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Elision in Nzema

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This paper examines elision as a syllable structure process in Nzema, a Niger-Congo (Kwa, Bia) language spoken mainly in the Western Region of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The paper discusses some phonological and morphological factors that necessitate elision in Nzema. The paper discusses the processes involved in elision and the contexts within which the phenomenon occurs in Nzema. It first considers V_1 and V_2 elision in some phrasal and compound constructions. It also discusses syllable elision that operates within words. The paper shows that segments, syllables, and tones are affected by elision. It is observed that although elision is purely phonological, it is also motivated by morphological factors as vowels interact during compounding, and at word boundary. The analysis shows that in Nzema, morpheme2-initial Vs (i.e., V_2) can be targeted for deletion in compounds and across word boundary, while elision of the first vowel, V_1, only occurs across word boundary. Again, syllables that are lost word internally are compensated for by lengthening the initial vowel, V_1 of the word. Moreover, in a context of $V_1\#V_2$ where the two vowels are of the same quality, the target for the deletion process is determined by tone. The findings show a link between the phonology and morphology of Nzema in the analysis of elision.

Keywords: *Compounds, Nzema, elision, tone, syllable structure process*

1 Introduction

This paper examines elision as a syllable structure process which is observed in the formation of some compounds and phrases in Nzema, a Niger-Congo (Kwa, Bia) language spoken mainly in the Western Region of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Nzema has five major dialects, namely Dwɔmɔlɔ, Ɛlɛmgbɛlɛ, Adwɔmɔlɔ, Egila, and Ɛvaloɛ. Nzema is one of the minority languages in Ghana that has very little literature, particularly in the area of phonology. In fact, works such as Owusu Ansah (2020), Amoh (2017), Abdul-Rahman (2013), Sibanda (2009), Abakah (2004), etc., attest to the fact that elision is a common phenomenon in most languages of the world. However, this linguistic phenomenon has not been explored in Nzema. It is therefore important to note how it operates in Nzema.

The data for this study were collected from primary sources. The information was gathered from native speakers of Nzema in the Department of Akan-Nzema Education, College of Languages Education, Ajumako. It was recorded using a tape recorder and later transcribed onto a computer. The transcribed data were cross-checked with two Nzema lecturers who are native speakers to ensure consistency and accuracy.

The paper first describes the phenomenon of elision in Nzema and finally analyses the data within the theoretical framework of autosegmental phonology (Goldsmith, 1976). Elision that targets the final V of the first syllable and the initial V of the second syllable are first discussed. The paper also considers syllable elision within words. Vowel-vowel sequence, particularly at the boundary of words and in compounds, constitutes a dispreferred configuration in most languages (Siptár 2005). As a result, Nzema deletes one of the two closely adjacent vowels.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief overview of the Nzema syllable structure and elision in general. Section 3, on the other hand, looks at elision

in consecutive constructions, possessive constructions, progressive constructions, perfective constructions, and verbal noun constructions. Section 4 focuses on elision in noun-noun and noun-adjective compounds. Section 5 discusses syllable-final high vowel elision. Section 6 discusses word internal syllable elision. Section 7 looks at twin vowel elision, and finally, Section 8 concludes the study.

2 Syllable structure of Nzema

I present the syllable structure of Nzema briefly in this section. The syllable structure types in Nzema, according to Nyame (2019), are the CV, V, and N. However, among the attested syllable types, N as a syllable type is yet to be attested (see, for example, Clements & Keyser 1983:29).
Thus, based on current data, I propose an alternative presentation of what has been provided by Nyame (2019). Therefore, the syllable structures in Nzema include the V, CV, and CVC. The segments dominated by a C-element are [+consonantal], and the segments dominated by a V-element are [+syllabic]. Consider the example (1) below.

(1) **Syllable types in Nzema**
CV— **/dá/** ‘to sleep’
/bɔ́ / ‘to beat’
/dɔ́/ ‘to weed’

The CV syllable type is primarily made up of a consonant, which serves as the onset, and a vowel, which serves as the nucleus, as shown above.

(2) V— **/e/**, **/ɛ/**, **/a/**, **/n/**, **/m/**, **/ŋ/**, **/ɱ/**
/è.tú/ ‘gun’, **/ɛ̀.dà/** ‘bow’, **/à.wà/** ‘calabash’, **/ǹ.zɜ̃́/** ‘wine’, **/m̀.g͡bɜ̃́/** ‘guinea worm’,
/ŋ̀.gà.kà.dʑè.lé/ ‘red ant’, **/ɱ̀.vɔ̃́.ã̀.l͡ĩ̀/** ‘stench’, **/kà.ǹ.dà.lɛ̀/** ‘bush fowl’, **/k͡pɔ̀.m̀.gbà/** ‘to sew’

The V syllable type is primarily occupied by segments that are [+syllabic], without an onset. We observe that these ([+syllabic]) segments can be either vowels or sonorant consonants, which are only nasals. The nasals have free distribution and therefore can serve as the onset, nucleus and coda.

(3) CVC- **/kũ̀n.dɯ̃́m/** ‘a kind of festival’
/ˋn.zɛ̀m.dɛ́/ ‘humour’

The constituents of the CVC syllable type include an onset, a vowel nucleus, and a coda. The syllable types above show that, currently, consonant clusters are not allowed in the language. It should be noted that Nzema allows only the alveolar nasal /n/ and bilabial nasal /m/ in coda positions. All other nasal consonants can occur syllable-initial as onsets or syllable-medial as syllabic nasals, as shown above.

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2.1 *Elision*

Elision or deletion refers to a situation where sounds are omitted or not articulated in certain contexts (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). This suggests that a sound, present in its underlying form, can be removed in the surface form in certain environments. Matthews (1997) defines vowel elision as the process by which a vowel at the end of a word is lost, or elided, before another vowel at the beginning of the following word. This definition agrees with that given by Casali (1997) and Rosenthall (1997) and appears to exclude other instances of elision but focus only on first vowel (V_1) elision. Indeed, there are languages in which elision always targets the leftmost vowel. As shown in (4), Nguni (Sibanda 2009: 44-45) is one of these languages.

(4) Nguni

	UR		SR
a.	/ba-onke/	→	[bonke]
	SUB-INDEF		
	'all'		
b.	/ba-odwa/	→	[bodwa]
	SUB-3PL		
	'Only them.'		
c.	/ibe-ihamba/	→	[ibihamba]
	3SG-go.PAST.PROG		
	'It was going.'		
d.	/ube-uhamba/	→	[ubuhamba]
	2SG-go.PAST.PROG		
	'You were going.' (Sibanda 2009: 44-45)		

In Nguni (4), we can see that the target of elision is not subject to whether the vowel is low or high. The target is always the leftmost vowel, V_1. In Akan, however, both leftmost and rightmost vowel elision occur (Amoh 2017:41). Let us consider the example in (5) below.

(5) Akan

	UR		SR
a.	/efie/ + /owura/	→	/efiewura/
	home owner		homeowner
	'Landlord/Landlady.'		
b.	/abʊa/ + /efunu/	→	/abʊæfunu/
	animal dead		dead animal
	'Dead animal.' (Amoh 2017: 41)		

The Akan examples in (5) above demonstrate that vowel elision does not always target V_1 as Rosenthall (1997) and Matthews (1997) posit, but also V_2.

In the examples (4) and (5), the environment for elision is at morpheme boundaries and within compounding, respectively. Elision can also occur within a word, affecting not only vowels but also syllables. In this case, it is syllable elision. The Ganda examples in (6) demonstrate this kind of elision.

(6) Ganda

	UR		SR
i.	/Ba-ezi/	→	[be:zi]
	PL-sweeper		
	'Sweepers.'		
ii.	/Ba-ogezi/	→	[bo:gezi]
	PL-speaker		
	'Speakers' (Harris 2011)		

In Ganda (6), the lost sounds involve low vowels, and the direction of elision is always to the left. Gimson (1970) observes that, aside from word-internal elisions, sounds may be elided in rapid colloquial speech, especially near word boundaries. This indicates that in languages where elision occurs frequently, the phenomenon is unavoidable, particularly for native speakers. In Dagbani, elision not only affects vowels but also nasal consonants or an entire syllable (Abdul-Rahman 2013). Additionally, as seen in the Ganda example in (6), elision in Dagbani occurs at word boundaries but always towards the left and never to the right.

In Esahie, a Volta-Comoe language, elision can target either V_1 or V_2 (Owusu Ansah 2020). Owusu Ansah (2020) argues that V_1 elision occurs in possessive and perfective constructions, whereas elision of V_2 always occurs in compounds.

According to Yule (2010), speakers tend to leave some sounds unpronounced in normal speech, which is neither the result of laziness nor a form of sloppiness. Thus, as Yule (2010) argues, deliberately avoiding the regular patterns of elision in discourse usually results in artificial talk.

The discussion above shows that elision is frequent in many languages. However, little is known about the phenomenon in Nzema. It is against this backdrop that I discuss the subject of elision in the language. I show in this study that in Nzema, elision targets vowels across word boundaries, in compounds, and at the syllable level.

3 Elision in phrasal constructions

Vowel elision usually occurs when two morphologically free forms are put together such that the vowel that ends the first word and that which begins the second word are juxtaposed. When this happens, one of the two vowels may elide. Thus, in Nzema, when two words are juxtaposed such that the first word ends in a vowel [V_1] and the second word begins with a vowel [V_2], one of the words loses its vowel. The environment for the deletion of the vowel is morphologically conditioned. In some environments, the V_1 is deleted, while in others, the V_2 is deleted. Let us examine instances of occurrence in Nzema.

3.1 *V_1 elision in a consecutive construction*

Consecutive verbs in Nzema are formed by adding the low-toned proclitic /à/ to verbs. The verbs can be either low-toned or high-toned, depending on their syllable constituents. In a consecutive construction where a pronominal is added to the verb, the pronominal loses its vowel in the sequence. Vowel elision occurs in this combination when first person singular /mì/ or plural /jɛ̀/, second person singular /wɔ̀/, third person singular /jì/ or plural /bɛ̀/

pronominals concatenate with verbs in their consecutive forms. In the juxtaposed vowels, the pronominals are usually [-low] while [+low] in the verbs, as shown in example (7) below.

(7)

V_1		#	V_2	⟶	V_2	
[-low]		#	[+low]			
a. /mĩ̀/	'me'	#	/àvá/	'may take	→ [màvá]	'(That) I may take'
b. /jì/	'him'	#	/àdɔ́/	'may buy'	→ [jàdɔ́]	'(That) he may buy'
c. /jɛ̀/	'our'	#	/ˋʌlí/	'may eat'	→ [jˋʌlí]	'(That) we may eat'
d. /wɔ̀/	'your'	#	/àlá/	'may sleep'	→ [wàlá]	'(That) you may sleep'
e. /bɛ̀/	'their'	#	/àzìlì/	'may laugh	→ [bàzìlì]	'(That) they may laugh'

Elision of the first vowel (V_1) in the first elements in the contexts above can be associated with two reasons. First, the initial vowel [a] in verbs of Nzema usually marks the consecutives of the verbs, and so deleting it would make the output appear perfective (tense) instead of its intended consecutive form, and that would bring a change in meaning of the output. For this reason, it is preserved. Secondly, in a context of a V-V sequence where one of the V is a [+low], the [-low] vowels usually delete. Moreover, the low vowel [a], due to its higher sonority, can withstand elision than any other vowel (Walker 2011).

3.2 *V_1 elision in a possessive construction*

Another environment for V_1 elision is between pronominal and noun concatenation in possessive constructions. The possessive construction in Nzema is marked with a possessive pronoun, which is attached to a noun. In contexts where the nouns begin with a vowel, a V-V sequence is created at the word boundary. When this happens, the vowel of the possessive pronoun (V_1) is elided in the V_1 # V_2 sequence. Vowel elision in this combination also occurs when first person singular /mì/ or plural /jɛ̀/, second person singular /wɔ̀/, third person singular /jì/ or plural /bɛ̀/ possessive pronominals concatenate with nouns. Just as we saw from (5), the V_1s that are targeted for elision in this construction are also specified for [-low]. Consider the examples in (8).

(8)

V_1		#	V_2	⟶	V_2	
[-low]		#	[+low]			
a. /wɔ̀/	'your'	#	/ˋazɛ̀lˋɛ/	'land'	→ [wàzɛ̀lˋɛ]	'your land'
b. /bɛ̀/	'their'	#	/àdˋɔmɑ̃́/	'baby'	→ [bàdˋɔmɑ̃́]	'their baby'
c. /jɛ̀/	'our'	#	/ˋʌdú/	'guns'	→ [jˋʌdú]	'our guns'
d. /mĩ̀/	'my'	#	/àlˋɔŋ̀ã/	'grandchild'	→ [mɑ̃̀lˋɔŋ̀ã]	'my grandchild'
e. /jì/	'his'	#	/ˋakɛ̃̂lɑ̃̂/	'sugarcane'	→ [jˋakɛ̃̂lɑ̃̂]	'his sugarcane'

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Example (8) shows that in Nzema, whenever a pronominal whose vowel is [-low] meets a noun with a [+low] vowel at word boundary, the vowel in the first element elides to avoid a vowel-vowel sequence. As can be seen from the examples, pronominals in Nzema function as possessives and, whether in singular or plural, would necessarily be subject to elision when they meet nouns. V_1 elision in a possessive construction is illustrated below in Figure 1.

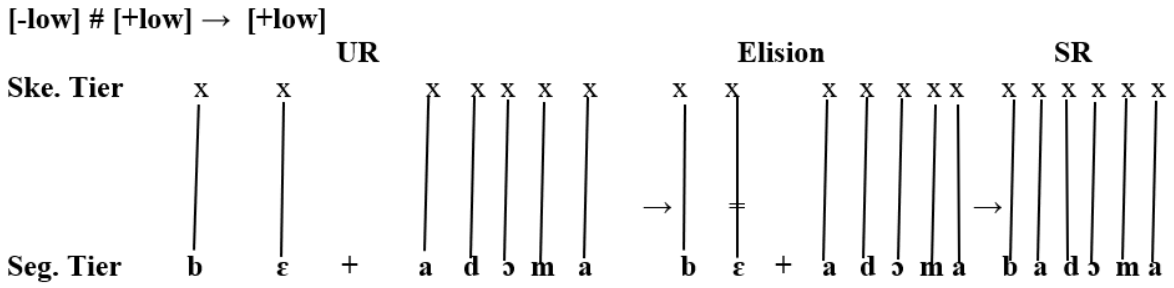

Figure 1: V_1 elision in a possessive construction

Figure 1 above shows V_1 elision in a possessive construction. At a morpheme juncture where the V-V sequence is realised, we observe a delinking of the -low mid-front vowel [ɛ] segment from its tier. This delinking results in the loss of that segment. The mid-vowel, which is weak in the output, is deleted for the preservation of the low vowel [a].

3.3 *V_2 elision in a progressive construction*

Progressive verbs in Nzema can be formed by attaching a low-toned proclitic /lɛ̀/ or a combination of /ɛ̀/ and /lɛ̀/ to verbs. Where the subject of the construction is a pronominal, only the clitic /lɛ̀/ is attached to verbs. However, in a construction where the subject is a noun, /ɛ̀/ and /lɛ̀/ combine as /ɛ̀lɛ̀/ and are attached to the verbs. The clitic /ɛ̀/ in a noun-subject progressive construction functions as a focus marker to the noun and the verb. We will therefore demonstrate elision in noun-subject progressive construction, as it is the domain in which elision is targeted. In a progressive construction where a noun is added to the progressive verb, the verb loses its vowel in the sequence. Let us consider example (9) below.

(9)

V_1		**#**	**V_2**	⟶	**V_1**	
[±high]		#	[-high]			
a. /kòdʑó/	‘name’	#	/ɛ̀lɛ̀sú/	‘is crying’ →	[kòdʑólɛ̀sú]	‘Kodwo is crying’
b. /kómʊ̃/	‘monkey’	#	/ɛ̀lɛ̀wú/	‘is dying’ →	[kómʊ̃lɛ̀wú]	‘a monkey is dying’
c. /bàkà/	‘a tree’	#	/ɛ̀lɛ̀tú/	‘is falling’ →	[bàkàlɛ̀tú]	‘a tree is falling’
d. /àbɛ́bɛ́/	‘locust’	#	/ɛ̀lɛ̀wúlú/	‘is hopping’ →	[àbɛ́bɛ́lɛ̀wúlú]	‘a locust is hopping’

From (9), we observe that in Nzema, nouns retain their final vowels, whereas verbs lose their initial vowels in progressive constructions. The clitic /ɛ̀/ (V2) in /ɛ̀lɛ̀/, which carries a low tone, consistently elides irrespective of the tone of the final vowels (V1) in the nouns.

3.4 *V_2 elision in a perfective construction*

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Another environment in which the second vowel is elided is in noun-verb concatenation in perfective constructions. Perfective verbs in Nzema are formed by attaching a low-toned proclitic /ɛ̀/ to verbs. The verbs can be low-toned or high-toned depending on their syllable constituents. In a perfective construction where a noun is added to the perfective verb, the verb loses its vowel in the sequence. Let us consider the examples in (10) below.

(10)

V_1		**#**	**V_2**	⟶	**V_1**	
[±high]		#	[-high]			
a. /ézúlé/	‘rain’	#	/ɛ̀dɔ́/	‘has fallen’ →	[ézúlédɔ́]	‘it has rained’
b. /kómm̃ŭ/	‘monkey’	#	/ɛ̀wú/	‘has died’ →	[kómm̃ŭwú]	‘a monkey has died’
c. /bàkà/	‘a tree’	#	/ɛ̀dú/	‘has fallen’ →	[bàkàdú]	‘a tree has fallen’
d. /sànĩ̃/	‘broom’	#	/ɛ̀túlú/	‘has loosened’ →	[sànĩ̃túlú]	‘a broom has loosened’
e. /bɔ̀lɔ̀/	‘ball’	#	/ɛ̀dé/	‘has burst’ →	[bɔ̀lɔ̀dé]	‘a ball has burst’

From the examples in (10) above, we see that whenever a noun that ends with a [±high] vowel meets a verb beginning with a [-high] vowel, the vowel prefix of the verb deletes. This shows that nouns stand stronger when they are in concatenation with verbs. It is also interesting to note that, as verbs give in to elision on the right (position) with [-high] vowel initial in noun and verb concatenation, when the position of the verb is reversed, so that nouns occupy the right position (verb-noun concatenation) with the verbs ending with [+high] vowels, this time there is no elision. Let us consider the following Nzema examples in (9).

(11)

V_1		**#**	**V_2**	⟶ **V_1V_2**		
[+high]		#	[+low]			
a. /dí/	‘eat’	#	/àl`ìɛ/	‘food’ →	[dí àl`ìɛ]	‘eat food’
b. /sú/	‘fetch’	#	/`ʌhúlé/	‘groundnut →	[sú`ʌhúlé]	‘fetch groundnut’
c. /tí/	‘tear’	#	/`ʌlúbʌ/	‘beans’ →	[tı̂`ʌlúbʌ]	‘harvest groundnut’
d. /bó/	‘beat’	#	/àkà/	‘name’ →	[bʊ̀ àkà]	‘beat Aka’

What we observe from example (11) is that verb-noun concatenations in Nzema do not result in elision, unlike noun-verb concatenations, where the initial vowels in the verbs give in to elision. I argue that in Nzema, whenever verbs with [+high] final vowels meet nouns with [+low] initial vowels at a word boundary, there occurs no elision even though the position of the nouns is on the right. This implies that for vowels in verbs to elide in their concatenation with nouns, the position of the verbs should be on the right, and initial vowels of the verbs must necessarily be specified for [-high] and not [+high] as in (10) and (11).

3.5 *V_2 elision in a verbal noun construction*

Noun-verb concatenation in verbal noun constructions is another environment where elision of the second vowel, V_2, occurs in Nzema. Verbal nouns in Nzema are formed by circumfixing the low-toned proclitic /ɛ̀/ and the high-toned enclitic /lɛ́/ to the base verb. In verbal noun constructions where a noun is added to the verbal noun, the verbal noun loses its vowel in the sequence. Let us consider the following examples.

(12)

V_1		#	V_2	⟶	V_1	
[±high]		#	[-high]			
a. /ˋɛjá/	‘farm’	#	/ˋɛz̀õl̃ɛ̃/	‘weeding’ →	[ˋɛjáz̀õl̃ˋɛ̃]	‘farming’
b. /bɔ̀lˋʊ/	‘football’	#	/ˋɛbɔ̀lɛ́/	‘playing’ →	[bɔ̀lˋʊbɔ̀lɛ́]	‘football game’
c. /ˋɛxɔ̀ɲ̃ˊ/	‘hunger’	#	/ˋɛɛ̀ılɛ́/	‘catching’ →	[ˋɛxɔ̀nɪ̃ˊɛ̀ılɛ́]	‘fasting’
d. /ˋʌhúlè/	‘groundnut’	#	/ˋɛlúˋʌlɛ́/	‘planting’ →	[ˋʌhúlélúˋʌlɛ́]	‘groundnut sowing’

As can be observed from (12), whenever nouns that end with [±high] vowels meet verbal nouns with [-high] initial vowels, which are always front vowels at word boundary, the vowel prefixes in the verbal nouns, V_2, readily elide.

Since verbal nouns are words formed from verb roots and affixes, these affixes are usually at risk of elision to preserve the root verb (Nyame 2019). Also, final vowels in nouns form part of the roots (Nyame 2019). As a result, noun final vowels will not yield to elision, hence the elision of the morphological prefixes in the verbal nouns. V2 elision in a verbal noun construction is illustrated below in Figure 2.

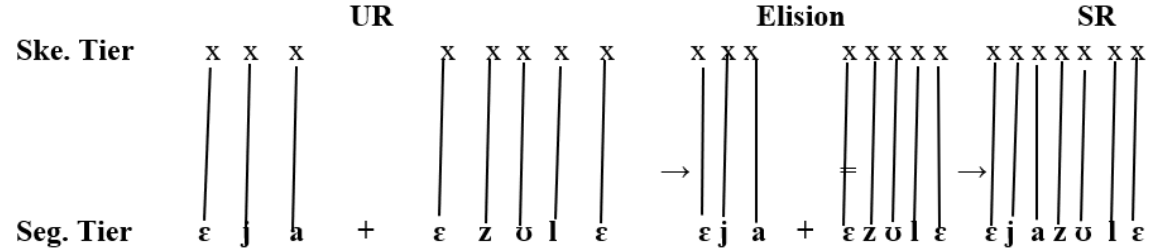

Figure 2: V_2 Elision in a verbal noun construction

4 Elision in compounds

Compounds in Nzema are formed by joining two or more independent words to derive a new word. Usually, when two words are combined to form a compound, and the first word ends with a vowel (V_1), and the second word begins with a vowel (V_2), the second word loses its initial vowel. Therefore, in a context of V_1-V_2 sequence across syllable boundary in a compound, the V_2 is deleted. Compounds in which V_2 elision occurs in Nzema are usually between a noun-noun and a noun-adjective.

4.1 *V_2 elision in noun-noun compound*

Morpheme concatenations in which V_2 elision occurs, the elided vowels are always specified for [-high]. When two nouns meet at word boundary, the initial vowel of the second element is elided. Noun-noun compounds are regular in the Nzema language. Let us observe from the following examples.

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(13) **noun noun compound**

V1		#	**V2**		**V1**	
[±high]		#	[-high]			
a. /bànã̀/	'plantain'	#	/édʑĭlĭ̃/	'farm'	→ [bànã̀dʑĭ̃lĭ̃]	'plantain farm'
b. /bútúlé/	'quarrel'	#	/`ɛjá/	'farm'	→ [bútúléjá]	'quarrel plant (Fern)'
c. /mã̀nzã̀/	'name'	#	/`ɛbà/	'name'	→ [mã̀nzã̀bà]	'personal name (fem)'
d. /nd`ɔ/	'kind of plant'	#	/`ɛkpà/	'mat'	→ [nd`ɔkpà]	'Indian mat'
e. /`ɛz̀ɛnĭ̃/	'funeral'	#	/`ɛdã̀l̃ɛ̃/	'cloth'	→ [`ɛz̀ɛnĭ̃dã̀l̃ɛ̃]	'funeral cloth'

What we observe is that when two nouns, of which the first is specified for [±high] vowel and the second begins with a [-high] vowel, the vowel that begins the second word, V_2, elides. This means that the first vowels stand stronger than the second vowels in noun-noun concatenations. Considering the makeup or inner strengths of the two elements in a noun and noun compound, Booij (2007:176) observes that one element is strong and the other is weak. He asserts that for this to be true, the relationship between the constituents should be that of sisters in which one of them is the head of a prosodic category, such as the foot. He adds that in the case of the English language, the first phonological word in noun-noun compounds is the strongest.

In Nzema, usually, when two nouns concatenate, the first functions as a modifier while the second functions as the head. For instance, in /ɛ̀z̀ɛnĭ̃/ 'funeral' and /`ɛdã̀l̃ɛ̃/ 'cloth', which becomes /ɛ̀z̀ɛnĭ̃dã̀l̃ɛ̃/ 'funeral cloth', it is a particular cloth used for funerals that is talked about. Therefore, the first noun, which functions as a modifier, retains its vowel to supply information about the head. Another reason for the first noun showing more strength than the second could be explained in terms of the semantic relations between the two nouns. Evidence for this assertion is given in the following subsection.

4.1.1 *Semantic evidence of strength in the first noun*

Noun-noun compounds in Nzema are endocentric, with the head always on the right. Explaining endocentric compounds with English words, Katamba (1993: 305) has remarked that, "semantically an endocentric compound indicates a sub-grouping within the class of entities that the head denotes." He gives the following examples: schoolboy, bedroom, and explains that the underlined are a kind of boy and a kind of room, respectively, in which the first part are just specifiers giving more precise meaning to the head.

This is what we observe in (13). Therefore, in Nzema, because the first constituent in a noun-noun compound provides a more precise meaning to the head, it wields much strength. This is in line with what Stahlke (1971: 186) observes in the Ewe language that when a noun becomes the head of a nominalisation, its prefix (vowel) is deleted, and therefore tonal alternations it conditions also become absent.

4.2 *V_2 elision in noun-adjective compound*

Another instance of elision of the second vowel, V_2, at morpheme juncture in Nzema is between nouns and adjectives in diminutive constructions. In a diminutive construction where a noun, which is usually a personal name, is added to the diminutive adjective /èʧí/, the diminutive adjective loses its vowel in the sequence. Let us see how this occurs in (14) below.

(14)

noun		**adjective**		**compound**	
V_1	**#**	**V_2**	⟶	**V_1**	
[-low]	#	[-high]			
a. /kódʑó/ ‘name’	#	/ètɕí/	‘little’ →	[kódʑótɕí]	‘Kodwo little’
b. /kʌ̀kú/ ‘name’	#	/ètɕí/	‘little’ →	[kʌ̀kútɕí]	‘Kaku little’
c. /kófĭ/ ‘name’	#	/ètɕí/	‘little’ →	[kófĭtɕí]	‘Kofi little’
d. /`ʌxú/ ‘name’	#	/ètɕí/	‘little’ →	[ʌ̀xútɕí]	‘Ahu little’

As can be observed from example (14), when nouns meet adjectives at word boundary in Nzema, the V_2s that begin the second word, which are usually front vowels and [-high], elide. The elision thus targets the rightmost vowel in the sequence. To account for the (V_2) loss in this environment, we approach it from two perspectives: morphological and phonological conditioning.

Morphologically, the vowel that is retained in a noun-adjective compound finally belongs to the entire compound, as in the examples above. Phonologically, the reason for the elision of the initial vowel of the second element is with respect to syllabification. Syllables at some point are required to have onsets or begin with a consonant, though not obligatory in Nzema. The second constituents have only a nucleus as their initial syllables, which are usually prone to elision, particularly in compounding.

Another reason for the loss of V_2 in noun and adjective compound as also observed by Nyame (2019), is that the vowel [è] in [ètɕí] is an affix and would therefore yield to elision to preserve the elements in the noun which the adjective qualifies.

5 Syllable final high vowel elision

In Nzema, vowels not only delete at morpheme juncture but also at some syllable final positions. Usually, this kind of elision occurs in fast speeches in which word-final high vowels following consonants are deleted obligatorily. The consonants that are followed by the high vowels are always nasals. This kind of elision also occurs in the Fante dialect of the Akan language.

Describing how these syllable-final high vowels delete in Fante, Abakah (2004) observes, “In standard Fante, if root morpheme terminates in a final SV-syllable (where S stands for non-vowel sonorant) the V deletes obligatorily if it has [+high] specification in its feature matrix.” (Abakah 2004:189). Let us see how this kind of elision operates in Nzema in Example (15) below.

(15)

UR	SR	
a. /bànĩ̀/	[bàn]	‘fence’
b. /bónĩ́/	[bón]	‘what’
c. /kómṹ/	[kóm]	‘monkey’
d. /mìdàmì/	[mĩ̀dàm]	‘I/me’
e. /bʊ̀ànĩ̀/	[bʊ̀àn]	‘sheep’
f. /ŋʊ̀ànì/	[ŋʊ̀àn]	‘who’
g. /bɛ̀nì/	[bɛ̀n]	‘left’
h. /`ʌɥí`ʌnì/	[`ʌɥí`ʌn]	‘a town name (Half Assini)’

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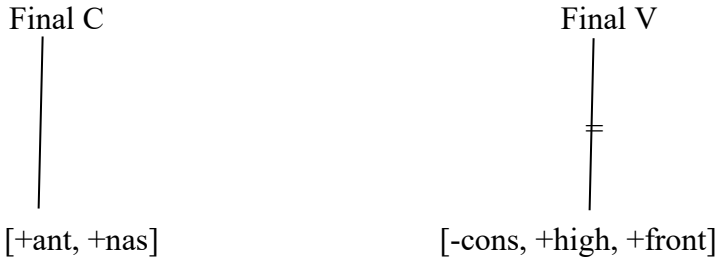
We can see from the examples in (15) that the elision indeed occurs at the end of each syllable. We also see that the vowels that undergo elision are front high vowels, except in example (15c), which is back high. Furthermore, whereas in example (15c) the vowel that deletes is specified for a [+ATR], those that delete in examples (15a, b, d-h) are all [-ATR]. This kind of elision is very productive in Nzema. This process can be captured in the rule below.

Post sonorant consonant final high vowel deletion rule:

(16)



Syllable final high vowel elision in Nzema is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

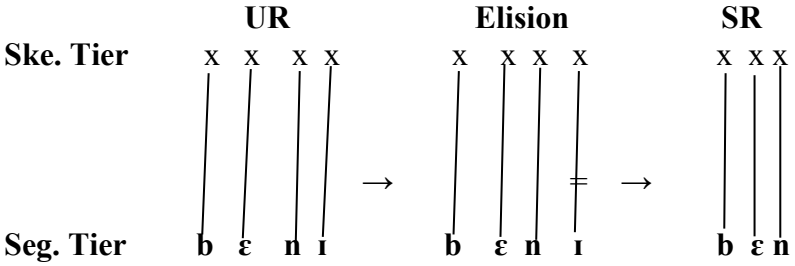


Figure 3: Syllable final high vowel elision in Nzema

Figure 3 shows syllable-final high vowel elision. We observe that the nucleus of the second syllable is delinked and therefore deleted in the output. Note that the resultant syllable is no longer two but one syllable with a single vowel nucleus and a coda.

6 Word internal syllable elision

Elision can also occur within words, where it would not target only Vs but also CVs. In this case, it becomes syllable elision. Consider the examples in (17) below.

(17) UR SR

a. /abɛbɛ/ → [a:bɛ] ‘locust’

b. /ʌbuburʌ/ → [ʌ:buɤʌ] ‘a lame person’

c. /ʌwuko/ → [ʌ:ko] ‘abode’ (Nyame 2019: 59)

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In (17), we observe a whole syllable deletion, which is compensated for by lengthening of the initial vowel. With this strategy, pronunciation is made easy for the native speakers. This is in line with Harris's (2011) argument that syllable deletion is language-specific and that the lost syllables are compensated for with a lengthening. This syllable loss is illustrated below in Figure 4.

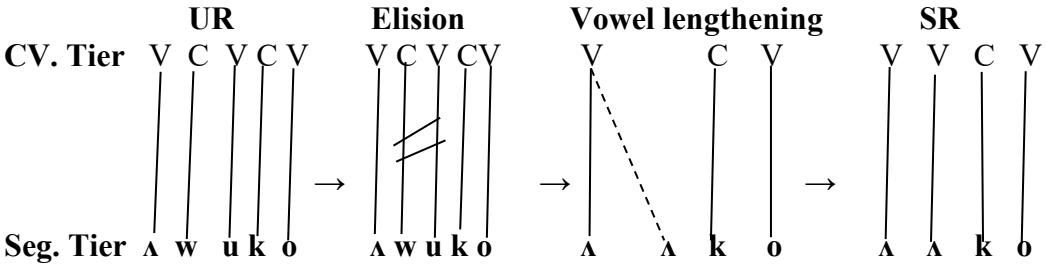

Figure 4: Word internal syllable elision

In the input, we observe that the number of syllables, which is three, has reduced to two in the output by means of elision. On the CV tier, we observe a feature spread from V_1 to the site of the second syllable. This paves the way for a lengthening of V_1 to compensate for the loss of the second syllable.

7 Twin vowel elision

There is a situation where it becomes difficult to determine which of the two (identical) or congruent vowels elides. This happens when the vowels in sequence are of the same quality; that is, when the vowels are identical. In this context, it is usually difficult to determine whether it is V_1 or V_2 that elides. In this sub-section, I show which one of two identical vowels that meet at word boundary elides in Nzema irrespective of word category. Let us consider the examples below in (18).

(18)

V_1		**#**	**V_2**		⟶	**V_1**	
[±high]		#	[-high]				
a. /àlìɛ̀/	'food'	#	/ɛ̀bí/	'is cooked'	→	[àlìɛ̀bí]	'food is ready'
b. /àbɛ̀lɛ̀/	'maize'	#	/ɛ̀já/	'farm'	→	[àbɛ̀lɛ̀já]	'maize farm'
c. /àdɛ̀lɛ́/	'spoon'	#	/ɛ̀vàlɛ́/	'to take'	→	[àdɛ̀lɛ́vàlɛ́]	'spoon taking'
d. /àkà/	'name'	#	/àkʒàbí/	'name'	→	[àkàkʒàbí]	'personal name'
e. /ètú/	'gun'	#	/ɛ̀dɔ́/	'has shot'	→	[ètúdɔ́]	'there is a gunshot'

From the examples, apart from (18c) and (18e) in which V_1 is a high tone vowel, the rest of V_1 are all low tone. On the part of V_2, however, all the vowels are low tone. In a situation such as this, some scholars, such as Abakah (2004), using Fante data, argue that it is the final vowel, V_1 of the first element, which elides. He argues further that the input low tone (initial vowel) of the second element survives at the output level, but the final vowel (V_1) of the first element, which is usually a high tone, is elided.

From the examples in (18) above, we observe that Nzema behaves differently. Unlike Fante (Abaka 2004), where high tone V_1 deletes, in Nzema, it is rather V_2, which is low tone, that deletes. We also observe that when V_1 and V_2 are both low-toned, as in (18a), (18b) and

(18d), the target of elision is still V_2. Moreover, where V_1 is a high tone, and V_2 is a low tone as in (18c), V_2 is deleted.

From the observation made thus far, it can be argued that in Nzema, whenever there is an identical vowel-vowel sequence at word boundary, where V_1 and V_2 are of the same tone level, that is, low or high, it is V_2 that elides. Again, when V_1 and V_2 are of different tone levels, it is the low-toned vowel, V_2, that deletes.

8 Conclusion

The paper has discussed how elision operates in Nzema. It has shown that vowels and syllables can be subjected to elision in the language. We observed that vowel elision is very regular across morpheme boundaries in consecutive constructions, possessive constructions, progressive constructions, perfective constructions, verbal noun constructions, and compounds in Nzema. In a context of $V_1\#V_2$, the vowel that deletes across word boundary varies. The analysis shows that in the consecutive constructions and possessive constructions, the deleted vowel is always V_1. However, in the progressive constructions, perfective constructions, verbal noun constructions, and compounds, the deleted vowel is always V_2. Consequently, I conclude, based on the data, that in the consecutive constructions and possessive constructions in Nzema, whenever there is a $V_1\#V_2$, the V_1 is deleted, whereas in the progressive constructions, perfective constructions, verbal noun constructions and compound constructions, V_2 is deleted.

As a preliminary conclusion, inter alia, we have observed that in Nzema, the morpheme2 initial V is systematically targeted for deletion as it involves more environments than it is found in V_1 elision. The vowels that are targeted for elision in V_1 elision are always specified for the feature [-low], while in V_2 elision, the vowels are [-high].

Moreover, in Nzema, whenever there is an identical $V_1\#V_2$ such that V_1 and V_2 are of the same tone level, that is, low-low or different tone level, high-low, it is V_2 that consistently elides.

The study has further shown that (at least in Nzema) the mid vowels, [ɛ, e, ɔ] surrender to [a], a [+Low] vowel. That is, whichever position [a] finds itself (whether as V_1 or V_2), it is mostly favoured against all other vowels.

Finally, the evidence in this paper indicates that there is a link between phonology and morphology when accounting for elision in Nzema.

Abbreviations

SUB	Subject marker
INDEF	Indefinite
2SG	Second person singular
3SG	Third person singular
PROG	Progressive marker
PAST	Past marker
PL	Plural marker
SR	Surface realisation
UR	Underlying representation
ATR	Advanced tongue root
V_1	First vowel
V_2	Second vowel

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