

THE LOSS OF PRENASALISATION IN THE
NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN VARIETIES OF
GIKUYU

BY:

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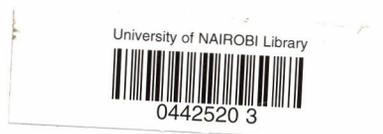
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Abstract

This work is essentially an investigation of the factors responsible for the loss of the nasal onsets that are supposed to precede the Gikuyu voiced stops. Prenasalised stops are treated as single units (phonemes) in Gikuyu phonology and not a combination of a nasal and an oral consonant. This is well explained in chapter two and at the beginning of chapter three. At the end of chapter two the Gikuyu syllable is illustrated using CV phonology. The prenasalised stops are accorded similar treatment with contour tones, since they are reckoned as occupying the same(one) slot at the C-V tier but different slots in the segmental tier.

The difference in the treatment of the prenasalised stops by different speakers of the two varieties of Gikuyu in our study is highlighted in chapter three. To be precise the speech of the elderly speakers of Gikuyu is seen to exhibit a relatively high incidence of prenasalisation while the younger speakers a remarkably low one.

The motivation of factors for the suspected loss of the nasal onset in what are supposed to be prenasalised stops is examined in detail in chapter four. The theories of autosegmental and CV phonologies are used to

describe the change in the prenasalised stops, while the theory of markedness and the principle of least effort are used to provide a possible explanation as to why the prenasalised stops, and not any other sound in the language, are the target of the change under investigation. William Labov's model for accounting for language change has been utilized in this study for the purpose of illustrating the distribution of the change under investigation among the speakers of NVG and SVG.

The study is concluded in chapter 5 with the revelation that there is in deed a correlation between age of the speaker and the incidence of prenasalisation. Multilingualism and such articulatory consideration as the effort involved in articulating certain sounds are identified as significant factors with a direct bearing on the change focused in our study.