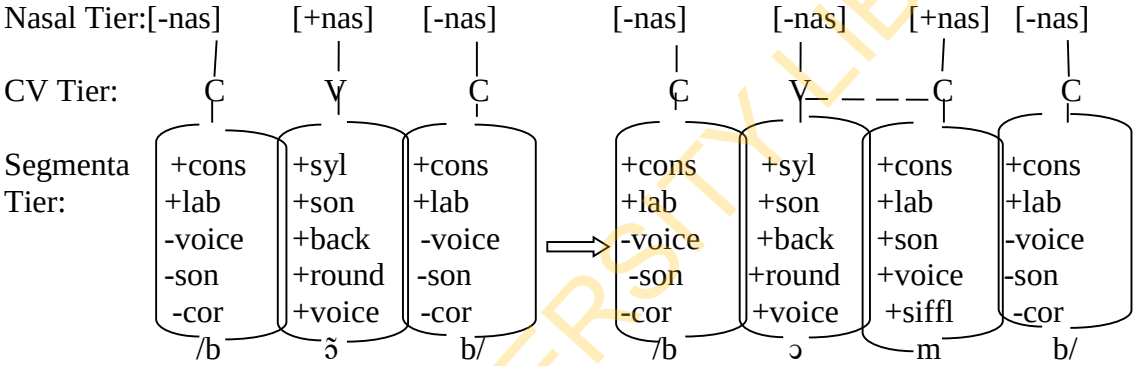
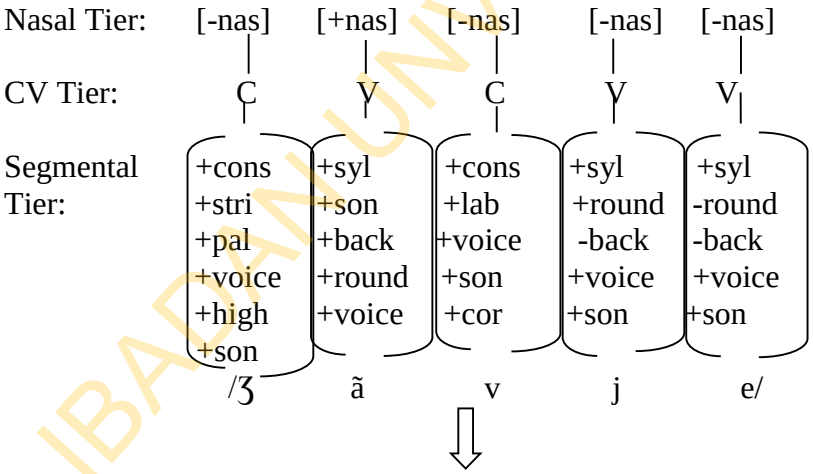
1.6. Pompe /pɔ̃p/



1.7. Bombe /bɔ̃b/



1.8. Janvier /ʒãvje/



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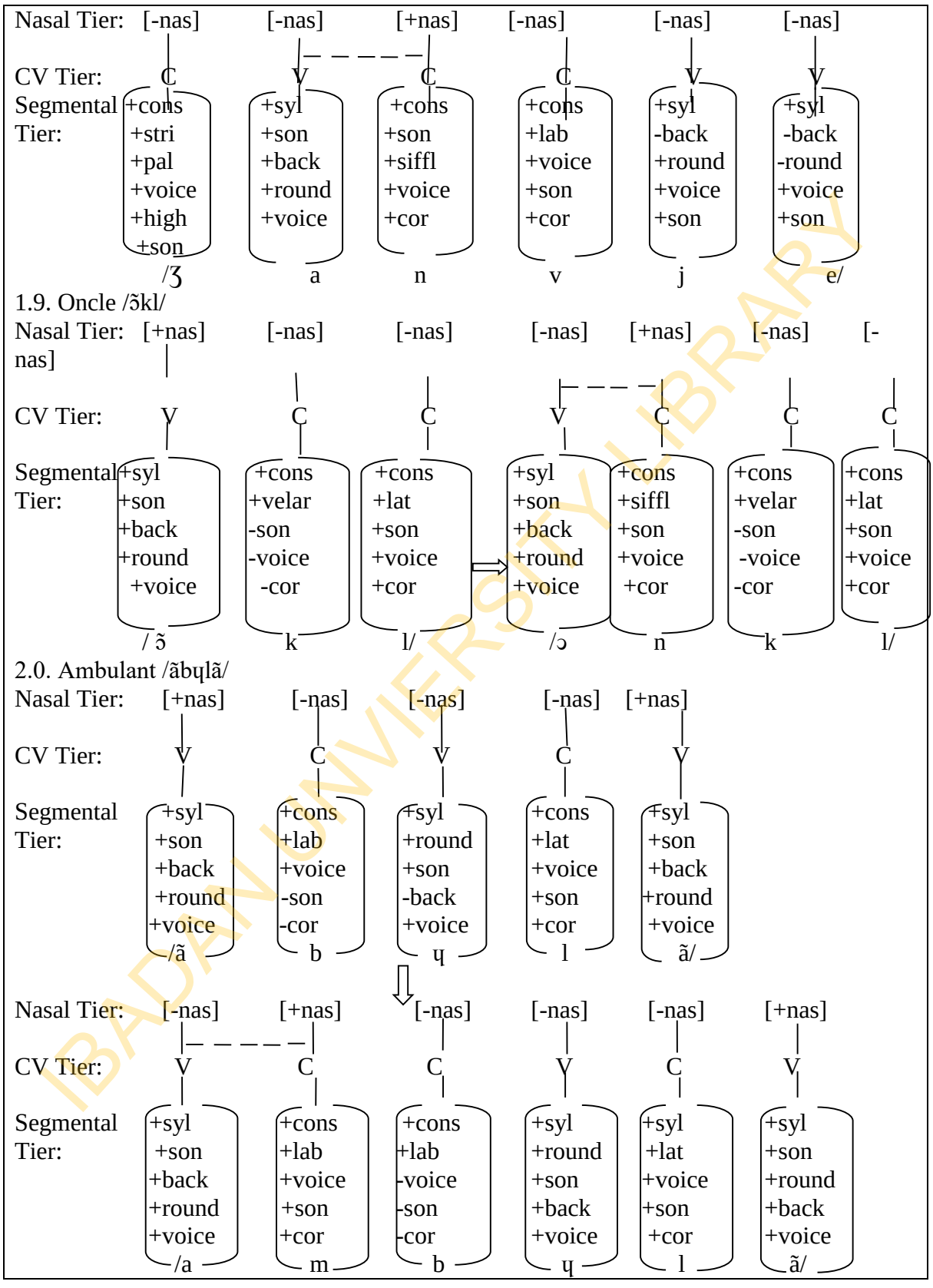

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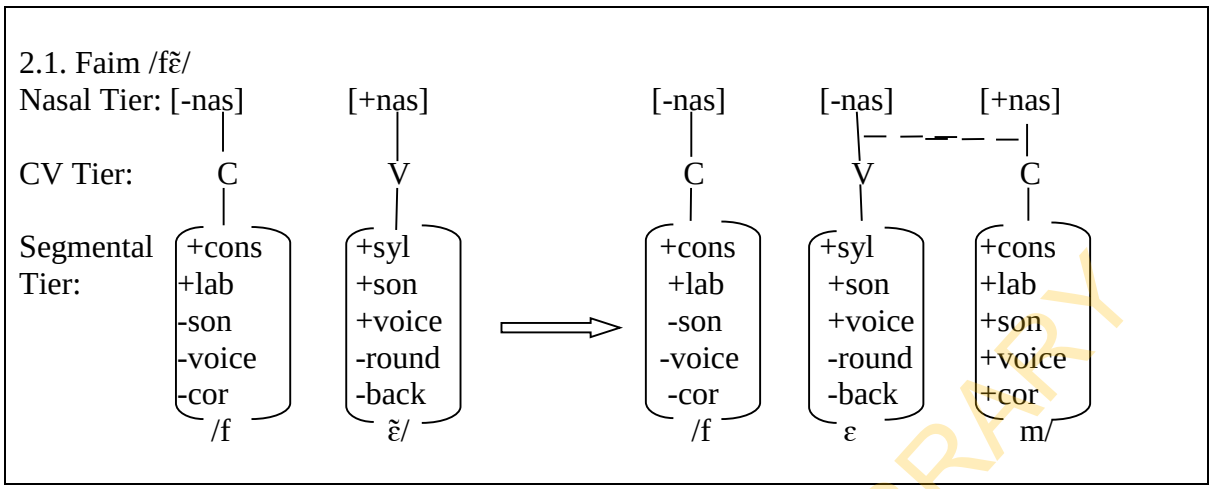

From the above, we could discover that though there are instances of denasalisation yet the nasal sound /n/ involved is just detached from the vowel thereby forming a type of spreading. That is why we would prefer to say that this type of denasalisation is as a result of lengthening of the nasal vowel sound. Non-linear phonology assumes that the features that represent each sound in an utterance are situated on different, independent (autonomous---hence, Autosegmental) tiers (Oyebade 1990:127; Iyiola 2014). Having realised the sounds denasalised sounds in the spoken French of the IUFLs, hence the autosegmental analysis of instances of the denasalisation in the data collected.

Conclusion

In (1.0) to (2.1), there is denasalisation of nasal vowel sounds /ã/, /ɔ̃/ and /ɛ̃/ as a result of lengthening of these nasal sounds especially at the initial and mid and sometimes in the final positions of the words concerned in the data collected. Thus: /ã/ at the initial position of words like: Français /fʁãsɛ/ becomes /fʁansɛ/, Adam /adã/ becomes /adam/, Ampoule /ãpul/ becomes /ampul/, Manche /mãʃ/ becomes /manʃ/, Janvier /ʒãvje/ becomes /ʒanvje/, Champion /ʃãpjɔ̃/ becomes /ʃampjɔ̃/, Ambulant /ãbɥlã/ becomes /ambɥlã/ while in the case of the nasal vowel sound /ɔ̃/ words like: Pompe /pɔ̃p/ becomes /pɔmp/, Bombe /bɔ̃b/ becomes /bɔmb/, Oncle /ɔ̃kl/ becomes /ɔnkl /, Bonjour /bɔ̃ʒuʁ/ becomes /bɔnʒuʁ/, Bonbon /bɔ̃bɔ̃/ becomes /bɔnbɔ̃/. In the case of nasal vowel sound /ɛ̃/, we discover that words like "faim /fɛ̃/" and "lundi /lœ̃di/" becomes "/fɛm/ and /lɛndi/" respectively. We would like to suggest that, the teaching of phonetics and phonology of French language should be emphasised especially in the Anglophone setting for better mastery of speech production of French sounds and words however it may not be totally possible to eradicate errors in French speech production but it could be minimised.

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