

# yoruba language and literature

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**Yoruba Language and Literature**

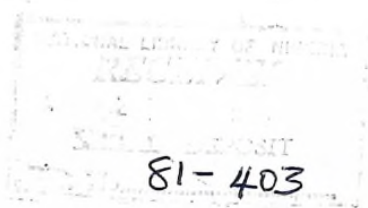
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# YORUBA LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

ADEBISI AFOLAYAN

Editor



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## *Acknowledgements*

This volume is a selection of papers read during the week-end Seminar on Yoruba Language and Literature held at the University of Ife, Nigeria, 13-16 December 1969.

The Seminar was organized by the Institute of African Studies in collaboration with the Department of English of the University. The rôle of the English Department was limited to providing a number of participants at the Conference, including the present writer (who also served as organizing secretary). Therefore, the present volume owes much to the Institute of African Studies, particularly to its then Director, Professor Michael Crowder (now of the Kano Branch of Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria) and its secretarial staff.

The University of Ife fully financed the Seminar, and now the University press is supporting the publication of this volume. Many thanks to the University authorities, particularly the Vice-Chancellor, without whose blessing the Seminar would not have taken place. Thanks are also due to the University of Ife Publications Committee, and to the former Editor of the Press, Mr. Hans Zell, whose persistent efforts have made the publication of this volume possible.

Since this publication owes its existence to the first Seminar on Yoruba Language ever to be held, all Yoruba scholars and authors who participated and contributed to it with great enthusiasm deserve grateful acknowledgement. Special mention should be made of Professor I. A. Akinjogbin, Chief I. O. Delano, Chief J. F. Odunjo, Dr. J. A. Adedeji, Professor C. Hoffmann and Professor Robert Armstrong, all of whom contributed richly to the Seminar. Professor Akinjogbin gave the opening address.

He and Chief Delanq, some two years earlier, had also arranged a week-end course in Yoruba which paved the way for the Seminar.

An unfortunate accident prevented this volume from appearing earlier. The first manuscript had been got ready for publication in 1971, but unhappily it disappeared. This necessitated a reassembling and re-editing of the materials.

Since all the numerous papers presented at the Seminar could not be published in a single volume, many of those which were read had to be excluded. Apologies to those authors whose papers were not selected for publication. No slight is intended.

Finally, the work of the Editorial Board, comprising professor Ayo Bamgbose, Dr. Wande Abimbola, Professor A. B. Fafunwa and Dr. A. Adetugbo, who worked with the present editor on the first ill-fated manuscript, is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Although the present version was not referred to the Board, the Editor has greatly benefited from the previous exercise.

Adebisi Afọlayan

## *Introduction S.H.I.*

The papers in this volume cover four different aspects of Yoruba Studies, although the first and fourth can be seen in a wider sense as belonging to the same general issue-education. The four aspects concern: components of Yoruba Studies; Literature; Language; and Educational Curriculum and Medium.



# *Constituents of Yoruba Studies*

## *Paper 1*

by

**Ayo Bamgboṣe**

When discussing the constituents of Yoruba studies, it is necessary to make a distinction between two types of Yoruba courses: one for native speakers, and one for those whose first language is not Yoruba. The aims and goals of the two types of courses are substantially different, and this will be apparent in the content of the courses. In this paper, only the course for native speakers will be discussed with emphasis on Yoruba studies at the university level.

In an earlier paper, I stated the aims of the Yoruba course at the post-primary level<sup>1</sup> as follows:

- (a) to give an insight into the structure of the language;
- (b) to develop greater expressiveness in the use of language;
- (c) to foster an appreciation of literary works;
- (d) to achieve a greater understanding of the social rôle of the language and its literature.<sup>2</sup>

Two important implications of these aims are:

- (i) that the course should be designed to make the student know more about the workings of his own language;
- (ii) that the core of the course should be an integrated study of language and literature.

The first point may seem at first sight to state the obvious; but, having examined some Yoruba syllabuses, it is necessary to point out that the primary concern of the student of Yoruba should be to know more about his language and not about any other. This requirement immediately rules out translation from Yoruba into English and vice versa, which used to be a main feature of the London G.C.E. O-Level and Teachers' Certificate Grade II syllabuses,<sup>3</sup> and translation from English to Yoruba which features prominently in the revised syllabus for the West African School Certificate, and even in the Part I degree syllabus of one of our universities.<sup>4</sup> In addition to translations, any other work requiring a study of English should be excluded from the syllabus. For example, in the Primary School Syllabus in Yoruba for Western Nigeria, an item in Class Six requires that pupils should be aware 'that there is a difference in the structure and grammar of the English and Yoruba languages', and the teacher is expected to provide examples 'of contrasting ways in which the two languages express the same thought'. This cannot be considered relevant to Yoruba studies, nor is it appropriate at this level of learning.

Any Yoruba course must be built around a core of language and literature, and at no time should students be required to abandon either. From this point of view, any Yoruba syllabus that is made up exclusively or almost exclusively of literature must be considered inadequate. Some people seem to think that the study of language is unnecessary beyond a certain level. For instance, when proposals for an A-Level Yoruba syllabus were being considered, it was seriously suggested that it should consist exclusively of literature. This attitude to language ignores the fact that literature is nothing but a creative use of language, and that all literary statements proceed from a knowledge of the texts. Therefore, any course in literature without an accompanying one in language, cannot really be fruitful. Similarly, no course in Yoruba for native speakers is complete unless it embraces a study of both oral and written literature in the wider context of Yoruba culture.

### *S.H.2 O-Level Yoruba*

The O-Level course should cover three main areas: Language, Literature, and Institutions. The language part of the course should include: Grammar, Comprehension, and Essay. In grammar, one should aim to make students aware of similarities and differences in grammatical patterns, whether of class membership or of structures. This type of grammar will not be tied to 'parsing' and drills on 'parts of speech' nor will it have anything to do with 'correction of faulty sentences and individual words' which are both major points in the revised W.A.S.C. Yoruba syllabus. Furthermore, 'the grammar will not be concerned, for example, with finding 'the Yoruba equivalent of the English "personal pronoun, objective case"'.<sup>5</sup> Comprehension should entail an understanding of the content of passages, the use of words and phrases (including idiomatic expressions and proverbs), and a reproducing of adequate summaries of given passages. Essay topics should be designed to give practice in the use of language for different kinds of purposes, such as description, narration, reporting, advertisement etc. Attention should be paid to the variations which occur in language when it is used in different situations.

In literature, the course should take the form of a general survey of the various literary modes, both oral and written, the aim being primarily to make students aware of the variety of works available in the language in prose, drama, and poetry, and to arouse their interest in them. Representative texts may be selected for study, but less attention should be paid at this stage to the cult of 'set books' i.e. the impression must not be created that literature is synonymous with the reading and discussion of set books. A general survey, including selected examples from each genre is likely to be more rewarding at this stage. In addition, students should have the opportunity of listening to performances of oral literature, if possible, local people (Ìjálá chanters, Ifá priests etc.). Should this prove difficult or impossible, recordings of such performances could be used instead.

No study of Yoruba (and indeed of any language!) may

be said to be complete without a thorough understanding of the cultural institutions associated with the use of the language. In fact, in the case of Yoruba oral literature, a great deal is bound up with specific cults, rituals or festivals, and cannot be fully appreciated outside the institutional contexts in which the forms are used. Therefore a course in Yoruba, especially at this level, should include a general study of Yoruba institutions (including customs and traditional beliefs).<sup>6</sup> As far as possible, students should be given an opportunity of observing and describing local customs. In some cases, knowledgeable people may be invited to give talks on some of the customs and institutions. There should be a correlation between this study and the literature courses. When a particular institution is being studied, the oral literature associated with it should also be discussed.

#### *S.H.2 A-Level Yoruba*

At the moment, there is no A-Level examination in Yoruba, but its introduction is being considered by a Working Party set up by the West African Examinations Council. An A-Level course in Yoruba should be a follow-up to the O-Level course and should combine work in language and literature.<sup>7</sup> In language, a more formal study of grammatical structures and systems should be attempted, and selected phonological features (such as tone, vowel assimilation and elision) should be discussed. Simple dialectal differences (especially those encountered in oral literature) should be observed and described. The work in literature should consist of an intensive study of samples of oral literature drawn from the different types (e.g. Ifá, Oríkì, Rárà, Ofò), and those of written literature in prose (novels, folk tales, short stories, essays and other writings) drama, and poetry. In addition to the reading of set books, the appreciation of passages of prose and verse which involve comprehension, elucidation of meaning, comparison and evaluation should be cultivated.

#### *S.H.2 Degree Course in Yoruba*

Yoruba studies at this level are concerned mainly with

language and literature. The language course should comprise: Grammar, Phonology, Orthography, Lexis, Dialects, and Historical Development of the language.

- (i) *Grammar*: In grammar, there should be a detailed study of the structure of the language with emphasis on the deeper relation between structures and criteria for distinguishing between classes or structures. The existing descriptions of the language should be studied critically and evaluated against the background of recent developments in linguistic theory and analysis.
- (ii) *Phonology*: An outline of the phonological structure of the language should be presented, and it should include the various units at the phonological level, the tone system (including grammatical tones), and special features such as vowel harmony.
- (iii) *Orthography*: This should embrace the principles of orthographic representation and a critical appraisal of the present Yoruba orthography against the background of these principles, and proposals for its reform, including the recommendations of the Yoruba Orthography Committee.
- (iv) *Lexis*: This should involve a study of lexical sets and collocations (including idioms), an assessment of existing dictionaries of Yoruba in the light of general principles of lexicography (including the thesaurus principle), and a study of loan words.
- (v) *Dialects*: A study of one or more dialects should be undertaken and the differences between the dialects and Standard Yoruba should be noted. Dialectal features in oral literature should also be identified and described.
- (vi) *Historical Development*: In conjunction with the study of dialects, vocabulary items from different dialects (including surviving dialects of Yoruba spoken in Brazil and Cuba) should be compared and sound correspondences established. Proto-forms should be set up, and hypotheses postulated.

about relationships between dialects and possible historical implications.

The course in literature should cover the three main divisions: Prose, Poetry, and Drama, and within these, the further division into traditional oral literature and modern written literature where appropriate. Literary study should be supplemented by a stylistic study of the texts.

- (i) *Prose*: This should embrace collections of traditional oral forms such as àlò (folk tales) and modern written forms such as novels, biographies, original compositions and political tracts (including talks and newspaper publications) and articles in Yoruba magazines such as *Olókun*.
- (ii) *Poetry*: Selections from a wide range of collections of traditional oral poetry (e.g. Ìjálá, Ifá, Oríkì, Ràrà, Èsà, Ofò, Orin Arò) should be studied. Attention should be paid to the criteria for classifying the types, the general characteristics of all the types, and the specific characteristics of each type. A special assignment in the student's final year could consist of a collection and a scholarly presentation of any of the types from an area in Yorubaland, preferably other than the student's area of origin. In addition to traditional oral poetry, original compositions of Ewì (mainly written) should also be included in the poetry course.
- (iii) *Drama*: This course should cover plays written as a literary exercise, and collections of plays originally performed on the stage, or on television, sometimes with improvised dialogue and songs.

A study of the stylistic devices used in the texts (whether of prose, poetry, or drama) should form an important part of the course in literature. This should include rhythm and chanting patterns, repetition, parallelism, tonal counterpoint, lexical matching, word play, and criteria for lineation. A comparison of the style of different texts (drawn from different types of prose or verse or from

works by different writers) should also be a useful aspect of this course.

In a new discipline such as Yoruba, it is particularly important that the highest academic standards should be set right from the beginning. This brings us to the question of the approach to Yoruba studies at the university level. In an earlier article, I commented as follows on this question:

The study of literature should be analytical, i.e. the emphasis must not be on memorization and explication of texts, but rather on interpretation and evaluation, including a study of poetic or dramatic devices, themes, plot, characterization and narrative technique wherever applicable. Similarly, at the post-graduate level, a thesis should not be considered adequate if all it does is to collect a type of oral literature with notes explaining obscure expressions or with a preface giving mainly sociological information. Almost anyone can go into the field, collect, transcribe, and publish literary texts in Yoruba. What distinguishes the scholar from the amateur collector is his ability to open up the text, to analyse it in such a way as to bring out its literary and stylistic merits and, in so doing, help us to understand why the work has the appeal it has for us.<sup>8</sup>

These points cannot be over-emphasized. The approach to Yoruba studies at this level must be scholarly, analytical and evaluative. Our function as teachers is not to turn the student into a poet or writer or performer. It does not really matter if he cannot produce poetry like a chanter or write like a poet. What is more important is that he should be able to analyse, interpret, and evaluate any literary work. The course should aim at providing him with the necessary tools to carry out such an analysis not only on the works included in his degree course, but also on works outside it, and on new ones which may come under his scrutiny after the completion of his course. In literary studies, texts must be considered paramount, and statements must be based on them. Evaluation is not an

expression of mere admiration or condemnation of author's language or style, nor should it draw from categories inspired by European literature, regardless whether or not they are appropriate to our own. The plot in a novel, or the theme of a poem, or the cultural and sociological factors associated with a type of poetry should not be a substitute for a scholarly assessment of the work. It follows from all this that the examination at the end of the course should be searching. It should not be confined to locating the contexts from which particular quotations have been taken, nor to a mere account of the plot or of the ideas expressed in particular works. Of greater importance are assessments of specific works, the art of a particular writer, or a comparison between several works.

Finally, I would like to take up the controversial question of how to use Yoruba as a medium for studies at the university level. In an earlier paper, I pointed out the difficulty of 'finding generally accepted Yoruba terms for grammar, literary criticism, and stylistics'.<sup>9</sup> The problem, however, is not one of terminology alone. There is a more important one of which language to use when talking about linguistic and literary features (i.e. the 'meta-language'). It does not really matter whether one borrows the English terms 'prose' and 'rhythm' or whether one coins the Yoruba terms 'òrò gbèrèfu' (dry words) for 'prose' and 'ìgbóhùnsókè-ìgbóhùnsódò' ('raising the voice up and down') for 'rhythm';<sup>10</sup> the important thing is that the precise meanings of the terms used should be clear. Experience with students at Ibadan and Lagos has shown that there is no difficulty in using Yoruba as a medium when the work is not strictly analytical (e.g. narration of the story of a plot, and discussion of themes, general background, or ideas).<sup>11</sup> The real difficulty comes when dealing with analyses or descriptions of literary and other features. This is not the students' fault; but rather that the meta-language must be developed in order to be equal to these studies. Until this problem is faced squarely, Yoruba scholarship through the medium of the Yoruba language will not be very effective or profound. To ill

strate this point, I wish to refer to two published examples of literary statements in Yoruba. In 'Ewì ní Yorùbá', Oḍunḵo defines poetry as follows:

Ní ọ̀rọ̀ kan, ohun tí à ní pè ní àròfò tàbí ewì yìí, èdòki ọ̀rọ̀ ní, tó mú ogbòn wá, tó jẹ̀ pàtàkì  
(‘In one word, what we call poetry is select words (lit. the liver of words) that bring wisdom and are important’)

He then gives the two characteristics of Yoruba poetry as:

- (i) ewì ní láti bá òfin ìgbóhùnsókè-ìgbóhùnsódò tàbí ìṣísẹ̀-ìjọ́, bá a ti ñ ṣísẹ̀ ‘rhythm’, Ó ní láti ní èyí, bí kò bá ní i, kíṣe ewì  
(‘Poetry must obey the laws of rhythm or dance steps, how we pace (rhythm). It must have this; if it doesn’t, it is not poetry’)
- (ii) Nnkan kejì ni pé ewì Yorùbá ní láti dùn létí bí orin<sup>12</sup>  
(‘The second thing is that Yoruba poetry must be melodious to the ear like a song’)

It is clear that neither the definition nor the characteristics mentioned above can be said to be an adequate description of Yoruba poetry; quite apart from this, the main criticism here is that these statements are vague and do not really give us any insight into the nature of Yoruba poetry. Could prose not consist of ‘select words that bring wisdom’? and isn’t there rhythm in prose too? The second example is a description by Oḷabimtan of a ‘sonnet’ in Yoruba composed by himself:

E wo bí àwọn ilà àròfò nàà ti parí. Ètò wa nínú rẹ̀.  
Tí ilà méjèjèjọ̀ àkọkọ̀ yàtò sí ti ilà méréń tí ó tẹ̀lẹ̀ e ti ilà méjì tí ó kẹ̀hìn sì yàtò sí gbogbo wọn<sup>13</sup>  
(‘Look at the way the lines end. They follow a certain pattern. That [the ending] of the first eight lines is different from that of the next four lines, and that of the last two lines is different from all the rest’)

This description is not just inadequate, it is also vague. In what way is the end of the line different? Is it in tone,

vowel quality, length, general pitch level (i.e. register), or is it in the choice of lexical items?

It is extremely important, whatever medium one uses, that the analytic and descriptive statements should be effectively put across. The goal of Yoruba studies should be to broaden our knowledge about our language and literature and ideally, this goal should be achieved through the medium of Yoruba. Indeed, a very serious challenge facing Yoruba studies at present is the development of a meta-language that will make this possible.<sup>14</sup> But meantime, and until a meta-language is properly established, any Yoruba technical language that makes the achievement of this goal possible is to be preferred to indifferent or second-rate scholarship in Yoruba studies.

### *Summary of the Constituents of Yoruba Studies*

#### 1. *O-Level*

- (a) Language
  - (i) Grammar
  - (ii) Comprehension
  - (iii) Essay
- (b) Literature  
(General Survey)
- (c) Institutions

#### 2. *A-Level*

- (a) Language
  - (i) Grammar
  - (ii) Selected topics in other areas
- (b) Literature
  - (i) Set Books on Prose, Poetry, Drama
  - (ii) Appreciation

#### 3. *Degree Course*

- (a) Language
  - (i) Grammar
  - (ii) Phonology
  - (iii) Orthography
  - (iv) Lexis
  - (v) Dialects
  - (vi) Historical Development

(b) Literature

- (i) Tests  
(Collection of Oral, and Written)  
Prose  
Poetry  
Drama
- (ii) Stylistics

*Footnotes & References*

- <sup>1</sup>. At the primary level, at the initial stage the greater part of the course will be devoted to the development of the basic skills of reading and writing. Cf. the aims of teaching Yoruba in the primary school as stated in the *Primary School Syllabus*, Ibadan: (General Publications Section, Ministry of Education, 1962) p.22.
- <sup>2</sup>. A. Bamgboṣe, 'Language Teaching in Nigeria - A Linguistic Viewpoint' *West African Journal of Education*, xi, 3 (1960).
- <sup>3</sup>. See, for example, *Yoruba Syllabus Teachers Grade II*, (Ibadan: St. Luke's College, 1963), (mimeographed).
- <sup>4</sup>. On this point, cf. the following opinion expressed by Mr. J. S. Ogunlesi: 'The typical question "Translate into English" has nothing to defend. . . . Such questions ought never again to be set. Its twin sister "Translate into Yoruba" too is hardly defensible.' J. S. Ogunlesi: 'The Teaching of Yoruba in Primary Schools' (Paper presented at the UNESCO Seminar on Yoruba and English, University of Ibadan, December 1963), (mimeographed).
- <sup>5</sup>. *Primary School Syllabus*, (op. cit.), p.33.
- <sup>6</sup>. A full list of such institutions is given in the W.A.S.C. Revised Syllabus in Yoruba.
- <sup>7</sup>. The view expressed here differs from that of the Working Party which has recommended that language should only be a minor part of the A-Level course and be examined in half of one of the three papers in the proposed A-Level examination.
- <sup>8</sup>. A. Bamgboṣe, 'Yoruba Studies Today', *Odù: A Journal of West African Studies* (New series), 1 (1969) p.94.
- <sup>9</sup>. *Ibid.* p.96.
- <sup>10</sup>. See J. F. Ọdunṣọ, 'Ewi ni Yoruba', *Olókun* 6 (undated), 13-14.
- <sup>11</sup>. For a few examples of this type of study, see: A. Olubummọ, 'Àwọ̀n Ọ̀nk-ṣwé Yoruba Ọ̀de Ọ̀nif: Daniel Fagunwa (Apá Kínní) 1903-1963', *Olókun* 4 (1964); 'Àwọ̀n itán Àròsọ Oríṣíríṣí' (author not named) *Olókun* 6 (undated); A. Şobande, 'Àwọ̀n Ọ̀we Ilẹ̀ wa', *Olókun* 7 (1967).
- <sup>12</sup>. (Glasgow: Collins, 1969). Op. cit., pp. 13 and 14. Cf. A. Akinjogbin, *Ewi lẹ́yí* where the defining characteristics of poetry are stated as (i) 'éró lẹ́jìnlẹ́ . . . tí a sọ tàbí tí a kọ lónà tí ó mú nì lẹ́kán tí èdè rẹ̀ sì dùn'. p.9. ('Deep

thought spoken or written in a passionate way and with melodious language:) (ii) 'ẹwa ede', p. 10 ('beauty of language'). Needless to say, these characteristics are not confined to poetry; they are true of many prose passages too.

<sup>13</sup>. *Olókun*, 7 (1967), 6-7.

<sup>14</sup>. In this connection, it would be profitable for this Seminar to set up a working party to consider this question.

## *Paper 2*

by

**Adeboye Babalola**

The tide of nationalism compels universities to adapt themselves to the indigenous intellectual climate; to turn to the culture of the people who own them.

*Sir Eric Ashby<sup>1</sup>*

In the academic circles of Anglophone countries, the term 'Yoruba Studies' is in line with such terms as English Studies, Welsh Studies, French Studies, German Studies, etc. the connotation of each of these terms is basically that of one biological cell or one railway coach compartment or one umbrella (sheltering a number of persons in the rain on a ceremonial occasion) or a furrowed field. So the question is:

What are the component parts of the cell called 'Yoruba Studies'? or

Which fellow-travellers are in the compartment marked 'YS' (Yoruba Studies)? or

What group is covered by the umbrella of Yoruba Studies? or

What ridges are discernible in the field named 'Yoruba Studies'?

Before considering our answer to this multiform question, let me present another picture of Yoruba Studies. As I see it, a scene is set in which a girl appears called English Studies followed by another girl called French Studies, another girl called German Studies, another girl

called Classical Studies, and several other girls all in a procession, making a pretty sight as they walk past a Yoruba academic. He reacts by saying in song to each of them:

Mo rí 'rú 'ẹ rí.

Má pa mi l'áyà.

Irú ẹ ní bẹ ní 'sàlẹ wa.

(I've seen your like  
before.

You can't sweep me  
off my feet.

There's a girl like  
you in my  
neighbourhood.)

The name of the girl that the Yoruba academic has in mind on this occasion is Yoruba Studies. He further mutters to himself 'B'ó ti wà ní Lìkì, bẹẹ ní ní bẹ ni Gbàhja' meaning, in this context, 'No race has a monopoly of beauties'. He sees in her figure, just as he sees in the others, a well-shaped head, a lovely face, curves in the right places, shapely legs, etc. He feels convinced that she has a rightful place in the procession.

There are two broad interpretations of the term 'Yoruba Studies'. In one, Yoruba Studies may be used to refer to the whole body of knowledge pertaining to the Yoruba people: their language, literature, history and culture (their life, thought and belief; their customs and institutions; their literary, visual and performing arts). For example, it was in this way that the term was applied to the journal *Odù* when it was launched in 1955 as 'A Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies'. The other interpretation, and I believe it to be the proper one for what we purport to do in this volume, refers to Yoruba letters and philology; the whole body of knowledge pertaining to the Yoruba language and its literature.

The chart below shows my concept of the constituents of Yoruba Studies. From the post-graduate research level, the material from these studies can be effectively fed into university first-degree course in which Yoruba Language and Literature are taught in a scholarly way and with no lowering of standards.

*Yoruba Studies*

<p><b>I. Yoruba Language</b></p> <p>1. Yoruba Linguistics            (a) Grammar            (b) Textual Analysis and Stylistics            (c) Dialects Study            (d) Dictionary-making (Lexicography)</p> <p>2. Yoruba Usage            (a) Idioms            (b) Proverbs            (c) English-Yoruba Translation</p>	<p><b>II. Yoruba Literature</b></p> <p>1. Oral Literature            (a) Prose            (b) Poetry</p> <p>2. Modern Literature            (a) Prose            (b) Poetry            (c) Drama</p>	<p><b>III. Yoruba Life and Thought</b></p> <p>(a) Beliefs            (b) Customs and Institutions</p>	<p><b>IV. Yoruba Practical Criticism</b></p> <p>(a) Prose            (b) Verse</p>
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Each of these constituents will now be briefly discussed in turn.

### *Grammar*

In this department of study, knowledge of the scholar deals systematically with the following: the general theory of the sounds in a language and their representation in writing; the uses of words in the language; the phonetic, the inflexional and the constructional features of the language; the general rules governing the relations of words in the sentence and the means by which they are expressed.

The main concern of the scholar in this department may be listed as follows: Phonology; Orthography; The outlining of Grammatical Structure; Sentence; Clause; Nominal Group and Verb Group Structures; Adverbs; Conjunctions; Traditional and Modern Yoruba Grammars.

### *Textual Analysis and Stylistics*

Here, the scholar is concerned with the grammatical analysis of various texts in the language and with the study of the stylistic features of various types of literary texts in the language.

### *Dialects Study*

On this ridge, the scholar tackles the study of the various dialects of Yoruba: their delimitation, their interrelationship, their distinctive characteristics.

### *Dictionary-making (Lexicography)*

The scholar's pursuit is the production of dictionaries of different levels and types, to serve the various groups of users of the Yoruba language and to reflect the growth of the language from generation to generation.

### *Idioms and Proverbs*

In this aspect of the language, the scholar's work is aimed at codifying the knowledge of Yoruba usage and consequently producing handbooks containing special articles on selected individual words or phrases and corrective

general articles on common offences against the 'rules' of good Yoruba prose style, i.e. common blunders in current Yoruba usage.

### *English-Yoruba Translation*

Here the goal of the scholar's labours is the establishment of the best Yoruba equivalents for these English expressions (words, phrases, and specialist terms) which are current in local newspaper reports and articles as well as radio news broadcasts, features, talks and discussions all of which deserve to be translated into the main Nigerian languages (therefore into Yoruba) for the benefit of the masses who do not speak English.

### *Yoruba Oral Literature*

Knowing that there is an abundant supply of legitimate material for academic work here, the scholar is concerned not only with the tape recording, transcription and annotation of the texts but also with the study of the content and form of each genre (or sub-genre) of oral literature. In other words, the scholar is also concerned with the analysis and literary criticism of each genre (or sub-genre).

*Prose* Here the material for study comprises multifarious folk-tales (àlọ/ítàn); riddles (àlọ àpamọ) and orations (òrọ̀ yànjù).

*Poetry* This is a treasury yielding copious texts of numerous types of Yoruba oral poetry, notably Èékì Ifá (Ifá divination poetry texts); Ìjálá (the hunters' chants); Ràrà (the memory-keepers' chants); Èsà (the masqueraders' chants); Ọfọ̀/Ògèdè/Àyájọ (incantations); Ègè & Ìgbálá (Ègbá dialect chants); Ègbádò (dialect chants).

### *Modern Yoruba Literature*

(a) *Prose*: Here the available material for scholarly study includes all literary prose works of merit (novelettes, novels and diaries) published in Yoruba from 1900, when BIBELI MIMỌ was first published, right up to this year when we were treated to the first detective-story novel in Yoruba, ÀJÀ L'Ó LERÙ. Here the scholar is concerned with the study of plot, character-

isation, and style in each work; i.e. with an overall literary appraisal of work on the basis of the appropriate canons of literary judgement.

- (b) *Poetry*: Academic work on this devolves on the study of published collections of poetic compositions of specific Yoruba authors of note. The poems under reference are attributable to particular writers, even though traditional Yoruba sayings and proverbs do occur in the poetry. The scholar works on the poems, as a literary critic, assessing the merits of each poet in the light of what the poet has to say, how valuable it is; and how he says it.
- (c) *Drama*: This is not a well-endowed corner of Yoruba Studies, not many good plays have yet been written in Yoruba. The texts of existing few form the subject of the scholar's study. He considers plot, characterisation and style in each play as well as the points essential to the successful performance of the play. Musical plays in Yoruba have of recent predominated, but these are to be judged in a class of their own.

#### *Yoruba Life and Thought*

This is studied as a background to Yoruba Literature and it covers such subjects as Yoruba customs and institutions, Yoruba arts (music, sculpture, weaving etc.). Here the fruit of the scholars' labours will consist of material for publications to serve as a Companion to Yoruba Literature, giving detailed information on the individual careers of Yoruba poets, novelists and dramatists, providing the general source material that informs creative writing in Yoruba, and supplying cultural data on the life of the Yoruba people, that very life which inspires Yoruba literature.

#### *Yoruba Practical Criticism*

The nature of the work delimited here is a study of the principles of Yoruba literary criticism and the application of these principles to Yoruba literary texts with a view to demonstrating clearly how these principles work in the exercise of literary judgement. These are questions which

must be answered: Is this prose passage good, or only fair, or bad of its kind? What are the detailed reasons for the answer given to the preceding question? What has the author to say, how valuable is it, and how does he say it? Is this excerpt from a poem good, or only fair, or bad of its kind? What are the detailed reasons for the answer given to the preceding question? What has the author to say, how valuable is it and how does he say it? Has the poem, in its rhythm and its music, the genuine sound of Yoruba poetry? This is how I view the Constituents of Yoruba Studies, a field of academic work from which many a glorious harvest may be gathered from year to year with the diligent help of all those concerned.

### *Footnote*

- <sup>1</sup>. *African Universities and Western Tradition* (Oxford, 1964), p.3.

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## *Paper 3*

by

**Adebisi Afọlayan**

### *Introduction*

There are three separate variables to be examined when considering constituents of Yoruba studies: the various spheres or aspects of Yoruba needing academic attention generally, how these various aspects can be developed into academic courses, and the kind of academic course suitable for the various stages at which Yoruba may be studied. This paper endeavours to examine all three variables.

### *Aspects of Yoruba Needing Academic Attention*

The most comprehensive and perhaps the most valid approach to this question is that every aspect of Yoruba deserves academic attention. These aspects become multifarious as soon as we begin to study the Yoruba people as well as their language.

On the language side there are two focal points: the properties of the language and what is achieved by it. The properties of the language have in turn two dimensions: internal and external. Internally, there are levels such as phonetics, phonology, graphology (orthography), grammar (syntax), lexis (dictionary), and semantics. Externally, different types of language expression used for different occasions, distinguished by subject-matter, speaker, audi-

ence and style constitute important aspects. Similarly, the organic structures of different expressions of varying lengths are in themselves significant. So that various aims are achieved through language. Stories, poems, plays, and novels are its outgrowth. Religious, social, political and economic activities could not be performed without language. Also, language is used to develop religious and philosophical concepts and ideas.

When attention is focused on the Yoruba people, other aspects deserving academic attention become evident. They have a history, a social structure and a political system. Their economic and commercial practices are worthy of note. Their country has an interesting geography, and their medical care has developed through notable processes. Finally, they have interacted with other races and consequently present numerous psychological and social traits for comparative study.

#### *Possible Academic Courses: Narrow Specialized Courses*

From the picture given above it can be seen that almost every academic course in the social sciences and the arts can be organized round Yoruba. Possible, however, most of these courses would be too narrow and specialized. Apart from serving as special areas of research interest, Yoruba economics, the sociology of the Yoruba people, the history of the Yoruba people or the religion of the Yorubas, for example, cannot each justify a full and valid academic course. Rather, such topics can at best form parts of wider academic courses in economics, sociology, history and religion. An alternative to making those disciplines part of wider academic courses is to organize them into many facets of one all-embracing course of Yoruba life and institutions.

#### *Language and Literature*

There are, however, two aspects of Yoruba which deserve full academic courses in their own right. These are language and literature, subsuming what we have earlier referred to as 'the properties of the language' and 'what is achieved through language'.

#### *Four-fold Distinction into Four Different Courses*

Owing to recent developments in the scientific study of language, it is advisable to organize studies in Yoruba language and literature around four themes, and possibly into four different courses, namely: Yoruba language activity, ('The Use of Yoruba'), Yoruba language pattern (linguistics), Yoruba literary activity and Yoruba literary pattern (stylistics). Though it may be objected with some justification that this would do violence to inseparables (language activity from language pattern and literary activity from literary pattern), certain considerations suggest that this is in fact a wiser arrangement than the two-fold distinction into language and literature.

Before considering the advantages of the suggested four-fold distinction, it is necessary to look at the suggestions one by one. Subsumed under the title Yoruba language activity are subjects such as essay writing, comprehension exercises, summary writing plus various grammatical, lexical, phoenetic, phonological and semantic, oral and written practices within realistic language performance. In contradistinction, a course in Yoruba language pattern would involve primarily a descriptive linguistic study of the Yoruba language. In addition to an examination of the various linguistic levels of Yoruba, this study could consider questions such as the need for a linguistic theory and the adequate requirements for such a theory. Similarly, Yoruba literature activity would include such things as reading, reciting, listening to, enjoying, appreciating or evaluating and even practising various types of Yoruba literature. Similarly, too, the Yoruba literature pattern would include not only a study of the distinctive internal and external structures of the various types of Yoruba literature as works of art but also a general examination of the theory of art in general and of the literary art in particular. Thus the two pattern courses would respectively examine the place of Yoruba language and literature within world languages and literatures. And exercises undertaken in pattern courses, unlike those which would come under activity courses, would be descriptive and analytical.

### *Why Preference for the Four-fold Distinction*

Three of the four suggested groupings will now be examined.

First, there is a basic difference between learning something or learning about it. In relation to language and literature, there is a basic difference between learning the Yoruba language or literature and learning about the Yoruba language or literature. One may know a great deal about the Yoruba language or literature without having a corresponding degree of knowledge of the actual language or literature.

Secondly, in recent years, as a result of developments in linguistics, there has been a considerable increase in the volume of knowledge relating to patterns and structures of language. What is more, this body of knowledge has been organized according to scientific principles. In this scientific age, there is a dangerous tendency to regard this kind of study of language and literature as the only thing worth doing. Naturally, those adhering to the traditional language and literary values tend to be antagonistic to the new ways which to them seem unconstructive. Thus a very unhealthy situation noxious to the growth and development of language and literature studies, is being rapidly promoted by those who uphold the traditional binary distinction.

Thirdly, not only must one remember that the knowledge on Yoruba language and literature is of a different order from the knowledge of Yoruba language and literature, but also that these two types of knowledge do not belong in the same stages of academic activity. For example, the knowledge of Yoruba language and literature is more suited to the curriculum of a primary school; whereas the other is more suited to the kind of teaching that occurs in a University.

Therefore, to create the best atmosphere for the promotion of Yoruba language and literature studies at every academic stage, a four-fold distinction is thought to be more viable. In this way the necessary proportionate emphasis will be accorded to, each academic stage.

### *Link Between Language and Literature*

Having clarified the relationship between Yoruba language activity and Yoruba language pattern and that between Yoruba literary activity, and Yoruba literary pattern, there remains for the envisaged relationship between Yoruba language and literature to be made equally obvious.

This writer frowns at the rigid dichotomy between language and literature in any modern language programme, and does not approve of sole emphasis on either. Rather, he sees one as being inevitably complementary to the other. According to this view, Yoruba literature is the outward expression of the Yoruba language. D. B. Heriot also thinks that:

Literature is the artistic expression in words – not words chosen at random and got down anyhow – but, the *artistic expression in words* of what has been thought, felt remembered, or imagined, and books, whether in prose or in verse, are its outward and visible aspect . . .

Similarly, spoken and written texts are the primary object of language study. Yoruba language studies, divorced from actual language (the language of literature being an integral, indispensable part therein), would be too abstract and lifeless. And Yoruba literary studies not firmly rooted in the study of the linguistic properties pertaining to the language of Yoruba literature (in contradistinction to the language of other registers) would be, at best, a pseudo-study of Yoruba anthropology, sociology and religion.

Therefore any adequate course in Yoruba *must* consist of language and literature. One without the other is not adequate to the proper understanding of Yoruba or to the development of the language in a modern age. An academic native Yoruba speaker who cannot appreciate and enjoy Yoruba novels, plays or poetry, and understand the patterns in the language is in some way deficient. He cannot be an effective propagator of the language to the younger generation.

### *Yoruba Academic Courses Suitable for Different Stages*

This section is concerned with the various stages of education at which Yoruba should be studied. In this way one will be able to examine the component or components suitable for each stage as well as the varying content of each component as education progresses.

#### **Primary School**

This is the stage at which basic grounding in Yoruba should be established, for it is fundamental to the education of any Yoruba child. As recent research developments in sociology and psychology of education have suggested, the educability of a child depends largely on his language development. And as some linguists have pointed out, one's linguistic competence has its maximum potential in one's mother tongue. In fact, Chomsky and his followers have expressly stated that a child's linguistic competence must be seen in terms of his knowledge of his mother tongue, or his native speaker's intuition in his own language.

What components of Yoruba studies can give this much needed grounding to the Yoruba child? In this writer's opinion, language activity is the focal point, the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) are the basic points of departure and Yoruba stories (including history), life and institutions are the basic sources of material upon which speaking, listening, reading and writing are based. This is not to suggest that the world at large will not supply relevant materials for speaking, listening, reading and writing. These wider sources will indeed increase in frequency and quantity as the child climbs up the educational ladder. Although there is a strong educational argument in favour of using Yoruba as the medium of instruction throughout all primary education, there is no reason why the Yoruba child should not learn most efficiently other languages, particularly English.

In the lower classes the four basic skills can be the basis of all Yoruba studies. In the higher classes, however, Yoruba studies would be best organized around three main components: language, literature and culture. In lan-

guage there should be increasing awareness of Yoruba language varieties, particularly register differentiation. In literature there should be increasing awareness of Yoruba literary modes. And in cultural studies there should be increasing awareness of Yoruba culture, not only as part of Nigerian (or even African) culture, but also as part of universal human culture.

### **Secondary School**

This stage of education in Yoruba, as is the case with other subjects, is best divided into two: school Certificate (G.C.E. Ordinary) and Higher School Certificate (G.C.E. Advanced). The aims are generally different at both levels and the sorts of courses needed should vary accordingly.

#### **School Certificate (G.C.E. Ordinary)**

At this point one aims at acquiring the four skills at the intermediate level, at introducing linguistic and literary sophistication together with a deeper knowledge of Yoruba culture.

To achieve these aims the course should have three separate components: language, literature and culture. The language exercises should include free composition, comprehension (both aural and reading), summary writing and elementary grounding in Yoruba language patterns. The literature exercises should include reading and enjoying different types of Yoruba literature, free composition of literary pieces, appreciation of literary works and elementary introduction to stylistics (the application of linguistics to literature). Unlike language and literature courses which would merely include an introduction to Yoruba language and literary patterns, the course in culture would be expected to include many Yoruba cultural patterns as well as an introduction to comparative cultural study with general reference to other African peoples and with special reference to other Nigerian peoples.

One section of the current School Certificate Yoruba language course is deliberately left out of the last paragraph namely translation. There are four major reasons for this deliberate omission. First this writer believes that

translation is basically a bilingual exercise which requires a thorough knowledge of both languages concerned. This being so, the current programme in translation focuses as much on English language as it does on Yoruba. It is an open secret that in the past the School Certificate candidate who was poor in English was nearly always just as poor in Yoruba, whereas the reverse was not true. This means that the degree of correlation between performance in English and that in Yoruba arises not so much from the fact that both examinations are adequate tests of the candidate's general linguistic ability, but from the considerable influence exerted by the translation questions in the Yoruba paper. Secondly, translation is an exercise more suitable to the learning of foreign languages than of one's own. It seems indisputable that a foreign language learner benefits tremendously from translating his own language into the target language and vice versa; whereas the foreign language is a mere diversion from the acquisition of the mother tongue. To expect similar or even comparable benefits through translation for the learner who is not proficient, let alone sophisticated, in either language is just too much. In fact, unlike the mother tongue learner for whom translation is an unnecessary diversion, according to Professor. C. Rabin, for the foreign language learner '... the acquisition of such translation mentality forms part of his preparation for the task ...' Thirdly, translation is a peculiar exercise in language requiring a special type of training for highly gifted people who are able to engage in bilingual work. Therefore it cannot be introduced in a course for any Tom, Dick and Harry, who will in turn be expected to show a translator's proficiency even before he has reached proficiency in everyday use of the language. Finally, although skills in translation are useful in a multilingual country such as ours, translation into or from Yoruba should form only a special course for specially selected students (or even, better still, scholars) of Yoruba who are also proficient in the other given language (be it European, African or Nigerian). Therefore it should be a post-secondary professional course (for example, for court translators) or an academic one (for example, for

scholars developing Yoruba vocabulary for technological, scientific and even literary-discussions).

### **Higher School Certificate (G.C.E. Advanced Level)**

At this stage the student of a course in Yoruba having some measure of linguistic and literary sophistication, is ready to acquire the four skills at a fairly advanced level.

A course adequate to these ends should consist of the four components outlined earlier: Language activity, language patterns, literature activity and literature patterns. This means that Yoruba culture at this stage would no longer be a component, but rather serve both as one of the main sources of the material for language and literary work and – possibly – as a constituent of other specialized academic courses such as Nigerian History. Because many specialized courses such as Sociology and West African Religion are not available at this level, there might still be a case for a very advanced course in Yoruba culture. However, since this kind of training occurs generally at a pre-university level, the best solution would be to make these specialized courses available.

As one would expect, all language and literature activities available at this stage should be fairly advanced. On the other hand, the language and the literature patterns taught at the same time should not go beyond the intermediate stage.

At this level one is tempted to imitate, for example, the equivalent English practice and teach literature course. Yet this English practice is at present under review, efforts are being made to redress the balance and provide an English language paper for this level. There should indeed be a good balance between language and literature components. For example, if three papers were to be offered one would be on language, one on literature and the third on stylistics and literary appreciation. Again, translation would be ruled out at this stage.

### **Post-Secondary**

For the purpose of this discussion two subdivisions must be made; academic and professional.

*Academic:* This would be principally made up of various types of courses at university level. Here two further subdivisions are necessary: under-graduate and post-graduate.

Since various aspects of Yoruba culture are assigned at this stage to various special subjects, the under-graduate course would consist of advanced language exercises, advanced language pattern, advanced literature exercises and advanced literature pattern. This means, for example, that free composition, comprehension and summary writing – all at very advanced levels – would be found alongside language patterns within the language work, just as reading and study of all types of literature and free composition of literary pieces would occur side by side with literary appreciation and stylistics in the literature work. It is as well to mention here that the stylistics course should be offered as a sort of compulsory link between language literature, while a course in translation could be offered as a special optional bridge. So that while everybody takes compulsorily a paper in stylistics as a bridge course, only specially selected people could offer a paper in translation as an additional one. Here the attitude to translation is understandable in view of what was said earlier on the subject. More explicitly, in this way translation is ruled out as part of a compulsory language or literature paper. With reference to literary work, translation is even less justified as a compulsory exercise. Besides the need for a high degree of sophistication in two languages before any good translation can take place, literature presents a special case of 'untranslatableness'. In this regard, almost half a century ago Sapir said:

... Literature moves in language as a medium but that medium comprises two layers, the latent content of language – our intuitive record of experience – and the particular conformation of a given language – the specific how of our record of experience. Literature that draws its sustenance mainly – never entirely – from the lower level, is translatable without too great a loss of character. If it moves in the upper rather than the lower level . . . – it is as good as untranslatable.

At this under-graduate level one might want to offer two separate degree courses, one in Yoruba language and the other in Yoruba literature. The earlier discussion on the relationship between language and literature will have shown that this writer does not agree with that choice, for it would greatly impoverish both courses and neither would adequately develop Yoruba for the modern age.

At the post-graduate stage, any of the various aspects of Yoruba language, literature and culture can be selected for special courses or research study in depth. Thus to this stage belongs advanced academic study of translation, for example, with reference to the development of technical vocabulary for technological, scientific, literary and linguistic discussion.

*Professional:* Two kinds of professions are chosen for illustration: teaching and interpreting.

Training for teaching Yoruba requires a pedagogical component, as well as an academic course which will form the academic background of the trainee. This means for example that for candidates for the current Nigerian Certificate of Education the academic course would resemble the one described earlier on for the Higher School Certificate (G.C.E. Advanced); for candidates for the current B.Ed. degree (with Yoruba as the major teaching subject) the course would resemble the under-graduate course already referred to. In addition, the pedagogical orientation of the teacher's course would lead to the inclusion of relevant aspects of education (especially aims and methodology of language learning), psychology (especially testing and measurement as well as the psychology of language learning), sociology (especially sociology of language acquisition and use) linguistics (especially applied linguistics for language teaching/learning) and the technology of language teaching aids. The length of training and the stage at which it is imparted would determine the extent of each of the aspects listed.

Training to be an interpreter, for example a Grade A customary court interpreter, would require a special course in translation. This would need at least four components: (Advanced) Yoruba language, (Advanced) Eng-

lish language, (Advanced) Yoruba culture and a survey of the chosen field (in this case legal practice and procedure).

### Conclusion

From the brief survey above one can see that this paper has very limited aims. It seeks to set out guidelines for the drawing up of a syllabus at each stage of education in Yoruba; it does not suggest the contents of each syllabus. This limitation is due to two main causes.

First, one syllabus alone cannot suffice to each stage. Different course designers may produce adequate but different courses based on the same guidelines. The efficiency or otherwise of a course depends fundamentally on the philosophy that inspires it, hence this paper is devoted only to questions of basic principle on what is needed by course designers to produce an adequate course in Yoruba studies.

Secondly, any given course might choose variously from the number of topics, books and authors on the same subject available for study. Certainly, Yoruba bibliographical information as illustrated by the work of Mrs. Ogunṣẹyẹ shows that there are more available relevant Yoruba works than it is possible for any course to absorb. Therefore to prevent the discussion in this paper from straying into relatively minor matters of detail, only important questions of principle and philosophy have been outlined.

Even if these claims are invalid, this paper will have served a useful purpose in highlighting the inadequacy of certain assumptions and the suggestions based on them.

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# *Yoruba* *Occasional Festival Songs*

by

**Oyin Ogunba**

In many communities in Yorubaland, purification festivals have undergone changes. It is conceivable that in the distant past, perhaps a thousand years or more ago, they might have been mainly ritualistic, taking the form of symbolic action and gestures to expel evil from a community. Even today, there are a number of places where the symbolic structure remains very strong. But by and large it has been replaced by what can be properly called a festival of songs. This category of annual songs, distinct from festival sacrifice chants or dance chants, we have called 'Occasional Festival Songs'.

Of course, it would be wrong to assume that these songs are a phenomenon of the twentieth century. The trend towards 'purification singing' began almost certainly some centuries ago, but in our century it underwent a rapid development of almost revolutionary scale, possibly because there are more things to sing about. A song still fondly remembered in Odè-Rémọ, near Şàgámù, indicates that the genesis of these songs is not as recent as we might think. About five hundred years ago, the people of Odè-Rémọ decided to move from their present site to a place called Agerige.<sup>1</sup> Some people had already gone ahead to build houses on the new site. For many, many years up to that time the community had moved from place to place and some people expressed dismay at the thought of moving again. The women, in particular, had got fed up and angry with the incessant moving and at one of the

annual festivals they staged a demonstration and sang round the town thus:

Feréwá de yun o,  
Feréwá de yun o,  
Férewá de yán'Geríge ò  
É de yan'Geríge  
Àáá  
Oye rééé.

Ferewa will no longer migrate,  
Ferewa will no longer migrate,  
Ferewa will not migrate to Agerige,  
He will not shift to Agerige.  
Will not.  
That is final.

The men got the message and the proposal was shelved.

Whereas such songs might have been rare in fifteenth-century Yorubaland, they are now the typical feature of many purification festivals. In Ijebu alone, between 1964 and 1966 I collected about 150 such songs. Most of them had been composed and performed two or three years before I began my field study, but were still fresh in the memory of the people; others came to life in my presence. The songs I am using to illustrate this paper are from this collection.

Occasional festival songs may be divided into the six following groups:

### 1. Satirical

The vast majority of these songs are satirical. This is to be expected in a community in which a man is so intimate or acquainted with his neighbour that he gets to know details of his day to day life. Moreover, the Yorubas are in a period of transition, and so the cleavage of traditional order and the development of new forms – such as the pretensions of the rising class and the arrogance of new religious converts – provide good material for satire. These satirical songs have a wide range of expression: some are serious and tend to be comments on how

ineradicable evil is in a human community; very many are abusive lampoons, sometimes deliberately vicious in intention; others (very few) are humorous self-derision. The following three songs will illustrate each type:

- LEADER: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Wọn yéye n'ádugbò.  
 Onírun n'ẹrun bí t'agándán,  
 Ààà ọ ẹ!
- CHORUS: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Wọn yéye n'ádugbò.  
 Onírun n'ẹrun bí t'agándán,  
 Ààà ọ ẹ!
- LEADER: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Mo r'ínẹ, mo r'ẹ̀jì, ọ k'ẹ̀ta.  
 Mo wa 'kitì ọ̀gán, ewú yọ ọ.
- CHORUS: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Wọn yéye n'ádugbò.  
 Onírun n'ẹrun bí t'agándán,  
 Ààà ọ ẹ!
- LEADER: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Mo sá késé, mo mí re 'gbó Ifá,  
 Mo yà bára, mo wà yà 'dí àgbọ̀n.  
 Àgbọ̀n mì titì, ọ ẹ b'ọ̀jò ọ rọ,  
 Ọ̀jò pa mí, o má ẹ p'ọ̀rẹ̀ mí.
- CHORUS: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Wọn yéye n'ádugbò.  
 Onírun n'ẹrun bí t'agándán,  
 Ààà ọ ẹ!
- LEADER: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Mo s'Ọpa, mo s'Orò, mo s'Àgan,  
 Mo wa 'kitì ọ̀gan, ewú yọ ọ.
- CHORUS: Àgbà òṣèké!  
 Wọn yéye n'ádugbò.  
 Onírun n'ẹrun bí t'agándán,  
 Ààà ọ ẹ!
- LEADER: False old men!  
 They are many in the street.  
 Moustaches like the agandan yam.  
 How sad!

- CHORUS: False old men!  
They are many in the street.  
Moustaches like the agandan yam.  
How sad!
- LEADER: False old men!  
I count one, two. What about the  
third?  
I dig the mound, but the rabbit  
escapes.
- CHORUS: False old men!  
They are many in the street.  
Moustaches like the agandan yam.  
How sad!
- LEADER: False old men!  
I trot a little towards Ifa grove,  
I turn suddenly, straight to the coconut  
tree,  
The coconut tree trembles, thinking it  
will rain.  
Let the rain harass me, and not my  
friend.
- CHORUS: False old men!  
They are many in the street.  
Moustaches like the agandan yam.  
How sad!
- LEADER: False old men!  
I went through Opa, Orò and Agan  
cults.  
I dig the mound, but the rabbit  
escapes.
- CHORUS: False old men!  
They are many in the street.  
Moustaches like the Agandan yam.<sup>2</sup>  
How sad!

Here a man tries to discover the secret of these false old men, but cannot accomplish his task because the old men are clever and elusive. His quest takes him far and he makes important discoveries, but somewhere, at the crucial point, the road is blocked and he can go no further.

The rabbit escapes cunningly and so negates and ridicules the seeker's efforts. But in spite of their craftiness the old men are victims of their uneasy consciences. They suspect every breeze of being a tempest and quake and tremble at nothing. But eventually they triumph over their restive conscience and every attempt to track them down fails.

This song is an important statement of ineradicable evil: its power, its malevolence. It was probably sung by an angry young man, inveighing against the corruption of the established order and thwarted in his bid to effect a change. But, ironically, the satire rebounds on the seeker, for he has underestimated the power of evil, thinking it could be easily overcome with a sudden, frontal attack. In the event, he is over-awed by the sheer magnitude and artful elusiveness of evil and becomes as dejected as a weary, unsuccessful adventurer.

The second song is a lampoon against a prominent citizen in a community:

Jégú o! Jégú o!  
Jégú gbékéléúke,  
Eléyin barabiri,  
S'ìgbòn wàrìwa o.  
Ó n'áṣejù, ó n'ámòga,  
Ó n'áṣe jù, ó n'ámòga,  
S'ìrèké lujélujé,  
Olórúwo kẹ̀nkẹ̀wì,  
Olórúwo bì i t'òpòn dípòn.

Villian! Villian!  
Villian with the shape of a beast!  
His back convex,  
His chin massive.  
He is a man of excess, he is arrogant,  
He is a man of excess, he is arrogant,  
His cheeks rotund,  
His head like a cartoon,  
His head like the *dípòn* tray.

The person lampooned here is a man given to excesses who, almost defiantly accommodates so many physical

deformities. The satirist's intention is to make of him a monster and to find a correspondence between his deformity of body and that of his mind. His large, tray-shaped head is a physical projection of his unwieldy, aggressive arrogance. Nature, as it were, knew he would be such a man and therefore gave him peculiar physical features.

The third song is one of self-mockery:

- LEADER: Owó! Owó!  
 Sílè! Sílè!  
 T'èmi t'Anímáṣaun rè dé Rẹmọ  
 Torí àgùtàn.
- CHORUS: Owó! Owó!  
 Sílè! Sílè!  
 T'èmi t'Anímáṣaun rè dé Rẹmọ  
 Torí àgùtàn.
- LEADER: Músé d'ẹran ní n'ẹsẹ,  
 Òún d'ẹran ní n'úwo,  
 Àgùtàn y'ẹni n'ílẹ gbirigbiri,  
 N'ọsan, ní Sábó.
- CHORUS: Owó! Owó!  
 Sílè! Sílè!  
 T'èmi t'Anímáṣaun rè dé Rẹmọ  
 Torí àgùtàn.
- LEADER: Nígb'àgùtàn mí já ní gáréjì  
 S'óun yọ sí pópó.  
 Nígb'àgùtàn já ní gáréjì  
 S'óun yọ sí pópó.
- CHORUS: Owó! Owó!  
 Sílè! Sílè!  
 T'èmi t'Anímáṣaun rè dé Rẹmọ  
 Torí àgùtàn.
- LEADER: Money! Money!  
 Shillings! Shillings!  
 Animasaun and I went as far as Rẹmọ  
 To buy some sheep.
- CHORUS: Money! Money!  
 Shillings! Shillings!  
 Animasaun and I went as far as Rẹmọ  
 To buy some sheep.

- LEADER: Muse held one sheep by the legs,  
The other man held the same by the  
horns.  
The animal bolted rolling us on the  
ground  
In the afternoon, at Sabo.
- CHORUS: Money! Money!  
Shillings! Shillings!  
Animasaun and I went as far as Rémọ  
To buy some sheep.
- LEADER: When the sheep escaped from the  
park,  
It went straight to the highway.  
When the sheep escaped from the  
park,  
It went straight to the highway.
- CHORUS: Money! Money!  
Shillings! Shillings!  
Animasaun and I went as far as Rémọ  
To buy some sheep.

This is a light-hearted rendering of a small incident – a sheep that got away – but with the manipulation of the satirist it becomes delightful self-mockery. He recounts the incident with mock-regret, re-enacting the absurd spectacle offered by two elderly men (in flowing robes) chasing a sheep about the highway in the afternoon. The refrain:

Owó! Owó!  
Şilè! Şilè!

mocks at the self-pitying men who, lamenting the fact that the need to win their daily bread takes them as far as Rémọ, makes them unwilling actors in an absurd dramatic situation. Obviously the tone of the song is only half-serious: Rémọ is only twenty miles away<sup>3</sup> and the audience knows it. Besides, the type of trading undertaken by the two men is considered respectable. Thus, both the singer and the audience enjoy the fine, teasing sentiment of the song and its deliberate exaggeration.

## 2. Political

Festival songs with political connotations have grown in number and in years of political stress dominate the songs of a community. At the time this material was being collected, most political songs were inspired by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was then in prison, convicted of treasonable felony. A number of songs dwell on his arrest, detention, trial, imprisonment and hope that he may return. Some express great optimism – when he comes back they say, life will be rosy for everyone except grabbing politicians, and the country will get back into shape. Here is one to illustrate the point:

LEADER: Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!  
Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!

CHORUS: Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!  
Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!

LEADER: B'Áwólówò bà t'àjò dé  
Máa rí 'ran wò.  
B'Áwólówò bà t'àjò dé  
Máa rí 'ran wò.  
Áá wo 'lèè mí,  
Áá wo 'lèè rẹ,  
Áá wo 'le aláṣe jù, afubisólóore,  
Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!

CHORUS: Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!  
Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!

LEADER: Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!  
Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
Oku! Ofẹ!  
Ànjànnú elésè méjì, baba Olayinka,  
Gbòun a t'àjò de  
Mẹkúnnù a r'ówò ná.

- ALL: Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
 Oku! Ofẹ!  
 Woléwolé fẹẹ dé o  
 Oku! Ofẹ!  
 Áá wo 'lèè mi,  
 Áá wo 'lèè rẹ,  
 Áá wo 'lé aláṣejù, gberegede.
- LEADER: The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up.
- CHORUS: The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!
- LEADER: When Awolowọ returns from his  
 travels  
 I shall see wonderful things.  
 When Awolowọ returns from his  
 travels  
 I shall see wonderful things.  
 He will inspect my house,  
 He will inspect your house,  
 He will inspect the house of the man of  
 excess, the ingrate.  
 The sanitary inspector will soon arrive  
 Arise! Hurry up!
- CHORUS: The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The sanitary inspector will soon  
 arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!

LEADER: The sanitary inspector will soon arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The sanitary inspector will soon arrive.  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The spirit on two legs, father of Olayinka,  
 When he returns from his travels  
 The poor shall have money to spend.

ALL: The sanitary inspector will soon arrive  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 The sanitary inspector will soon arrive  
 Arise! Hurry up!  
 He will search my house,  
 He will inspect your house,  
 He will inspect the house of the man of excess, thoroughly.

The singer says that the country is sick because everyone has scattered dirt around indiscriminately, and this may soon cause an epidemic. The only hope for health is the imminent visit of the sanitary inspector, who will force every one to clear all the scum and debris and so re-establish a standard of decency and cleanliness within the state. He implies that all those people who now wallow in a political mess will quake for having transgressed and will try to flee from retribution.

Of course this is sung in a mood of excited hope. The singer tends to view the arrival of the sanitary inspector as a kind of messianic advent, a panacea for all the ills that at present plague the nation. Consequently he sees the plight of the leader as a pilgrimage, a period of dedication, preparatory to the supreme task of saving the nation.

Many political songs on the Awolowo theme express the jingoism of party loyalists: they ridicule their opponents and whip up hopes for his return. But there are other songs which do not just pipe to the common will: in some of them, the singer takes a close look at the man, notes the faults in his character, which have perhaps caused his difficulties, and gives him what is considered sober advice.

### 3. Entreative

A festival provides at times a singer with the ideal chance to unburden his thoughts, and those of the community, on a worrying issue. He may address himself to a particular person, to a group of people, to the whole community, or to a spirit or god. In the example below, the appeal is to a local god.

Laaaaaaaaaré!

Láre Orísànyìn!

Má mà jí mi gbé tífí n'áyé mi o,

Rí mo şeé şe.

Ko jí mi n'ówó,

Kí mi kó pètẹ̀ẹ̀sì o,

Bi t'awọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ eni Èko.

Àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ eni Èkó o,

Àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ eni Èkó o,

Wọ̀n ti sọ ụgbó Olú Uwórì d'oko àwo.

Laaaaaaaaaré!

Láre Orísànyìn!

Má mà jí mi gbé tífí n'áyé mi o,

Rí mo şeé şe.

O Lare!

O Lare Orisanyin!

Let me not remain for ever in misery,

Toiling day and night.

Let me have money,

To erect storey buildings,

Like our sons sojourning in Lagos.

Our sons sojourning in Lagos

Our sons sojourning in Lagos

They have turned Olu Iwori grove to a ceramic

centre.<sup>4</sup>

O Lare!

O Lare! Orisanyin!

Let me not remain for ever in penury

Toiling day and night.

<sup>4</sup> The singer admires the success of some of the 'sons' of the town, who have travelled out, made money through

their various ventures in Lagos and returned to their town to demonstrate their new affluence by setting up a ceramic industry. But he, the singer, is indigent while others have so much wealth. So he appeals to the god, Lare Orisanyin, to grant him something, that he may not die in penury in spite of all his struggles to make ends meet. The supplication is not a challenge to the god's sense of fairness but rather a simple appeal for himself; that he may be remembered in a place where so much abundance flows.

Entreative songs may be secular or sacred. The secular ones are usually appeals to institutions for social improvements or social justice or to people employed by them. The sacred ones seek divine favour. Usually the singer intones plaintively, conveying the fact that he is at his wit's end, or that the community for which he is pleading is in a desperate situation.

#### 4. Interrogatory or query songs

During some of the purification festivals, a singer is granted immunity and may sing on anything and in any manner, however tendentious. This is part of the essentially democratic nature of Yoruba institutions. Therefore some of the songs are bold inquiries (in some cases libellous) into the carryings-on of public men and officials. For example:

Ogu kẹ ẹ mi rí o!  
 Ogu kẹ ẹ mi rí fọ k'ọràn má dò'nìyàn!  
 Ogu kẹ ẹ mí rí o!  
 Wọ̀n f'ogú àpò s'ulẹ́ ká í mọ̀ o,  
 Wọ̀n f'ogú àpò s'ulẹ́ ká í mọ̀ o,  
 Owó rú wọ̀n fu kọ́ 'kìtì gogoro s'ulẹ́ ọ̀ba,  
 Owó ru wọ̀n fu kọ́ 'kítí gogoro s'ulẹ́ ọ̀ba,  
 Wọ̀n owó tí tán n'úlẹ́.  
 Oye ọ̀ni wọ̀n nì gbórí n'úlẹ́ iba rẹ̀,  
 Oye ọ̀ni wọ̀n nì gbórí n'úlẹ́ iba rẹ̀,  
 Ìrẹ̀kẹ́ sọ̀jọ, ìdí nì gbọ̀n pẹ̀pẹ̀ o.

Strange happenings!

Strange happenings because we took no offence!

Strange happenings!

They built that thing for two thousand pounds before  
we knew,

They built that thing for two thousand pounds before  
we knew.

Money spent in building a tallish mound in the oba's  
palace,

Money spent in building a tallish mound in the oba's  
palace.

They now say there is no more money.

Upstarts from ne'er-do-well homes,

Upstarts from ne'er-do-well homes.

Cheeks puffed up, buttocks quivering!

The singer is utterly disgusted by the insolence of the men who have so deliberately misused public funds. He says they built a mere cenotaph at a fantastic cost of £2,000 and then complained that the treasury is empty. He is furious that upstarts and ne'er-do-wells should become the administrators of the community and deplores a system that can establish men of ignoble character as leaders.

This particular song is in rather bad taste and not quite typical. Most of the others are more discreet, more oblique in their imputations. In this case, the singer's anger tends to confuse him to the point that his facts are incorrect, for the cenotaph cost £500 and not £2,000, as he alleges.<sup>5</sup>

### 5. Incantatory

In Yoruba festivals incantations appear more frequently in sacrificial rites than in occasional songs. Nevertheless, there are exceptions. Perhaps this can be accounted for by man's incurable fear of the universe and of his fellow men. A festival of songs is sometimes an occasion for voicing this fear, for calling attention to, and warning, 'dark' people in a community, and for wearing a bold look of confidence in spite of whatever evil intentions they may harbour. Here is an example:

I mo bóun n'Órò,  
Ó mí lérí,  
É mà lè rí mi mú.  
Èèè.

Àyàfí kú wọn i r'ágbodò n'omi şiko.  
 Àì p'ejò bọ'rí,  
 Olóríderé mà í l'òdugbẹ o,  
 Láńgbá i gb'ógu t'olúlé,  
 Èéé.  
 Ìtàkù ùre  
 Èì t'agbẹn, t'agbẹn, t'agbẹn n'àyà.  
 Mì k'óguná wo do,  
 Ş'óun í wọ şen,  
 Á wọ şen, á wọ şen şen.

He is angry I satirised him at the Oro festival,  
 He is threatening.  
 But he cannot catch me.  
 Never.  
 Unless one can catch a salmon in a swamp.  
 No one sacrifices a snake to his head.  
 The parrot is never caught in a bush trap,  
 The lizard cannot wage war against the landlord.  
 The stump in a cleared bush  
 Cannot challenge, challenge, challenge the farmer.  
 Whenever a burning torch enters water  
 It is quenched instantly,  
 It will be quenched instantly, quenched instantly.

This singer obviously scorns the threats of his adversary. He and his enemy operate on different planes and will never meet, or if they do, it will mean sheer annihilation for the opponent. This is based on the fallacy that nature arranges things into strict categories and does not permit haphazard development and interference, that there is an unerring regulating hand in charge of the universe, that everything is controlled by a divine intelligence. Because of this the singer can revel in psychological speculation, based on his trust in the sanity of the universe.

## 6. Elegiac

There are occasions when an individual, or a group of people, or a whole community may feel grief-stricken

because of an incident. At festival time they can lend outward expression to their sorrow:

Ééééé

Ó dùn mí.

Ááááá

Ó dùn mí.

Ukú Àyúbà o dẹn'ni,

Awó lọ o ee,

Ó dẹn'ni o, ọrun rere.

Ìgbìmọ dede ẹni un wà,

Àwọn Àyúbà wọn kú wẹrẹ.

Ìgbìmọ dede ẹni un wà,

Àwọn Àyúbà wọn kú wẹrẹ.

É mẹ mi i jà,

É mẹ mi i sọ,

É n bẹnikẹni ní baye jẹ.

Ku wọ mi rẹ'ra,

Kó surun wọn mi re'ra o,

Ku wọn mi re'ra n'Àlùjánnà

Ó gbé

Ìgbìmọ dede ẹni un wà,

Àyúbà ọmọ Sérirí.

Ìgbìmọ dede ẹni un wà,

Àyùba baba Sílífá.

É mẹ mi i jà,

É mẹ mi i sọ,

É n bẹnikẹni ní báyé jẹ.

Àwèrèweré!

Jẹ'bọ ó dà o.

Awọn ọmọ Orúgbò s'ẹbọ rẹ,

Ó dà o.

Àwèrèweré!

Jẹ'bọ ó dà o.

Ará Orúgbò s'ẹbo rẹ,

Ò dà o.

Àwèrèweré!

Jẹ'bọ o dà o.

Oh . . . !

It grieves my heart.

Oh . . .!

It grieves my heart.

The death of Ayuba grieves our heart.

A great man gone.

It grieves our heart, farewell!

He was our councillor.

Ayuba died so suddenly

He was our councillor

Ayuba died so suddenly.

He never quarrels with you,

He never grudges you,

He never joins people in spoiling the world.

If people meet,

If it is true that people meet,

If people meet again in heaven,

Then woe unto that man.

He was our councillor,

Ayuba, son of the Seriki.

He was our councillor,

Ayuba, father of Silifat.

He never quarrels with you,

He never grudges you,

He never joins people in spoiling the world.

Awerewere!

Grant our plea for him.

Orugbo citizen make sacrifice for him.

Let it be accepted.

Awerewere!

Let the sacrifice be accepted.

Sojourners at Orugbo make sacrifice for him

Let it be accepted.

Awerewere!

Let the sacrifice be accepted.

Ayuba's untimely death is a source of sorrow and amazement to the community. Why should such a philanthropist die so prematurely? His death shocks the singer and virtually shakes his faith in a just universe and a heaven there-

after. A wicked neighbour must have caused this untimely death. But if there is a heaven and a powerful hand that shapes all things, ultimately this nefarious act will not go unpunished. The elegy turns into a prayer with a plea to the gods to forgive Ayuba's transgressions, so that he may have better luck in heaven than he has had on earth.

### Style

The main points of style in these songs concern verse form, expression, composition and performance.

### Verse Form

The major division in verse form is between songs that appear to be in one piece, either one stanza or multi-stanza, and those that have a leader-chorus relationship. This division is, of course, artificial, since we can safely assume that all songs were originally leader-chorus in form. But with time, the older songs lost the leader-chorus element and were handed down orally either as one stanza or, less frequently, as two, three or four stanzas.

In these songs, the outstanding feature of the verse form whether single piece or leader-chorus, is their repetitive structure. The single piece songs are divided in this way:

- (i) One-stanza songs (which may consist of four or five lines) in which a certain fragment or phrase occurs in all or most of the lines, e.g.: **Sa a jo j . . .**
- (ii) Single-piece songs with two sets of repetitive structures. The opening lines – three or four – are repeated at the end. The middle forms the core of the song, but even in this section one or two lines are repeated, e.g.: **Laaaaaaaaare!**
- (iii) Songs with pairs of essential, operative lines running through, e.g.: **Ero esi wen ro.**
- (iv) Songs in which the repetition is not of operative lines but of operative words or phrases, e.g.: **I mo b'oun n'Orò.**

The leader-chorus songs are divided into the following categories:

- (i) Songs in which there is a line by line (or breath by

breath) repetition between leader and chorus, e.g.:  
**Ojú mi r'òràn . . .**

- (ii) Songs in which the chorus keeps to a given refrain (usually the first few lines of the leader's part) while the leader varies his part, e.g.: **Àgbà òsèké!**
- (iii) Songs in which both the leader's and the chorus' parts are irregular, e.g.: **Iyawo! iyawo!**

By and large, these songs have a simple verse form. Sometimes the simplicity is almost 'primitive', as when a singer fills a whole line with: **En! En! En!**

Most of the songs are constructed to conform to the standard-pattern rhythm of percussion stick music.

### Expression

Occasional festival songs rely heavily on imagery and diction.

### Imagery

The following kinds of imagery are quite common: *Physical imagery*, of a storm, tempest and disorder, e.g.: '**Àgbón mì títì, ó ɛ b'ójò ó rọ,**' to indicate a restive conscience. '**Uji esi má jà**' to signify confidence and a tenacious hold on life. '**Òpẹ̀ ì kú o, ɛ wo màrìwò**' to indicate longevity or immortality.

*Agricultural imagery*, of cultivation, etc., e.g.: '**Ku wẹn m'òkọ ọlókùnrun lọ s'óko**' to indicate wilful negligence that the land is left uncultivated and choked with weeds. '**Ìtākù ure, Ei t'ágben, t'ágben, n'áyà**' to indicate confidence and successful cultivation.

*Food imagery*, of eating, cooking, etc., e.g.: '**K'ówó yẹn'run, s'oun i bọ**' to indicate a belief in the rationality and order of the universe. '**Ku wẹn ko'gi kẹn fu wọn s'ògiri ọbẹ**' to indicate destruction as well as incidental creation. '**Mófinmófin re e mirepo**' to advertise a monstrosity.

*Imagery of hunting, fishing etc.*, e.g.: '**Mo wa 'kítì ògán, ewú yọ lọ**' to indicate the intractability of evil. '**Olóríderẹ mà f'ìdùgbẹ**' to indicate two distinct levels or spheres of existence. '**Àyàfi ku wọn i r'agbodo n'omi siko**' to indicate nature's well ordered categories.

*Medical imagery*, of sanitation, etc., e.g.: '**Woléwolé fẹ**

dé' to indicate the spiritual cleansing and purification of a community.

Imagery in these festival songs is usually concrete and tends to make a tremendous impact of the mind. This is because the singer draws his reference direct from nature or human behaviour and the hearer is immediately struck by the depth of his perception and the ease with which it has been conveyed to him. Therefore it can be said that some of the imagery is metaphorical and some metaphysical.

### Diction

As with imagery, word-usage in festival songs shows that the singer is a conscious artist who chooses his words with an eye on dramatic effect and immediate impact. Three tendencies can be noted in word-usage:

- (i) Words and phrases that describe human features with extreme sensitiveness, e.g.: *dúdú wọwọ, dúdú janjan ẹyin barabiri, igbọn wariwa, òrúwọ bí t'ọpọn dipọn.*
- (ii) Action-packed words and phrases, e.g.: *yí wéréké, jò làgbàlàgbà, bùrẹnbùrẹn, yànmùyànmù.*
- (iii) Words and phrases that are on the borderline between metaphor and imagery, e.g.: *òrúwọ ọlọsa, ẹẹké ẹẹbú, ọpọ bànbà.*

### Composition and Performance

The composer of festival songs may be any member of a community, yet not everyone will succeed in producing a good song. The good composer is a gifted artist resembling the poet of the literate tradition. Like him, he has something to say, and says it to the best of his ability.

Most of the songs which feature at festival time are composed in advance. Weeks before the festival, a would-be singer begins to dwell on his subject. A gifted artist may get divine inspiration, and the appropriate imagery will come to enrich his composition. But still, he must achieve the best form of expression, and to do this he makes many mental corrections, until the final product is excellent in every way.

There are some songs which are unplanned. The atmosphere of a festival is usually charged with creativity and a good artist may simply conceive a song there and then. Since much of the frame-work of a song is usually ready-made for him in the traditional form, all he has to do at times is to jostle his expression into poetry. The standard attained in some of the planned songs is sometimes extraordinarily high.

In most cases, however, a song is composed by two or more people prior to the festival day. A farmer on his farm or a carpenter in his shop may summon a friend to share the composition of a song with them. Secretly, they ramble over it, rehearse it and perfect it until the festival day. Rehearsals also take place in larger groups, especially in those communities where there is sectional contest in song. At the approach of a festival five or six people may forgather to compose songs and then have thorough rehearsals so as to win the contest. They anticipate the themes about which the other section of the community will sing and prepare songs to answer them lest they be caught unawares.

The performance of festival songs occurs in two ways. In the first, a singing group moves from house to house, stopping before the doors of prominent people in the community. As the group stops, someone starts singing. They usually follow a definite procedure: the leader of the song sings a verse, he stops, and another person picks up what he has just sung, a third person picks it up and sometimes a fourth. By the time each of these men has sung that verse, the community, which has been murmuring it all along, joins in the verse and everyone masters it. Then the leader takes up the same verse and adds new lines to it and the same process to transfer and learning takes place until every bit of the song has been mastered.

The second kind of performance, or competition, is more formal. The two or three wards of a town select their best singers, who meet at an appointed place and sing in turn. The best ward receives the acclaim of the people. In pattern, the actual singing is the same as above.

The performance of these songs enables a Yoruba

community to bring forth its musical and poetic standards. Many songs get rejected, in most cases because of faulty construction, these songs automatically die. The standard a community sets itself can be very high, for at times, in one night, out of a hundred songs, only two or three are considered worthwhile and are allowed to get into the community's repertoire of songs.

### Whither Festival Songs?

At present, occasional festival songs are almost completely weaned from formal purification ritual and are moving towards pure dramatic presentation. The typical festival singer has come to believe that he is performing a social, rather than a religious function. As poetry, some of these songs still leave much to be desired. There is still too great a reliance on repetitive structures, only partially compensated for by the concreteness of the imagery and the illuminating quality of the diction. It is as yet too much of an art of the people and tends to lack that individuality and complexity which makes art transcend mere commonplace.

But the future of traditional Yoruba poetry seems to lie in this direction more than any other one. In future many more festivals will lose their ritualistic element. Only the poetry and song, re-vitalized annually or at convenient times by new poets will live on, as has happened in many other traditions.

### *Notes*

1. Agerige is a place three-and-a-half kilometres north of Ode-Rẹmọ, not to be confused with Agege, near Lagos.
2. Agandan yam has fibrous hairs which look like moustaches.
3. Muse and Animaṣaun live in Ikorodu.
4. This is a reference to the ceramic industry in Ikorodu.
5. The secretary to the Ṣagamu District Council in a letter in 1966 informed me that the cenotaph was built for £500.
6. Awerewere is one of the praise-names of the Goddess of the Sea.

# Classification of Yoruba Oral Poetry\*

by

Ọlatunde Ọlatunji

Yoruba oral poetry must be seen within the context of Yoruba folklore, namely, as the poetic verbal aspect of 'manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc.'<sup>1</sup> It is transmitted by word of mouth and learnt by imitation or example.

Two major attempts have been made at classifying Yoruba oral poetry. Ulli Beier<sup>2</sup> recognizes *oríkì*, *ẹsẹ Ifá*, *òwe*, *ràrà*, *ìjálá*, *ewì*, *ẹkún iyàwó* and *àlọ àpamọ* as genres of Yoruba poetry. His classificatory criterion appears in his work of 1959: 'Yoruba poetry is classified not so much by the contents or the structure but by the group of people to which the reciter belongs and the technique of recitation he employs'.<sup>3</sup> Babalọla, using the same criterion for classification, adds as genres of Yoruba poetry *ọfọ* or *ògèdè*, *ẹsà* and *iyẹrẹ Ifá*.<sup>4</sup> The list of Yoruba poetic genres classified according to the way they are chanted would therefore, according to Beier and Babalọla, consist of *oríkì*, *ẹsẹ Ifá*, *òwe*, *ràrà*, *ìjálá*, *ẹsà*, *ẹkún iyàwó*, *àlọ àpamọ*, *ọfọ* or *ògèdè* and *iyẹrẹ Ifá*.

It is true that the Yoruba readily recognize some poetic forms by the way they are performed or chanted, but a look at the list above readily reveals that the forms are not all recognizable by the mode of chanting. It is *ràrà*, *ìjálá*, *ẹsà*, *ẹkún iyàwó*, *iyẹrẹ Ifá* which can only be so recognized. *Ràrà* is chanted by men and women, old or young, for entertainment on social occasions.<sup>5</sup> *Ìjálá* is performed by hunters and devotees of Ọgún (Yoruba divinity of iron).<sup>6</sup> *Ewì* or *ẹsà* is chanted by masquerades<sup>7</sup> while *ẹkún*

*iyàwó* is sung by brides on the eve of their marriage (there are men, though, who teach them in preparation for their marriage).<sup>8</sup> *Ìyèrè Ifá* is chanted by devotees of Òrúnmìlà, the *babaláwo*, when they come together on festive occasions.<sup>9</sup> Other poetic forms (though locally distributed but musically indentifiable) could be added to this list.<sup>10</sup> *Ègè* is a popular chant in Egbaland, almost comparable in its themes and social rôle to *ràrà*; *alámò*<sup>11</sup> among the Ekiti, *olele* among the Ìjèsàs, etc. They can be listed *ad infinitum*, as modes of chanting vary from place to place.

These poetic forms, which are recognized by the way they are chanted, I have called chanting modes. Some of them are widely distributed all over Yorubaland, e.g. *iyèrè ifá*, *ijálá* and *ewi*, but most of them are localized,<sup>12</sup> as has been said above. The analysis of these chanting modes is yet to be done by an ethnomusicologist.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from these forms, there are those Yoruba poetic forms which are not recognized by the mode of chanting but by certain characteristics within their internal structure. These are *oríkì esè Ifá*, *òwe*, *àlò àpamò* and *ofò* (*ògèdè*). It is very important to distinguish this class from the musically identifiable class of the chanting modes. I have called this class the feature types.<sup>14</sup> *Oríkì* can be identified not only by its descriptive, eulogistic rôle of extolling the good qualities of its subject but also by other internal features, e.g.

(a) High incidence of nominalizations:

Okò Láyemí Atérererèpàdéòwè.

Àgbagilòwò-òwè, baba Àjàní.

Arúngimóiyáálé-òbóníara.

Àgbagilòwòdèwèsònú.

(Babalòla)

(Husband of Láyemí, He who lies prostrate aiming to shoot a black colobus monkey.

He who snatches a tree branch from a monkey's grip, father of Àjàní.

He who breaks a tree branch against an old female monkey.

He who snatches a tree branch from a monkey's grip.)

- (b) Use of *omọ*, *okọ*, *baba* (offspring, husband, father of . . .)

*Omọ* Lárò, *omọ* Ajíbòsìn, *omọ* Èpè- ò-jà *omọ*  
Gboríjòbí, *omọ* Fùúlá.ga.

*Omọ* Ògbòlá, 'mọ Adélù, *omọ*  
Alùgbìn-òrìṣà.

*Omọ* Èfúntilé, -Làlú Òwu, *omọ* Èfunrójọpo.  
Ògúnmọdẹdẹ, Olóró, *baba* Òbílọ.wọ, *okọ*  
Yéyọmí

(Babalọla)

(Offspring of Lárò, offspring of Ajíbòsìn,  
offspring of Èpè-ò-jà, offspring of  
Gboríjòbí, offspring of Fùúlá.ga.

Offspring of Ògbòlá, offspring of Adélù,  
offspring of Alùgbìn-òrìṣà.

Offspring of Èfúntilé, Làlú Òwu, offspring of  
Èfunrójọpo.

Ògúnmọdẹdẹ, the Tormentor, father of  
Òbílọ.wọ, husband of Yéyọmí.)

Another feature of Oríkì is the multiplicity of its indirect references to events.

Odù Ifá is recognized by its divinatory purport, its characteristic structure and complete symbolic identification of the Ifa suppliant with the protagonist of the *ẹṣẹ* Ifa story.

- (a) *The structure of ẹṣẹ Ifa*<sup>15</sup>

Aróunkẹ awo wọn l'ó.de Ègbá.

- (i) Aróunwẹ awo òdeèJẹṣà.

Ògèdè l'ó so l'óko Ègbá kòndùkònduù.

- (ii) A dífá fÈndèrèè omọ afàdán-méjì-ṣẹbo-ńtorí-omọ.

Òún lè bímọ-ópọ bá.í lọ dáfá sí.

- (iii) Wọn lá.dán mé.wá l'ẹbo.

Wọn l'éyelé mé.wá ẹbo.

Wọn ládìtẹ mé.wá ẹbo.

- (iv) Èndèrè rúbọ.

- (v) Ó rúbọ tán lọ bá kiọ sọmọ íbí

Ojú ọmọ ní ní pán an.  
 Lọ bá kiọ sómọọ bí.  
 Ó bímọ, bímọ, bímọ  
 Ọ-ńkà ní ní fí kamọ è.

- (vi) Aróunké awo won ló.de Ègbá.  
 Aróunwẹ awo òdeẹJesà.  
 Ọgèdẹ ló so lóko Ègbá kọ̀ndùkọ̀nduù.  
 Dífá f'Èndèrè ọmọ afádán-mé.jí-sẹbọ-ńtorí-ọmọ.
- (vii) Rírú ẹbọ ẹrù.  
 Àtètètù.  
 Kẹ́ í pẹ, kẹ́ i jìnnà  
 Ẹ wá bá mi ni wòwẹ ọmọ.

The ẹsẹ Ifá often starts with the citation (i), the reference, by name or appellation, to previous babaláwo (or, in some cases, non-humans) who had divined for the protagonist in the ẹsẹ Ifá story. The citation could appear to be a proverb, or a characteristic saying of the babaláwo, while some appear to be narrative comments. The citation is often, but not compulsorily, followed by the presentation of the protagonist and his problem, i.e. the occasion of divination (ii). 'Dífá fún' often marks out this section, but it may not occur. Ifá's reply (iii) often follows. It is here that Ifá demands that something – a sacrifice or a symbolic miming – be done. The protagonist reacts to this (iv) either obeying or disobeying Ifá. In the example above. Èndèrè obeys. After the protagonist's reaction comes the result of this reaction (v). If he obeys, the protagonist achieves his desire and rejoices, prasing his babaláwo. The whole story so far / (i) – (v) / may be summed up (vi) in a sort of cyclic or intra-structural recapitulation. General comments (vii) often stress the need for obeying Ifá's commands.

(b) *Symbolic Identification*

Symbolism means to attribute more than its superficial value to a word or action through the way the word is used or the action is presented. The entire system of Ifá divination is based on symbolism. The suppliant identifies himself with the protagonist. The actions of the protagonist

and his fortunes are also regarded as symbolic of the fate of the suppliant. The suppliant is often advised to sacrifice the same items either to be as lucky as the protagonist of the *ẹsẹ Ifá*, or to avoid his misfortunes. In the *ẹsẹ Ifá* above the *Eńdèrè* sacrifices ten bats, ten fowls, and ten pigeons so that he may have children. The *Ifá* suppliant for whom this *ẹsẹ* is created would be expected to offer the same items so that he may be fertile.

*Ofò* can be identified by its mystical and metaphysical expectations, namely, subjection of the universe to man's will, a symbolic wordplay wherein lies the belief in essences and sympathies, the invocation, the repetitions and the assertions – all features that invest it with weirdness. Examples of some of the features include:

(a) Symbolic wordplay

*Ito l'ó ní kí n tó aráawájú*  
*Àgbòrín ìgbòrò l'ó ní kí n gbòn èrò ẹyín sílẹ*  
*Asẹ kó lọ sẹ owód mi wá*

(It is the ito leaf that says I should equal those who are superior to me.  
 It is the antelope in the woods that says I should get away from laggards.  
 The sieve should go to sift money for me.)

(b) Invocation/repetition,

*Adísúúrúgbèjé.*  
*Adísúúrúgbèjé.*  
*Adísúúrúgbèjé.*  
*Èkùn-abàyà-gbàá*  
*Èkùn-abàyà-gbàá*  
*Èkùn-abàyà-gbàá*

*Ifá* is being invoked in this example. The feature of repetition, often symbolically determined (usually three times), is also exemplified above.

(c) Assertions

*Gẹgẹ ladíẹ í kẹyin adẹ.*  
*Gẹgẹ ladíẹẹ kẹyinin rẹ.*  
*Gẹgẹ ladíẹ í kẹyin.*

Bádíe ní bá ní sunkún aṣọ.

Ọpọlọ.pọ ùhùhù l'olÓ.dùmarè í fíí bò ó .o .o

(It is with gentleness that a hen handles eggs.

It is with gentleness that a hen handles its eggs.

It is with gentleness that a hen handles eggs.

When a fowl is crying for a cloth,

It is numerous feathers that Oló.dùmarè showers on it.)

Òwe is known by its prescriptive function, its comment on life, and features of parallelism, lexical contrast, and repetition.<sup>16</sup> Òwe has a didactic end:

Eni t'ó rọnni níṣé là á bẹ̀rù.

A kì í bẹ̀rù ẹ̀ni tí a ó. jẹ ẹ fún.

(We should fear the sender of a message.

We do not fear the one to whom to deliver it.)

Àlọ àpamò sets out with an enigma which is posed for solution. It abounds in recondite metaphors.

Aboyún kọ̀ṣẹ̀,

Omọ inú ẹ̀ ní 'pẹ̀lẹ̀'.

(irúlá)

(An expectant mother stumbles,

The child within her greets her 'gently'.)

Àdàbà kéréké,

Kò sí ọ̀jà tí kò nọ́ rí.

(owó)

(The small dove,

There is no market it hasn't visited.)

The answers to these riddles are 'dry okro' and 'money' respectively. A dry okro sounds if shaken, as the dry seeds inside it rattle, and it is the seed that will grow again. Money cannot but be present in any market.

Therefore these feature types need to be classified apart from the chanting modes. They can be readily collected and are identifiable and analysable as soon as their texts are available.

This new classification has some advantages over the existing traditional one, which merely lumps together forms which are recognized by their internal structure. We can now consistently apply whichever classificatory criterion we choose, and two classes of Yoruba poetic forms emerge, namely, the chanting modes and the feature types. Not all the chanting modes are widely distributed over Yorubaland: *Ìjálá*, *iyèrè Ifá* and *èṣà* occur everywhere, while the others are localized in their distribution. The feature types are found all over Yorubaland.

Because they can be recognized by their characteristic internal structure, it is easy to discover that almost all the feature types (with the exception of *àlò àpamò*) occur within the repertoire of performers in one or the other of the chanting modes.<sup>17</sup> It is also possible to demonstrate interpolations within the feature types themselves. *Òwe* occurs within *odù Ifá* and *oríkì*, *òfò* does in *odù Ifá*, and *oríkì* can be identified in *odù Ifá* and *òfò*. (See section B of the Appendix.)

The chanting modes are aesthetically relevant in the study of Yoruba oral poetry because of their emotive or affective value. The linguist needs the professional co-operation of the ethnomusicologist. While the ethnomusicologist analyses what features (tonal, register, and melodic), distinguish the modes from one another, the linguist will examine and describe the form which the modes impose on the same material, e.g. tonal distortion, syllable lengthening etc. Our new classification will help in this direction, because it will enable a specimen of a feature type to be chanted in the various modes so as to distinguish one mode from another.

This new classification avoids the existing grouping together of poetic types in that the chanting modes can now be set apart from the feature types.<sup>18</sup> Each mode and each feature type can be studied by various experts, and for the first time the literary analyst can discuss the inner and outer forms of Yorùbá oral poetry. I hope this new classification will be found useful.

## APPENDIX

### A. Feature Types and Chanting Modes: Yorùbá Oral Poetry

	Classification
Feature Types	Chanting Modes
Ofò	Ràrà
Oríkì	Ìjálá
Òwe	Èsà
Eṣẹ̀ Ifá	Èkún ìyàwó
Àlọ̀ àpamò	Ìyèrè Ifá
	Ègè
	Alámò
	Òsàrè
	Àdàn, etc., etc.

	Ofò	Oríkì	Òwe	Eṣẹ̀ Ifá	Àlọ̀ Àpamò
Ràrà	+	+	+	-	-
Ìjálá	+	+	+	+	-
Èsà	+	+	+	-	-
Èkún ìyàwó	+	+	+	+	-
Ìyèrè Ifá	+	+	+	+	-
	+ occurs		- doesn't occur		

### B. Feature Types Performed in Various Chanting Modes

#### (i) Oríkì

in Ìjálá:

Baba Ògúnwálé nìkan kọ, baba  
Ògúndáhùnsii ni.

Òkúnrin gbòngbòngbòn bí ojó tíí kanrí.

Òkúnrin gbòngbòngbòn bí eni fìbòn tì

Omọ̀ Òrìlòmólá, omọ̀ Atókoígbàlówóàso.

(Babalọ́lá, *The Content & Form*, p.219 lines 5-8.)

in Ràrà:

Baba Atógbilé abokolétí Aṣípa

Oba onkàngé abòbìòru.

Òkọ .mi níṣu, má. ní òngúnyán

Ayélàágbé.

Abarúgbó-ìṣu-l'óko.

(Babalọ́lá, *Ràrà Chants*, p.29, lines 91-5.)

in Èkún Ìyàwó:

Omọrelúūgbón Ìjèní omọ Obà Seèlèlè.

Èmí ó. wá relé òrèè mi .o.

Omọ ojúoró ò jèsè eyè ó tómi.

Ìrù òkéré ò j'Obà ó tòdòrò.

(Mustapha, *Èkún Ìyàwó*, p.44, lines 85-8.)

in Èsà:

Omọ olóbi wónwótiwọ.

Omọ olóbi wónwótiwọ.

Èí tó bá fèni.

Abégúndé, yóó. mọ wọ sǹjù èni.

Èí tí ò bá fèni

A wọ sǹjù omọ ẹranko,

Omọ ẹranko a roun mọọ mú soko jẹ.

Èrówó, òlẹ, omọ Akábìsọlà

(Adébí sí, *Èsà*, p.30, lines 158-165.)

in Ìyèrè Ifá:

Ifá ní ñ kí yín tèsótèsó

Ó ní ñ kí yín tológuntológun un.

Hin in

Ó ní ñ kí agbààgbà mẹ.fà tí ñ bẹ nífẹ Onlayé

Hin in, àun, àun

Ó ní ñ kí gbogbo omọ òsòdè ní.gboro

kòòkan, o jàre

Hin in

Bó tí ní ñ kí 'Túndé Olátúnjì

Hin in

Ní.jèbú Ode

Hin in

Nílee Fowóseré

(ii) *Ofo*

in Ìjálá:

Kíkún nilé ikúnkún skún.

Omọ yó. kúnú ilé .rẹ dandandan bí èni ní

fini sẹbi.

Gbígba ñ tògèdè.

Àdósùsù ò níí sùré òun nìkan.

Ìwòn tó gbàgbín nìgbín íkó.

O ó. kúnlé .re dandandan bí eni ní finì sèbí.  
Ojú omọ kì í pọn pèrègún.  
Ojú aṣọ kì í pọn ọgèdè.

(Babalọlá, *The Content and Form*, p.245, lines 11–18.)

in Èkún Ìyàwó:

Mo ní èyí tí mọ bá rẹẹ gbàgbé.  
Èeran ọ. mọọ rán ñ létí rẹ.  
Bẹẹ ni àṣọkàn ni tìllyè.  
Olúkúlúso, Olúkúlúso  
Béja nílá so, à rílé omi  
Obi ipa, obi ifin  
Owólabí Ajé.ígbe, tí mo mú rẹẹ bọ yààya  
Kí yàà ọ. ya diẹ sínúù mi .o.

(Mustapha, *Èkún Ìyàwó*, pp.43–4, lines 73–80.)

(iii) *Eṣẹ Ifá*

in Ìjálá:

Agbọnmí ní wólé eja, níf balé eja jé  
Apàjùbà níf balé aparò jé.  
Kùmò pónpó la fíf sọkọ ọgúlútu 'pù'.  
Wón ní kólé rẹ láyé.  
Wón tún ní kólé-rẹ ló.run.  
Ó ní, 'È jé ká fẹbọ wólé ọrun dà nù, ká tún  
tayé kó'.  
Àwọn àgbà tọrun wá ṣorí dèùnkàndèùnkàn.

(From *Ìrètẹ Mé.jì*. Babalọlá, *The Content and Form*, pp.251–3, lines 16–22.)

in Èkún Ìyàwó:

Ifá .kan dé, Odù .kán gàṭe.  
È bi mí, e nífáa kín ní.  
Mònmòmòná Oríftàgé Owólabí.  
Mo ní Ọtúá roro, Irosùn roro.  
Opèèkétè ni bàbaafá .o, bàbáà mi  
Èjì Ogbè ni baba Opèlè  
Àrámọka ni baba Sàngó  
L'ó dífá f'Olómóṣíkàtà, baba àgbàdo.

(Mustapha, *Èkún Ìyàwó*, p.83, lines 49–66.)

in Ìyèrè Ifá:

Dí mé.jì o ò.

Yàn mé.jì.

Gbìrìgìdì nìsà akàn.

Dífá fỌlọwá.

Ọlọwá nì sawo ròde Ìràwò, ọ jàre.

Hẹn ẹn.

Ọlọwá diwin ò kú má.

Hẹn.

Abọ̀Ràwò Ọlọwá tóó diwin

Hẹn ẹn.

(iv) *Ówe*

in Ìjálá:

Àgbà kì í şubú yèkẹ kó da tikùn sílẹ, ohun a  
je sínú nì teni.

(Babalọlá, *The Content & Form*, p.241, line 29.)

in Ewì (Èşà):

Translated into Yorùbá are Beier's examples  
in 'Iwì' in *Yorùbá Poetry*, p.39.

N ó. wọ ọ ká igbó,

Èhìn araa rẹ ni yó. fi lànò.

Ewúré wo alá.patà bí kí ó kú.

Kòlò nì mì lògbà

Inú nì bí adìẹ şùşùşù

Orí adétù nì pète àrọ̀n

Orí adá.rọ̀n nì pète àtijọ̀ba.

in Ràrà:

Ba à rẹni gbékẹ lé a tepá mọşẹ eni. (p.9, line 42.)

Békòlò bá jú.bà ilẹ

Ilẹ a yanu.

(Babalọlá, *Ràrà Chants*, p.31, lines 3-4.)

N.B.: Àlọ àpamò has not been heard within the  
repertoire of the various mode performers.

C. Feature Types Interpolated in Other Feature Types

(i) *Ówè* (adapted though)

in *Odù Ifá*

Bá a. bá jeun gbọn-in-gbọn-in

Ilèkùn gbọn-in-gbọn-in là á tí.

(Abínbólá, *Ijiniḗ Ohùn Ènu Ifá*, Apá kííní.)

in *Oríkì*

A kí í gbàkàtà lówó akítì.

Kùbólájé, .ta ní gbalé baba Omọ lówó omọ?

Àjírẹ.rín òkinkin, àdàgbàla.gbà sí yan

àgbìgbò

Ohun tó sàgbìgbò tó fì dẹkun èrínín rín

Bó bá se gúnnugún a wońkoko mórí eyin.

(Odubitan, *Oríkì Àwọn Timì*, Osoḡbo, 1964, pp.3, 10.)

(ii) *Qfò*

in *Eṣe Ifá*

Òwọn owó ni wọn ní nàwó mini

Òwọn oúnjẹ là ní pè ní.yàn

Omi ló wọn ni wọn ní lé.sun.

A dífá fún Ońyánwọn tíí. sọmọ Obalé.yò

Ajòrí

Ońyánwọn níí, 'òun lè lówó bá.í?'

N ló dáfá sí

Wọn ní kọ á rúbọ.

Wọn ní yó. lówó

Wọn ní yó. dájà.

Ó ní kín ni kó.un ó rú

Wọn ní kó rú eyelé mẹ.wá.

Wọn ní kó rú adìye mẹ.wá.

Wọn ní kó rú ègbààwá

Wọn ní kóoko ewéefá

Ońyánwọn rúbọ.

Ó rúbọ tán.

Ońyánwọn lówó.

Ó dájà.

Ijó ní n jò.  
Ayò ní n yò.  
Ní n yanwo.  
Lawo n yinfá.

E sàré wá ẹ wá rajà ọmọ ọbaà.  
Iná lo ní ẹ bá mi nájàa tẹmi.  
Èrà ló ní ẹ bá mi rà.  
Àtàgbowó moní-jinwin ní ta tiẹ  
Àpẹjin àpèlà ni wọn pèsẹwírí  
Tẹrútọmọ ní pe Yánníbo  
E wáà bá mi nájàa tẹmi ò  
Arèrèègbosùn.

(iii) *Oríkì*

in Eṣe Ifá

Ọkùnrin kùkùrú Ọkẹ̀ Ìgẹ̀tí,  
Gbólájókódó ọmọ Ọkinkin tíf mērinín fọn.  
Ọmọ ọpòlọ.pọ imọ tíf fún nīngínìngìn.  
Ọmọ ejò mé.jì tíf sàré ganranganran lórí  
eréwé.

Ọmọ iná jó.ko mó. jódrùn  
Ọmọ iná jó.ko mó jẹ.lùjù.

(Abimbólá, *Ijìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Enu Ifá*, Apá Kìnní,  
p.46, lines 120–126.)

in Ofò

Àwọn iyàmi ọ̀sòròngà, ajapájorí  
Ajẹdòèniyàn má.bì.  
Àwọn ló gbe orí irókò,  
Tí wọn ró kokooko;  
Àwọn afòsánsòru  
Àwọn ni afòrusòsán  
Alábe sékélé  
Ọfígògòdá-oló.ògùn lójú

(A. Oníṣọ̀n-òkúta, *Ìlẹ̀pa Dúdú Ayé*, Ọ̀soḡbo:  
M̀bárí M̀báyò Publications, 1965, p.18.)

N.B.: There's no evidence of àlọ àpamọ having been interpolated with other feature poetic types, nor does any other type occur in it.

## Notes

\*I am grateful to Professor Ayo Bamgboṣe for his suggestions. All quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from my personal collections.

1. (a) William John Toms, quoted by W. R. Bascom in 'Verbal Art', *Journal of American Folklore*, LXVIII (1955), 245-252. See also J. Berry, *Spoken Art in West Africa* (London, 1961).
- (b) The distinction between Yoruba prose and poetry is not absolute, but relative. Yoruba poetry can be spoken, chanted or sung; there is emphasis on the artistic form of poetry, e.g. parallelism, word-play, repetition, tonal counterpoint, lexical matching etc; it has archaic lexical items, tonal and grammatical distortions or deviation, and fixed, socially and traditionally defined subject matter. Yoruba prose, on the other hand, puts emphasis on its subject matter, which is individually chosen as is the language, which is that of common speech. It is spoken; it has unusual forms, intelligibility being paramount. None the less, it has to be remembered that the distinction is not absolute, it is a sort of cline, one form shading into the other: the language and rhythm of prose, however, form the foundation of verse.
2. Beier & Gbadamṣi, *Yorùbá Poetry* (Ibadan: Government Printer, 1959). Beier does not, however, use the terms *àlò àpamò* and *ẹkún iyáwó*.
3. *Ibid.*, p.9.
4. S. A. Babalola, *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), p.23, n.2.  
Each genre has its distinctive style of vocalization or technique of vocal performance. Yoruba traditional poetry in general is best classified not so much by the themes as by the stylistic devices employed in recitals. There is a distinctive mode in which each genre should sound forth in performance and an experienced listener to recitals of the various types of Yoruba vocal art can name almost immediately, from the sound of the recital, the particular style of vocalization being employed by a performing vocalizer of whose identity he is ignorant.
5. A. Babalola, 'Rara Chants in Yorùbá Spoken Art'. paper presented at Staff Seminar, University of Lagos, June 1966; and H. Wolff, 'Rara: A Yoruba Chant', *Journal of African Languages* 1, Part 1 (1962), 45-56.
6. S. A. Babalola, *Ìjálá Àtẹnuḍẹnu* (Ibadan: Ministry of Education 1956), *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), pp.1-55, *Ijala: A Form of Oral Poetry in Nigeria* (Lagos, 1968), 'Ijala, the traditional poetry of Yorùbá Hunters' in U. Beier, ed., *Introduction to African Literature*, (London: Longmans, 1967), pp.12-22.
7. O. Adebisi, *Èsà Egúngún: A Traditional Yorùbá Poetry*. Unpublished Long Essay, Dept. of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages, University of Ibadan, 1969.
8. K. O. Mustapha, *Ẹkún Iyáwó: A Form of Yorùbá Traditional Poetry*, Unpublished Long Essay. Dept. of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages, University of Ibadan, 1969.

- <sup>9</sup>. Wande Abimbola, 'Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline', *Lagos Notes and Records*, University of Lagos Bulletin of African Studies, II, 1 (June 1968), 30-40.
- <sup>10</sup>. 'Osare' in Ile Ife, 'Adan' and 'Asiko' among the Ondo.
- <sup>11</sup>. I learnt this from Mr V. Olayemi of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.
- <sup>12</sup>. The Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, has recognized terraced chanting in Eastern Yorubaland, viz., Ife, Ijẹṣà, Èkítì, etc. Ref. R. G. Armstrong, V. Olayemi and B. Adu, 'Èkítì Traditional Dirge of Lt. Col. A. Fajuyi's Funeral' *African Notes*, V.2. Ibadan (1969), 63-94.
- <sup>13</sup>. Cf. U. Beier & B. Gbadamosi, op. cit., p:9, 'the analysis of the recitation of poems should really be made by a musicologist. To my knowledge nothing has yet been published on this particular subject.'
- <sup>14</sup>. For detailed description and discussion of the feature types, see the author's work: *Characteristic Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1970
- <sup>15</sup>. See W. Abimbola, *Ijúnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ènu Ifá*, Apá Kínlí (Glasgow: Collins, 1968) pp.16-17; and R. Prince, *Ifá: Yorùbá Divination and Sacrifice* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964), pp.2-6. For further discussion see W. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1970); W. Abimbola, *An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Lagos, 1969.
- <sup>16</sup>. See A. Bamgbose, 'The Form of Yorùbá Proverbs', *Odu*, IV, 2 (1968), 75-86; and O.E. Vidal, 'Introductory Remarks on Yorùbá Language', in S. A. Crowther, *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London: Seeleys, 1852), pp.1-38.
- <sup>17</sup>. Some comments by Beier and Babalola point to the need for a reclassification of Yorùbá oral poetry. In *Yorùbá Poetry*, Beier writes, 'It is highly interesting that the subject matter of these groups of poems can sometimes be interchangeable. (The sole exception being Odù Ifá or oracle verse), I have heard a poem from a hunter which I had heard in a different town on a different occasion from an Egúngún masquerader. In the first case the poem was classified as Ijálá, in the second as Iwí. Although such overlapping of subject matter is not very common, the fact that it exists shows that the terms Iwí or Ijálá refer to a technique of recitation rather than a type of poem' (p.9). Èṣẹ̀ Ifá is, contrary to Beier's assertion, chanted. See Appendix A. And Babalola, in *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ijálá*, observes that 'In honour of each progenitor of the Yorùbá people there is a traditional verbal salute called Oríkì Oríṣẹ̀ which is suitable for performance in more than one style of Yorùbá spoken art. When performed by Ijálá artists, these verbal salutes become Ijálá chant' (p.23). 'There is a hard core of minstrel they are performed.' (p.25). See Appendix, section A, for illustrations of this point.
- <sup>18</sup>. E.g. Beier in *Yorùbá Poetry*, has a section, 'Oríkì' which contains specimens of Oríkì, 'Ijálá' which in turn contains the oríkì of plants and animals and lineages; 'Ewí' which has the oríkì of towns and lineages; in his 'Mar-

riage and Funeral Songs' and 'Poetry for Children' there are also orikis. Babalola too has some pieces which in his *The Content and Form of Yorùbá Ìjálá* are regarded as Ìjálá but which also occur in his *Àwọn Oríkí Orílẹ̀* as Oríkí. This new classification would put all examples of Oríkí together and set up a class of chanting modes.

# *Notes on the Collection, Transcription, Translation and Analysis of Yoruba Oral Literature*

by

**Wande Abimbola**

Despite the fact that systematic collection and analysis of Yorùbá oral literature started only a few years ago, so much work has been done in this field that one can say with pride and satisfaction that Yoruba oral literature is today one of the best known areas of African verbal art. Among the several works that have been published in this field are those of Adeboye Babalola on Ìjálá (hunters' poetic chants)<sup>1</sup>, the late Olusoji Ogunbòwale on Ègbá oral poetry,<sup>2</sup> and the works of the present writer and William Bascon on Ifá literary corpus.<sup>3</sup> New areas of oral poetry are being actively investigated by several people including Olatunde Olatunji,<sup>4</sup> Afolabi Olabimtan<sup>5</sup> and Oludare Olatjuba.<sup>6</sup> It is hoped that the results of these investigations will soon be available in printed form.

Most of the work done so far on Yoruba oral literature is on poetry, while prose continues to lag behind. So far, the poetic genres that have been investigated are Ifá, ègè, ìgbálá, ọ̀fọ̀, rárà,<sup>7</sup> iwí-egúngún and oríkì.<sup>8</sup> But of all the genres mentioned above, Ifá and Ìjálá seem to have received a disproportionately large amount of attention while some have been collected and published as raw materials awaiting critical analysis.

There are a number of other genres which are quite well-known but have not yet been collected, let alone analysed. Some of these are etíyẹrí, àrọ̀ and òkúpípè.

There are without any doubt several other genres, unknown to the present investigator, in many Yoruba dialects, awaiting collection and analysis.

The Ifá literary corpus is by far the richest genre of Yorùbá oral poetry. It is divided into two hundred and fifty-six categories known as Odù out of which the first sixteen are styled major, and the remaining two hundred and forty, minor Odù. Each Odù contains an unspecified number of poems known as ẹṣẹ. The work of the present investigator over the last six years has revealed that there are several hundreds of extant ẹṣẹ in each Odù.

Although other genres of Yoruba oral poetry are not as rich as the Ifá literary corpus, they nevertheless contain very interesting poems worthy of inquiry. The importance and urgency of collecting the genres hitherto not collected, and of analysing those not yet analysed cannot therefore be over-emphasized.

The collection and analysis of Yoruba oral prose has received very little attention compared to oral poetry. However, two important genres of Yoruba oral prose have so far been recognized, namely Àlọ and Ìtàn. Indeed, these two genres of oral prose are well-known to almost all Yoruba-speaking people; who must have come into contact with them during childhood. These folktales formed an important part of entertainment, for children in Yoruba traditional society and most children had the opportunity of listening to them, especially on moonlight nights. Although the telling of folktales on moonlight nights is fast dying out, due to rapid urbanization and socio-economic change, it is gratifying to see that the schools have adopted the telling of folktales as a regular feature of oral composition and entertainment in primary schools.

So far, very little has been done about collecting oral prose. Adebayo Babalola however, has just finished the collection of tortoise tales (Àlọ Ìjápá) and it is hoped that it will soon be available in printed form. Nothing, as far as the present writer knows, has been done on Ìtàn which is an important genre of Yoruba oral prose containing many interesting tales. This is therefore a rich field for investigation.

In retrospect, it can be said that most of the work so far on both poetry and prose has been one of collection, transcription and translation. At this point one may want to inquire whether the best methods have been employed in collecting, transcribing and translating. It is an important question, and one that must be looked into.

The tape recorder is universally accepted as the best instrument for the collection of oral literature, and its introduction has led to a revolution in this field. However, one must remember that the tape-recorder is not without its limitation as an instrument for this purpose. Jack Berry, writing on the limitations of the tape-recorder for the collection of folktales, says: 'Technically perfect and imaginatively and stylistically creative renditions of folktales are unlikely to be obtained in the artificial contexts in which so many of our transcriptions have obviously been . . .'.<sup>10</sup> Despite its drawbacks, the tape-recorder is the most important instrument for the collection of oral literature. The problems that arise when employing other means of collecting oral literature (e.g. writing down the material directly by dictation from the artist) are so obvious that one need not go into them here.

The work and the difficulties of the student of oral literature begin with the recording of oral literature on tape. The first question that comes to mind is: what does one do with the material collected? If it is sufficiently large, it must be correctly catalogued for easy reference and in any case kept at the right temperature to prevent it from growing mouldy and gradually losing its value.

The next stage, of course is the transcription of the material. Those who are not experienced in this exercise cannot appreciate the amount of painstaking patience and devotion required for good results. Transcription must always be done by experts and, if given to students, must always be carried out under strict supervision. The work must be checked and rechecked several times before the final product is obtained. Any student of oral literature will testify to the fact that with every checking one almost invariably finds something to alter, add or subtract – an unpleasant situation that makes one hesitate to label the

material at any stage as final. One must however summon up courage at some stage, after being satisfied that all possible errors have been investigated, (sometimes when one looks back on the material, it may be more correct to say when one's patience is exhausted) and send the material to the typist.

Connected with the question of arriving at the best transcription is the problem of orthography. What orthography is one to adopt when transcribing Yoruba oral literature? It is the view of the present investigator that a phonetic orthography would be best for this purpose. Obviously one cannot write oral literature as one writes down other types of literature because of the need to represent accurately as much of the sound system in the oral material as possible. Such phonetic characteristics as lengthening of syllables, not grammatically significant in Yoruba, but of great importance in oral literature, must be indicated. It is important to remember that transcription is and should be a faithful representation of the material collected. There are, of course, certain aspects of the material which cannot be represented in writing under normal conditions. Such aspects include the musical qualities of the sound system of the material which can only be investigated by the scholar whose main interest and training is musicology. A phonetic orthography which represents as much as possible the peculiarities of the sound system of the material is sufficient to lead the careful investigator to an accurate transcription. It must always be remembered that an inaccurate transcription is dangerous since it will lead to wrong analysis.

The work of a translator is also fraught with problems, for the translation of oral literature cannot be handled like the translation of written, straightforward texts. The cultural content of oral literature discussed below makes communication difficult once the linguistic medium of communication changes. Certain aspects of the original material cannot be translated from one language into another and some of them would need to be elaborated by means of notes before they begin to make sense. It would therefore be unwise to adopt a method of translation

which makes it impossible to control the difficulties mentioned above. This is the major fault of a fine translation in the target language. The best approach, then, would be to make translation in the target language as literal as possible so as to transfuse part of the cultural content, imagery and other literary characteristics of the material into the target language. If translation, however, is too literal, it no longer makes sense in the target language and therefore loses the effect it is designed to produce. Some of the works of the writers already mentioned are available in translation.

Some critical work has been done on some of the genres mentioned above and a lot more is being undertaken by various investigators. Nevertheless, there is still a great deal of work ahead of us before we can avail ourselves of a properly analyzed stock of oral literature. What then should be the criteria of analysis? Perhaps the most urgent need in the study of Yoruba oral literature today is for the development of a commonly acceptable format of analysis. One must state at once that oral literature cannot be analyzed effectively from the point of view of the written literature of exotic languages. We have to take into consideration the underlying cultural element, since the material is always culture-bound.

One cannot, for example, make any meaningful statement about the form and content of the Ifa literary corpus unless one fully understands the cultural content, i.e. the position of Ifa as a Yoruba God, the Ifá cult and the beliefs of the Yoruba in the various aspects of Ifa worship, e.g. sacrifice and divination. Appreciation of oral literature must therefore always be informed by the cultural background which is so predominant in its form and content.

One is often tempted to ignore the cultural context and place all emphasis on stylistic method. The stylistic approach, scientific as it may be, cannot be successfully undertaken independently of the cultural function of the material being analyzed. Suppose, for example, one is going to analyze stylistic repetition in the Ifa literary corpus; one cannot, with this type of material, analyze all

recognizable patterns of repetition and stop there. One must relate the patterns of repetition to their function in the corpus as a whole, and this will certainly entail relating them to the cultural context. What function does stylistic repetition perform in the Ifa literary corpus? What effect does repetition have on the material? What is the attitude of Ifa priests to repetition, especially when a certain material has to be repeated sixteen times, so that the Ifa priest must chant what is otherwise a brief spell for several hours? The analysis of digression in the Ijala chant is related to the entertainment purpose of Ijalá; the expectation of the audience sometimes leads the artist from one theme to the other.

Therefore, in order to evolve an acceptable format for the appreciation of oral literature, we must blend our knowledge of the most up-to-date techniques of literary criticism and stylistics with a thorough understanding of Yoruba culture. Without this, any critical work is bound to be sterile. This approach is of particular importance nowadays; for a violent process of Westernization is eroding our cultural values and beliefs so that gradually we are breeding a group of westernized children to whom most of the commonplace aspects of our culture are foreign. Traditional Yoruba society had no such problem since everybody understood his culture very well. That is why in a traditional society, the audience could easily distinguish a good Ijala poem from a bad one.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, when it is not unusual to find many Yoruba adults who do not know what Ijala or Ifa is – and this makes it impossible for them to criticise it – one obviously cannot neglect the cultural context if the work of analysis is to be purposeful and meaningful.

Another problem that arises in connection with analysis of Yoruba oral literature, especially for the purpose of teaching in high schools and universities, is that of the language. In which language should the analysis of Yoruba oral literature be made, English or Yoruba? There is hardly any doubt that it would be ideal to do all work of analysis in Yoruba. This immediately presents a number of problems the most important of which is the absence of

a generally accepted stock of technical vocabulary in Yoruba. What, for example, should be the Yoruba equivalent of such literary terms as repetition, word-play, style, personification, plot, etc.? If there is no equivalent in Yoruba, what should be the borrowed equivalent? These questions can hardly be solved until all scholars of Yoruba literature meet and exchange ideas in order to arrive at firm conclusions.

Meanwhile, in which language should lecturers in Yoruba in the three Universities where we have degree courses in Yoruba (Ibadan, Ife and Lagos) do their work? The approach to this problem differs radically in these three universities. At Ibadan, nearly all lectures and tutorials are held in English and all questions, with the exception of a compulsory one, are set and answered in English. In Lagos, all lectures and tutorials, questions and answers are given in Yoruba. In Lagos, the compromise on the question of technical vocabulary is to adopt English terms where there are no readily available Yoruba equivalents.

The answer to this problem, as has been said above, is obvious. Scholars of Yoruba Studies must put their heads together and look for proper equivalents to all the technical terms they are likely to use in the course of teaching and analyzing Yoruba literature, both oral and written. Where such equivalents cannot be found, the existing English terms should be borrowed into Yoruba, following definite and carefully-laid-down rules of borrowing arising from a thorough consideration of the structure of Yoruba language. In addition, such terms must be agreed to by the majority since it is only in this way that borrowed terms can become authentic and respected.

The need for a proper collection of oral literature has already been mentioned. One may add that this need is urgent because most of the traditional artists who are familiar with oral literature are old and nearing death. Since there is no continuity of tradition, with the death of every artist we lose a tremendous amount of useful material for ever. One must therefore hasten to collect as much as possible before the sources of our information become extinct.

The surest means of preserving oral literature is however, to have continuity in our tradition. This is why the use of Àlò and Ìtàn in schools, mentioned above, is an important development. Teachers should be encouraged in this endeavour and should add the chanting of Ìjálá and other aspects of oral literature to their entertainment programme. Scholars interested in oral literature should not limit themselves to collecting, transcribing, translating and analyzing. They should cultivate an active interest in the chanting of the material. Oral literature, an interesting and fertile aspect of our culture, cannot be preserved on tapes and tape-recorders, nor can it be preserved through analysis and translation. It can only be preserved by forging a link between the older and the younger generation. This link today is held by a tenuous string in great danger of snapping. We should see to it that it does not break and in addition we should endeavour to strengthen it through well-established continuity.

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*Editor's Note:* Research work noted as being in progress in No. 4, 5 & 6 above have now been completed.

## *Lexical Matching in Yoruba Poetry*

by

**Ayo Bamgboṣe**

One important feature of Yoruba poetry is the deliberate way in which lexical items are juxtaposed so as to force a comparison between them. For example, in

- (1) Ó ṣẹgun sí ọ̀tún  
Ó ṣẹgun sí ọ̀sì

(He conquered to the right  
He conquered to the left)

the lexical items ọ̀tún (the right) and ọ̀sì (the left) are brought together and contrasted with each other. Similarly in

- (2) L'ó bá *dolówó*  
L'ó bá *dọ̀lọ̀rọ̀*

(And he became a rich man  
And he became a wealthy man)

the lexical item *olówó* (a rich person) is matched with a synonymous one *ọ̀lọ̀rọ̀* (a wealthy or a rich person).

In an earlier article,<sup>1</sup> I described this feature as 'lexical contrast', because there is more than one lexical item, and there is a comparison between the items. This description emphasizes the similarity of examples (1) and (2) but it also obscures their semantic difference. In (1), the two items have different meanings. There is, therefore, a lexical as well as a semantic contrast. In (2), however, the two items have practically the same meaning. What is important here is not so much the fact that there are two differ-

ent lexical items as that the two have almost identical meanings. Rather than emphasize the lexical difference, one should emphasize the semantic similarity or difference. In view of this, I have now chosen for this feature a neutral term – ‘lexical matching’.<sup>2</sup>

The main characteristic of lexical matching is the bringing together of two or more lexical items in such a way as to exhibit a semantic contrast or correspondence. In the case of semantic contrast, many of the matched lexical items are antonyms e.g. àlọ (going) and àbọ (coming) in

- (3) Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ àlọ  
Kó rúbọ àbọ

(They asked him to make sacrifice about going  
on the outward journey  
And make sacrifice about coming  
on the return journey)

or ọ̀kúnrin (men) and obìnrin (women) in

- (4) Ó mú ọ̀kúnrin  
Ó sì mú obìnrin

(He captured men  
He also captured women)

Some of the antonyms have become accepted through long association, even though there is nothing about them that makes them obvious opposites e.g. ilé (house) and ọ̀ (road) in

- (5) Ó múlé pọ̀ntí  
Ó mọ̀nà rokà

(He filled the house with wine  
He filled the road with yam flour paste)

or oko (farm) and odò (river) in

- (6) Olóko ní roko . . .  
Olódò ní rodò

(The one for the farm is going to the farm  
The one for the river is going to the river).

Not all the items involving a semantic contrast are antonyms. There are several that are semantically unrelated. For example, *Sókótó* (a place name) and *ṣòkòtò* (trousers) in

- (7) Ohun tí à ñ wá lọ sí *Sókótó* tí a bá lá.pò *ṣòkòtò*  
(Something that we were going to look for in *Sokoto* and which we have found in the trouser pocket)

or *iyà* (suffering) and *iyá* (mother) in

- (8) Àpón yan *iyà*, ó ní òún yan *iyá*

(The bachelor chooses suffering and says he has chosen a mother)

Semantic correspondence in lexical matching varies from similar to identical or near identical meanings. Where the meanings are very close, there is no difficulty in establishing the correspondence. For example, in

- (9) *Wọ́n ñ dídè*  
*Wọ́n ñ kúnlẹ̀*  
*Wọ́n sì ñ nàró*

(They are standing  
They are kneeling  
And they are getting up)

three lexical items are matched, two of which exhibit semantic correspondence. The items *dídè* and *nàró* both have the meaning 'stand up'. Similarly, in

- (10) *Apá lará*  
*Ìgún pá nìyekan*

(The arm is [one's] relative  
The elbow is [one's] relation)

the items *ará* and *iyekan* both have the same meaning i.e. 'a relation'. There are, however, cases where the meanings are not identical. In

- (11) Ebi kò pa ìmàle, ó ní òun kí í jẹ àáyá  
Ebi pa Sùlè, ó jòbọ

(When) the Muslim is not hungry, he says he does not eat àáyá (a type of monkey)

(When) Sùlè was hungry, he ate a monkey)

the pattern is clear. Ìmàle is the generic term for Muslims, and Sùlè is a Muslim. Similarly, òbọ is the generic term for monkeys and àáyá is a type of monkey. Hence the pattern:

- |             |          |   |
|-------------|----------|---|
| a. Generic  | Specific | - |
| ↓           | ↑        |   |
| b. Specific | Generic  |   |

The question that arises here is whether this should be treated as a case of semantic correspondence or of contrast. Clearly, there is the generic/specific contrast already pointed out above, but perhaps more significant, when compared with the examples of semantic contrast already given, is the similarity in meaning of the lexical items being matched. It seems clear that if the notion 'semantic correspondence' is to be useful, then it must have some elasticity. It should embrace actual identity as well as similarity of meaning. Of course, the implication is that there may be different interpretations. The less similar in meaning, the more likely it is that there will be a disagreement as to whether there is semantic contrast or semantic correspondence. On the whole, the distinction between semantic contrast and semantic correspondence is not clear-cut; rather the two should be seen as the end points of the cline.<sup>3</sup> The further one moves away from identical meanings, the nearer one is moving towards semantic contrast and vice versa.

There are two subsidiary features associated with lexical matching. They are called subsidiary because they are not in any way characteristic or diagnostic, since they are not found in all examples of lexical matching. The two features are (1) occurrence in same semantic range, and (2) tonal contrast.

In all examples of semantic correspondence, as well as in those of semantic contrast involving antonyms, lexical matching generally involves a choice of items belonging to the same semantic range, i.e. items that can easily be grouped together under a common semantic label. In (1) the matched lexical items *òtún* 'the right' and *òsì* 'the left' both refer to direction; in (10), *apá* 'arm' and *ìgúnpá* 'elbow', are both parts of the body, and *ará* and *iyekan* are generally terms for members of an extended family. Such examples can be multiplied. In

- (12) *Kí o má. jòkùn*  
*Kí o má. jekòlò*

(Don't eat the millipede  
 Don't eat the earthworm)

the matched lexical items are *òkùn* (millipede) and *ekòlò* (earthworm), both small creatures living in the soil. In

- (13) *Òtò nìbòsẹ̀ òtò nìbòwọ̀*  
*Òtò lẹ́já gbòòrọ̀-gbòòrọ̀*

(There are stockings, besides, there are gloves.  
 There is also the long scarf)

the three items *ibòsẹ̀* (stockings), *ibòwọ̀* (gloves) and *lẹ́já* (scarf) are all articles of clothing. There are, however, cases of lexical matching where the items cannot be said to belong to the same semantic range. A good example is (7) containing *Sókótó* and *şòkòtò*, the one being the name of a town, and the other an article of dress. This is often the case with examples of lexical word play. In

- (14) *Eni t'ó gbọ́ Ifá kò mọ́ Ọfà*  
*Eni t'ó mọ́ Ọfà kò gbọ́ Ifá*  
*Bẹẹ̀ ni Ifá tà l'Ọfà*

(The one that knows Ifá does not know Ọfà  
 The one that knows Ọfà does not know Ifá,  
 Yet, Ifá is profitable in Ọfà)

which is a word play on Ifá (a divination cult) and Òfà (a place name). There is no semantic relation between the two lexical items being matched and so they cannot be said to belong to the same semantic range.

The second subsidiary feature associated with lexical matching is tonal contrast. This is already obvious in the examples given earlier in which all except (12) exhibit a tonal contrast. This in itself is strong evidence of the importance of tonal contrast in lexical matching. If any further evidence is required, one can point to the deliberate choice of synonyms with contrasting tones in the case of lexical matching involving semantic correspondence. For example, in (2), *ólórò* is chosen to match *olówó*, in (9) *nàró* is chosen to match *dìdè*; and in (10), *ìyekan* to match *ará*. All these examples show tonal contrast. In spite of the high incidence of tonal contrast in lexical matching, it must not be thought that all lexical matching involves tonal contrast. Example (4), where *òkùnrin* 'men' and *obìnrin* 'women' are matched, does not involve any tonal contrast, and is by no means an isolated case. In

- (15) *Òtò nífẹ̀ taya*  
*Òtò ní tókò*  
*Òtò ní tí baba*

(The love of the wife is different  
 That of the husband is different  
 That of the father is [also] different)

there are three matched lexical items, all with the same tones. In

- (16) *Ojú ẹ̀ni l'òjò kù kù kù tí kò rọ̀*  
*Ojú ẹ̀ni l'òjò rọ̀ rọ̀ rọ̀ tí kò kù*

(It was in our presence that it threatened to rain  
 but rain did not fall  
 It was in our presence that rain fell but it did  
 not threaten to rain)

the lexical items matched are *kù* (threaten [of rain]) and *rọ̀* (fall [of rain]), and they both have a low tone.

Lexical matching is basic to a number of important stylistic features in Yoruba poetry, and to this extent it may be said to have implications for the structure of Yoruba poetry. Such features include: lexico-structural repetition, tonal counterpoint, word play and parallelism.<sup>4</sup>

Lexico-structural repetition is of two types: full and partial. Full lexico-structural repetition involves a repetition of the structure as well as of the lexical items: partial lexico-structural repetition involves a repetition of the structure with a variation of one or more lexical items. It is this second type of repetition that involves lexical matching. In

- (17) Mo jí, mo bá *erin* ní nù *igbó* . . .  
 Mo jí, mo bá *ẹfọ̀n lẹ̀.dàn*

(I woke up and found the elephant in the forest  
 I woke up and found the bushcow in the glade)

two pairs of lexical items are matched; *erin* (elephant) and *ẹfọ̀n* (bushcow), *igbó* (forest) and *ọ̀dàn* (glade); and it is these items that constitute the lexical variation in the lexico-structural repetition. In

- (18) Ojúmọ t'ó mọ mi ló.ní o  
 Ojúmọ *owó* ní ó jẹ . . .  
 Ojúmọ t'ó mọ mi ló.ní o  
 Ojúmọ *ọmọ* ní ó jẹ . . .  
 Ojúmọ t'ó mọ mi ló.ní o  
 Ojúmọ *aya* ní ó jẹ

(The day that dawns today  
 Let it be a day for money  
 The day that dawns today  
 Let it be a day for children  
 The day that dawns today  
 Let it be a day for wives)

there is full lexico-structural repetition in the first line of each of the three pairs of lines, and partial lexico-structural repetition in the second line of each pair. The matched lexical items are *owó* (money), *ọmọ* (children) and *aya* (wives). These items constitute the lexical varia-

tion in the pattern. Similar examples of lexical matching in a lexico-structural repetition can be found in (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (9), etc. All these examples show that lexical matching is a basic element in partial lexico-structural repetition.

The second feature in which lexical matching is a basic element is tonal counterpoint – the deliberate selection of contrasting tones in identical places in a set structural pattern where two or more lexical items are matched or a single lexical item is played upon.<sup>5</sup> Most of the examples of lexical matching already given also illustrate the feature of tonal counterpoint (see for example, (1), (2), (3), (5), (6), (9), etc.). In spite of the close connection between lexical matching and tonal counterpoint, the latter cannot be considered a characteristic feature of the former for two reasons: firstly, as already shown above, not all examples of lexical matching involve tonal contrast, and secondly, lexical matching need not involve identical places in a set structural pattern. In

(19) *ìṣẹ́ l'òdùṅ ìṣẹ́*

(Work is the medicine for poverty)

the lexical items matched are *ìṣẹ́* 'work' and *ìṣẹ́* 'poverty'. They do not occur in identical places in the structure, and there is no repetition of a set structural pattern within which the lexical items are matched. Similarly, in

(20) *Òjò ní rọ̀ sí kòtò, gegele ní rojú*

(The rain is falling into the 'pit' [and] the hillock is frowning)

although the lexical items matched *kòtò* (pit) and *gegele* (hillock) occur in similar structures, they occupy different places within these structures. The condition of identical places within a set structural pattern, which is a requirement for tonal counterpoint is therefore not satisfied. It is clear from these examples that lexical matching does not necessarily involve tonal counterpoint. On the other hand, whenever it is a feature of two or more lexical items, tonal counterpoint always involves lexical matching.

The third feature in which lexical matching plays an important rôle is word play. And the type of word play which always involves lexical matching is lexical word play, i.e. play on two lexical items which differ in tone, or in both vowel and tone.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is true to say that lexical word play is just a special form of lexical matching. The only difference between the two is that lexical word play is restricted to tonal contrast or a contrast of tone and only one vowel, whereas lexical matching need not involve tonal contrast and the items matched may show a consonant contrast as well as a contrast of more than one vowel. Thus, (1), (3), and (6) are examples of lexical matching without word play, but (7), (8) and (14) are examples of both lexical matching and word play.

Parallelism is the fourth feature in which lexical matching is a basic element. It involves a juxtaposition of sentences with a similar structure, a matching of at least two lexical items in each structure, a comparison between the juxtaposed sentences, and a central idea expressed through complementary statements in the sentences.<sup>7</sup> In

- (21) *Èhìnkùlé l'òtá wà*  
*Ilé l'aşeni ñ gbé*

(The backyard is where the enemy is  
 The house is where the traitor lives)

two sentences of the same structure are juxtaposed in the couplet. In the first line, there are three lexical items èhìnkùlé (backyard), òtá (enemy), wà (is) which are matched with ilé (house), aşeni (traitor) and ñ gbé (lives) respectively. There is a comparison between the two sentences: one's enemy is likely to be found in one's backyard; in the same way, the traitor is likely to be someone living in one's house. The central idea expressed is that one is more likely to be betrayed by a close friend or relation than by someone distant.

There is a difference between the way lexical matching operates in parallel sentences and the way it does in the other features already discussed. Whereas in lexicostuctural repetition, tonal counterpoint, and word play,

lexical matching need not involve more than one pair of lexical items, in parallel sentences, there must be a matching of at least two pairs of lexical items. Compare (10), (21) which are both parallel sentences with (4) lexicostuctural repetition, (19) tonal counterpoint and (7) word play. The pattern of lexical matching in parallel sentences involves an equation in which one finds a correlation between the lexical items in each line. This correlation merely indicates co-occurrence and does not in any way imply a matching of the lexical items. For example,

- (10) *Apá lará*  
*Ìgúnpá nìyekan*

(The arm is [one's] relative  
The elbow is [one's] relation)

may be symbolized as:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & a & : & b \\ & :: & x & : & y \end{array}$$

(i.e. *apá* is to *ará* as *ìgúnpá* is to *ìyekan*).

Similarly (21) may be symbolized as:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} & a & : & b & : & c \\ & :: & x & : & y & : & z \end{array}$$

The correlation of the lexical items is best shown in cases of parallelism where the pairs of lexical items matched are completely interdependent. For example, in

- (22) *Şòkòtò níf jogún ìdí*  
*Ọmọ níf jogun baba*

(It is the trousers that inherit the waist  
It is the child that inherits the father)

it is meaningless to talk of a lexical matching of *şòkòtò* (trousers) and *ọmọ* (child) independently of the matching of *ìdí* (waist) and *baba* (father). The two pairs must be taken together in the pattern:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & a & : & b \\ & :: & x & : & y^B \end{array}$$

Apart from its use in word play, emphasis seems to be the main function of lexical matching. Where the items being matched are similar in meaning, the emphasis is achieved through semantic repetition. In

- (23) *Inú bíbí ẹrú níí perú*  
*Ẹdò fùfù iwòfà níí pa iwòfà*

(The anger of a slave is what kills a slave  
 The temper of a serf is what kills a serf)

the same general idea is repeated in each line: what causes the undoing of a slave is his temper. The items selected are synonyms or near synonyms: *inú bíbí* (anger) and *ẹdò fùfù* (temper); *ẹrú* (slave) and *iwòfà* (a serf). Similar emphasis could have been achieved by repeating the first line, but the variation in the second line makes the emphasis more effective, and the couplet more poetic, owing to the use of lexical matching and tonal counterpoint. The choice of a different lexical item also helps to avoid the monotony of repetition. For example, if

- (2) *L'ó bá dolówó*  
*L'ó bá dọlọrọ*

(And he became a rich man  
 And he became a wealthy man)

is changed to

- (24) *L'ó bá dolówó*  
*L'ó bá dolówó*

(And he became a rich man  
 And he became a rich man)

although the original meaning is preserved, the repetition of the same lexical item will definitely make (24) monotonous. Where the items matched are different in meaning, the emphasis is achieved through semantic contrast. In

- (25) *Ó ẹ́gun síwájú*  
*Ó ẹ́gun ẹ̀.yìn*

(He conquered to the front  
 He conquered to the rear)

what expresses forcefully the extent of the conquest is the semantic contrast between iwájú (front) and ẹ̀yìn (back).

This paper shows that lexical matching is relevant to a wide area of Yoruba poetic structure. A single instance of it may involve several stylistic features. For example,

- (26) *ìṣẹ́ ò ṣohun à mú ṣeré*  
*iyà ò ṣohun à mú ṣàwàdà<sup>9</sup>*

(Poverty is not something to play with  
 Suffering is not something to joke about)

involves a lexical matching of *ìṣẹ́* (poverty) and *iyà* (suffering) and *ṣeré* (play) and *ṣàwàdà* (jest). Both pairs are examples of semantic correspondence, with the lexical items drawn from the same semantic range. Tonal counterpoint is shown in the selection of contrasting tones in each pair, and there is lexico-structural repetition and parallelism in the couplet. Therefore, lexical matching deserves serious attention in the study of Yoruba poetry.

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- (24) A variation of (2).
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- (26) Wande Abimbola, op. cit., *Apá Kìíní*, p.79.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. 'The Form of Yoruba Proverbs', *Odù: University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, IV, 2 (1968), 74-86.
- <sup>2</sup>. See Ayọ̀ Bamgboṣe, 'Word Play in Yoruba Poetry', *International Journal of American Linguistics* XXXVI, 2 (April 1970), 112.
- <sup>3</sup>. A cline may be defined as 'a continuum carrying potentially infinite gradation'. See M. A. K. Halliday, 'Categories of the Theory of Grammar', *Word* XVII, 3 (1961), 249.
- <sup>4</sup>. Since these stylistic features are typical of all types of Yoruba poetry, both traditional and new, it follows that lexical matching is productive in, and basic to, Yoruba poetic composition.
- <sup>5</sup>. This feature was first described by O. Olatunji who defined it as 'tonal contrast on lexical items in identical places in a structural scheme'. See O. Olatunji, 'Tonal Counterpoint in Yoruba Poetry', paper given at the 8th West African Languages Congress, Abidjan, March 1969.
- <sup>6</sup>. See A. Bamgboṣe, 'The Form of Yoruba Proverbs', *Odù: University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, IV, 2 (1968), 83-84. A more detailed account is to be found in his article 'Word Play in Yoruba Poetry', *International Journal of American Linguistics* XXXVI, 2 (April 1970), 111-112.
- <sup>7</sup>. The first account of parallelism in Yoruba poetry is to be found in O. E. Vidal: 'Introductory Remarks on the Yoruba Language' in S. Crowther, *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London: Seeley's, 1852). pp.1-38.
- <sup>8</sup>. The fact that it makes sense to match each of the lexical items in (10) independently of the others does not invalidate the use of this equation for that example. The crucial point is that in all parallel sentences, at least two lexical items must be matched, and this is true of (10) as well as (22).
- <sup>9</sup>. The word division in this example is left as found in the text. In fact, the last three words in each line should have been written (joined or hyphenated) as a nominalization.

# *Tradition and the Yoruba Writers* *D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola* *and Wole Soyinka*

by

**Abiola Irele**

The title of this paper is a deliberate echo of one of the most celebrated of T. S. Eliot's essays, namely, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. In that essay, Eliot defined the relationship of the European writers to the entire literary tradition of European civilization, and sought to clarify the manner in which the work of the significant new talent coheres, as it were, with that tradition and creates a new pattern of meanings within its total framework. Eliot's idea offers, I believe, an extremely profitable perspective for a comprehensive view of European literature not merely with respect to its historical development, but also, and perhaps primarily, with respect to its essential spirit. But what strikes one as significant about this essay is the original understanding which it offers of the meaning of 'tradition' – as not so much as abiding, permanent, immutable stock of beliefs and symbols, but as the constant refinement and extension of these in a way which relates them to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and originally new.

I have taken Eliot's idea as my point of departure here, because of what I believe to be its immediate relevance to a consideration of the literary situation in Africa in our times. It is my personal belief that what gives a special character to literary creation in Africa today is the movement to establish and to maintain the sense of tradition as conceived by Eliot. The essential direction of modern African writing, of the work of the truly significant writ-

ers, is towards the definition, in and through literature, of a distinctive mode of thought and feeling, towards an imaginative apprehension of an African spirit. And the main motive power in this movement resides in the endeavour of the African writers to work out a new spiritual coherence out of the historical disconnection between their African heritage and their modern experience. In no other area of Africa is the current along which runs this elaboration in literature of a continuous stream of the collective consciousness from the traditional to the modern so clearly evident or so well marked out as in Yorubaland. For while it is true to say that in other parts of Africa the writer has been aware of the compelling reality and importance of the essential substructure of traditional patterns of life for his experience and for his artistic expression, and has sought either a thematic or formal integration of his work with the specific mode of literary expression which has been associated with these traditional patterns of life, it is only by using the example of Yoruba writers that, to my knowledge, the various levels of the transition from the traditional to the modern can be illustrated. In Yorubaland, we have the extraordinary situation where the vast folk literature is not only alive but vigorously contemporary, providing constant support for new forms – for the literate culture developing within the language itself as a result of its reduction to writing, as well as for the new popular arts that sociological factors have brought into being, particularly the so-called 'folk opera'. Furthermore, this folk literature provides a source for the new literature in English, the language through which the modern technological world made its entry into the awareness of Yoruba people and constituted itself part of their mental universe.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the evolution of Yoruba culture over the past century or so has been the way in which it has been able to afford a stable insitutional and spiritual groundwork for the transformation of collective life and feeling for the individual within this culture, at the critical moment when Western civilization introduced an element of tension into African societies.

Yoruba culture has played an integrative rôle in the process of acculturation to which all African societies have been submitted, in such a way that this process can be seen today largely as one of adaptation, the adjustment of the native culture with the foreign, the harmonization of two ways of life into a new entity. This is not the place to enter into a sociological discussion of acculturation among the Yorubas, and I only refer here to the work of P. C. Lloyd in particular, whose outlook on this question was singularly influenced by his work in Western Nigeria, and who was thus led, in what appears to be his summing up, or *Africa in Social Change*, to place emphasis in his analysis of social change in Africa 'on the adaptation of indigenous institutions' (p.160).

The point I would like to make, however, is that what I have called the integrative rôle of Yoruba culture in the situation of culture contact created by the advent of Western culture is fully reflected in the work of the Yoruba writer, not only at the level of content analysis of individual works, which reveals the intimate working out of the process, but more significantly in the pattern of evolution established by the inter-connections between the various levels of literary expression in Yorubaland that I outlined earlier. It is in this perspective that I would now like to discuss the theme I have chosen, by addressing myself to the work of three outstanding Yoruba writers, D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, and Wole Soyinka. If I have chosen these three, it is because of the intimate relationship that exists between them, not only owing to their derivation from a common backcloth (to quote Soyinka himself) but also because of the active influences at work between one writer and another all along a line of development which can be seen running through their writings.

The death of D. O. Fagunwa on the very day on which his article of vernacular literature appeared in one of the Nigerian dailies (December, 1963) is surely one of the most tragic coincidences in literary history. By an obscure irony of fate this writer, whose work was steeped in the

mystical world of Yoruba folklore, seemed to have felt a premonition of his death, and to have wished to leave behind a final testament of the faith in the vocation which animated his literary career.

But not only his end, his whole career now appears ironical. While his works enjoyed immense popularity among the Yoruba public, (all his novels have been reprinted no less than 10 times, and certainly not only because they are used in schools) until very recently he does not seem to have attracted the kind of serious attention that lesser writers working in English have had bestowed on them. Even now, he is granted slow and grudging recognition. He arouses interest as a vague forerunner of Tutuola. Recently, in this connection, J. Jahn, in his *History of Neo-African literature*, relying no doubt on the testimony of Ulli Beier, is able to affirm confidently: 'Tutuola's source, everyone agrees, is the oral Yoruba tradition, and he is closer to it than the author Fagunwa, who wrote in the Yoruba language and influenced him' (p.23). In the article by Bier, which obviously influenced Jahn, after an analysis of a passage of Fagunwa, we find this surprising comment: 'It is in passages like this that Fagunwa is closest to Tutuola. *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* abound with descriptions like this, and they may well have been influenced by Fagunwa', (*Introduction to African literature*, p.191). The whole tone of that comment, as of the article itself, suggests that Beir, who should have known better, was concerned primarily with pointing out the achievement of Fagunwa, while taking care to safeguard the foreign reputation of Amos Tutuola. The utter futility of this procedure will, I hope, become apparent as this discussion proceeds. But the ultimate injustice to the memory of Fagunwa and to the nature of his achievement comes from his own publishers, who seem to have appreciated him as a source of profitable business rather than as a writer in his own right. In the translation of Fagunwa's novel, *Ogboju Ode*, prepared by Wole Soyinka and which Nelson insisted on publishing, the title page and blurb are designed to relegate Fagunwa into the backdrop as much as possible, and to bring the

translator into focus; obviously, Nelson is more interested in having Soyinka on its list (with the prospect of good sales that his name entails) than in giving the wider world a taste of Fagunwa's creative genius. The cynical attitude of Fagunwa's original publishers with regard to his work reaches its height in an advertisement of Soyinka's translation I have seen, in which they have gone as far as to delete Fagunwa's name altogether.

I have dwelt on Fagunwa's ill fate at the hands of critics and of his own publishers not simply to give vent to my personal indignation, but rather, to make a point which needs strong reiteration: that his work stands at the head of creative writing in Yoruba language and exerts the most pervasive influence on every category of Yoruba literature. In addition, I would like to highlight the extreme importance of a proper and serious consideration of his work in the development of a new tradition of Yoruba literary expression.

The achievement of Fagunwa has been, by all accounts, a remarkable one. He responded early to the need, felt by many, for a literature in the vernacular, at a moment when a new cultural consciousness was beginning to emerge out of changing social conditions. His work appeared at the appropriate phase in the development of the language itself, from a purely oral to a written one. With about a hundred years of work already expended upon the task of devising a graphic form for the language, which had given it, as it were, a more stable character, Fagunwa appeared to consolidate the work done in the past by furnishing Yoruba with a literature in the secondary (literal) sense of the word – he translated the oral tradition into a written form, into a literate culture. Since he was the first to make a new and significant literature of the language, to give the oral tradition an *extended* literary form, he can be called a pioneer.

The first concern of the critic is to determine as adequately as possible the value of the work which he examines in terms of the coherence of the work as a whole; and in terms of literature, the levels of meaning revealed by the writer's use of language. At the same time, there can be

no universal measure of artistic value, for the canons of judgement must correspond to the culture and to the tradition within which the individual artist operates and which provides him with the immediate material out of which he creates. In an original situation such as that of Fagunwa, it is especially important to consider the exact nature of the relationship between the work of the writer and the culture in which it occurs. In the light of these considerations, the term 'pioneer' is inadequate to describe Fagunwa, a writer who was nothing less than a complete artist, indeed a master. For in his work he gave new life and effect to the oral tradition which he inherited from his culture, creating out of the communal material it offered him a distinct personal expression.

Thus it would be a grave error to dismiss his work as consisting of simple fantasies or naive childish ideas. On the contrary, there is a maturity of expression and vision in his work which is as adult as the most modern novel, and a high seriousness of purpose which fully engages the imagination and the intelligence. The primary achievement of Fagunwa was the way in which he was able to fill out the restricted outline of the folk tale and to give it the dimension of a developed narrative from retaining its essence and its allegorical and symbolic quality while giving it a modern relevance. This new and original medium one can only call, for want of a better term, the 'mythical novel'.

The novels of Fagunwa are constructed in relation not only to a traditional form of literary expression, but also to a definite cosmology. His narrative technique flows directly out of the oral tradition; at the same time, it is evident that he strove, even noticeably, to go beyond the limitations of the tradition in the context of an extended literary medium. What Fagunwa has sought in each of his novels is to create a unified sequence rather than a juxtaposition of motifs from the Yoruba narrative tradition. Indeed, in the series of adventures that make up the narrative scheme of each novel, it is not so much a question of the author putting together separate, recognisable motifs into a sequence as it is of his drawing upon the raw mater-

ials existing in the tradition to create a single extended narrative. There is a genuine attempt at a more elaborate construction of situation, and a certain measure of endeavours in achieving character more fully than in the folk tales. Both his human and supernatural characters are endowed with life and clearly individualized in such a way that their actions, though proceeding from moral or spiritual attributes that are given at the outset rather than developed, assume that measure of interest necessary to engage the reader. Thus, in *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the formidable spirit, Èṣù-kékeré-òde, with which the hunter Olówó-Ayé has to wrestle, is so vividly realized that the outcome of the contest matters a great deal to the reader. Moreover, an attempt to give central unity to the conception of character is apparent in the link between Àkàrà Oògùn and Olówó Ayé, (the central figures respectively in the first two novels, *Ògbójú Qdẹ* and *Igbó Olódùmaré*.) who are both hunters of the same family. Above all, in making the transition from oral tradition to written literature, Fagunwa brought into play his considerable descriptive power and gave the necessary imaginative scope to the situations he created, thus sustaining his narrative. The opening pages of *Igbó Olódùmarè* represent a remarkable example of this aspect of his art.

This last observation points at once to the most striking feature in Fagunwa's art – his way with language. He possessed the Yoruba language to a high degree and employed it with consummate mastery. The tone of his language, as has already been observed, is that of oral narrative. This not only gives to his writing an immediate freshness but, reinforced by the use of imagery, contributes to what Wòle Soyinka has called Fagunwa's 'vivid sense of event'. The various shades of living speech give full value to the style of the author who draws the most unexpected effects from the structure of the language itself. Repetition, balance of tonal forms, word building and sustained phrasing in whole passages build up in his works a distinctive idiom in which Fagunwa's personal feeling for language and the rhetoric of Yoruba oral literature have become intimately fused. Thus what is signific-

ant about his personal use of language is his resourceful exploitation of the communal medium and his enduring fidelity to its nature, his individual illustration of its peculiar blend of exuberance and gravity.

It should be clear by now that an examination of Fagunwa's narrative technique and use of language provide a lead into the profound meaning of his work as a whole. His language expresses in particular the extraordinary sense of humour with which he infuses his subject matter. The atmosphere in each novel, despite its 'ghostly' character, is constantly lightened by touches of warm, familiar humour. The most grisly character is ridiculed from the outset with a laughable name, the most harrowing situation relieved by some comic interlude. This lightness of touch confers a certain emotional ease not only to the individual situations but to the whole narrative strain, so that one moves freely in the world of Fagunwa's novels. His creation of this world through language is not only pleasant upon the ear, but also agreeable to the mind.

This quality of Fagunwa's work is not without significance, for the humour and the lightness of his imaginative discourse are an inherent part of their moral purpose. It is not simply in the didactic strain of these novels – which in itself is of value to the Yoruba – that this significance must be sought, but rather in the total world view which the novels reveal. Fagunwa's work reflects a vision of man and his place in the universe. This, admittedly, is not a deliberately worked out and consciously articulated structuring in his novels, but something inherent in their symbolic scheme and resonance, which derives from the culture that provides the foundation for his individual imaginative world. The most obvious characteristic of Fagunwa's world is its fusion into a comprehensive theatre of human drama of the natural and supernatural realms. His characters exist and move within an imaginative frame-work whose frontiers are wider and more extensive than those of the conventional, realistic novel, a universe in which the 'normal' barriers between the physical and the spiritual world have been dissolved. He has created the universe of his novels directly out of the Afri-

can, and specifically Yoruba conception which sees the supernatural not merely as a prolongation of the natural world, but as co-existing actively with it. Within this cosmology, the rôle of the traditional artist is to transpose the real world into his work in such a way as to reveal its essential connection with the unseen, giving to the everyday and the finite the quality of the obscure and of the infinite.

The special position of Fagunwa in this respect is that, while his work relates to this tradition, his art goes beyond it by giving a freshness to the old materials through which it was handed down. His knowledge of Yoruba life and customs, combined with the particular effects of his descriptive and narrative power, gives vividness to the settings of his novels and lends a strange and compelling quality of truth to his evocations. The world of spirits, the realm of fantasy is made familiar and alive, because in these novels, it proceeds from an individual understanding of human life and of the varied moral situations in which it takes place. It is this element in Fagunwa's art, the continuous extension of human fate and responsibility beyond the confines of the immediate social world into the spiritual, which gives to his work its total significance.

This significance is inherent in the symbolic framework and connotations of his writing. A simple but valid interpretation of the pattern of situations in his novels suggests that his forest stands for the universe, inhabited by obscure forces with which man stands in a dynamic moral and spiritual relationship and with which his destiny is involved in short, a mythical representation of the existential condition of man as expressed in Yoruba thinking. The tremendous adventure of existing in which man is engaged is dramatized by the adventures of Fagunwa's hunters, who face trials and dangers in which they must justify and affirm their human essence. The very choice of the hunter as the central figure in this scheme is of great importance, for the hunter represents the ideal of manhood in traditional Yoruba society – the unique combination of physical and spiritual energy that is the privilege of man within the universal order.

There is, then, a humanist vision of a special kind in the symbolic foundation of Fagunwa's novels. They express a sharp awareness of the necessity, due to man's precarious existence, for an active confrontation with the world, as well as a triumphant affirmation of man's central place in the entire scheme of creation. It is to this attitude that Olówó Ayé gives expression in a passage from *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

ẹbọra tí ó bá fi ojù dí mí, yoo máa tí ọrun dé ọrun ní,  
emi ọkunrin ní mo wí ẹ̀ẹ̀, oni ní n ó sọ fún ẹ̀yin ẹbọra  
Igbó Olódùmarè wí pé, nigba tí Ẹ̀lédàá dá ohun  
gbogbo tí ń ẹ̀ ninu ayé tán, ó fi eniyan ẹ̀ olórí  
gbogbo wọ̀n. (p.16).

It needs to be emphasized that here we are not dealing with an influence from an outside source – that Fagunwa's humanism is not Western or Christian – but that this element proceeds directly from the very structure of the imaginative tradition to which his work is tied. Contrary to the theories peddled by the anthropologists, depicting the traditional African as so saddled with the weight of his existence as to be crushed by it and therefore inclined to a passive attitude to the universe, the cosmologies of the different African cultures reveal an intelligence of the world centred upon the privileged position of man, an imaginative and symbolic organization of the world not simply in human terms, but in a comprehensive relation to man.

For the Yoruba, the balance of human life, the very sense of human existence, consists in the dynamic correlation between individual responsibility and pressure of external events and forces. The understanding that human fate is as much a matter of chance as of conscious moral choice determines the social function of folk tales – their illustration of the moral and spiritual attributes needed by an individual to endow his existence with human meaning. In the folk tale, the imagination is led unwaveringly towards a vision of the world that privileges the rôle of human will and responsibility, and by the same token reduces the force of the arbitrary and the hazardous. It is this element of the folk tradition that is so vividly drawn

out by Fagunwa in his novels. The trials and terrors, the forces that his heroes confront in their adventures offset the fragility of man, who compensates for it with the strength of his moral and spiritual resources.

When the testamental import of these novels is grasped, the relevance of Fagunwa's fantastic world becomes clear. Our very notion of fantasy as opposed to reality undergoes a drastic revision, which enables us to understand more adequately the nature of Fagunwa's art, and to enter more fully into his world. We cannot then expect of him a narrow realism, either in his theme or in his construction of character. His imagination is operating at a more profound and more fundamental level than that of the realistic novel. It is on this account that I would reject as too narrow the criticism made by my friend and colleague, Ayo Bamgboṣe,<sup>1</sup> that Fagunwa does not develop the psychology of his characters. Psychology in relation to character belongs to the 19th-century European novel, and is even now being abandoned by the modern writer, in favour of a probing into the deeper layers of human consciousness. The spirits and figures that inhabit Fagunwa's forest and cross paths with his strong willed hunters (Ògbójú Ọḍẹ), are projections of the terrors and obsessions that have the imagination and consciousness of man since the beginning of time, and which remain the active impersonations of the collective dream of mankind. To this dream Fagunwa gives a localization within Yoruba culture; moreover, he invests it with a direct immediacy.

Fagunwa's work belongs then to the great tradition of allegorical and symbolic literature, set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references. His achievement resides in his creation of a form in which the Yoruba imaginative tradition can be given a translation into modern terms, and in the process acquire new vitality. It is this achievement that lies directly behind the work of Amos Tutuḷa, who exploited the medium of expression forged by Fagunwa, and writing in English, won international acclaim.

There is a considerable amount of misunderstanding at the base of Tutuḷa's reputation overseas. He was thought

to have created a new form of expression, a new kind of novel and his limitations with language were extolled. I suspect myself that on this point an element of prejudice was at work. One of the reviewers for example greeted Tutuola's English as a welcome change from the pretentious rhetoric of his Westernized compatriots. Tutuola was admired for his 'quaintness', for the ingenuousness of his style and his subject matter.

Now quaintness, as such, is not and cannot be of value. To be even more explicit, we can assert that on the specific point of language, Tutuola's limitations really are limitations, and constitute an unmistakable barrier both for him as an artist, and for his public. Tutuola obviously does not dominate his medium and there is no use pretending that this is an advantage. The truth is that it is possible to appreciate Tutuola's genuine merit, *in spite of* his imperfect handling of the English language, not because of it.

Another misapprehension concerns the unenthusiastic reception given to him in his own country. This lack of response has surprised and worried his foreign admirers. A little reflection however, will show that it could not have been otherwise among a public long familiar with Fagunwa - in other words, with the original thing, presented in the glory of Fagunwa's handling of Yoruba. Tutuola could not, in these circumstances, make the same kind of impact on his Yoruba readers as on his Western public. Moreover, the English he used in the handling of his material divorced it from its original setting, and the very peculiarities of his language were not of a kind to convince anyone here that he had original genius. It must be said in this connection that the shift from Fagunwa's Yoruba to Tutuola's English is greatly disappointing to a Yoruba speaker especially at first. For my part, I have no doubt in my mind that of the two, Tutuola is the lesser artist. What is more, it should be clear by now that much of the praise and acclaim that have been lavished upon Tutuola belong more properly to Fagunwa, who provided not only the original inspiration but indeed a good measure of the material for Tutuola's novels.

Having said this, I would like to add that all the same, it

is fortunate that Tutuola was published. Clearly, it would have been better for him to use Yoruba, which he must surely wield better than English. In all events, it is important to remember that a writer's use of a medium created by an earlier writer is of course very normal in literary history. When it comes to Tutuola, this development is all the more natural, and in the long run acceptable, because he has considerable merit as an individual artist, indeed a quality all his own. What makes his work valuable is the individual touch he has imparted to the form he took over from Fagunwa, thus making a genuine contribution to the common tradition.

Tutuola has been discussed enough by competent critics and there is no need for me to re-examine his work. Gerald Moore's analysis of his novels stands out in this respect, and I agree with many of his observations as can be seen from my own approach to Fagunwa's symbolic novels. If the connection with Fagunwa had been discovered earlier, and subsequently, more overtly acknowledged, much would have been gained by it. So numerous are the echoes of Fagunwa in Tutuola's work – and in some passages, these echoes have the sound of straightforward transcriptions, not to say plagiarism – that this omission in Beier's essay appears to me regrettable. A more rigorous examination, insisting upon this connection, would have brought out the special vigour of Tutuola's vision, its considerable sharpness, belonging with the mythical framework in which, after Fagunwa, he too operates.

As G. Moore has perceived, Tutuola's visionary powers set him apart from other writers. The Orphic significance which Moore has drawn from his writing is indeed important, but only as the dominant element in the individual apprehension of Tutuola the artist and not, as is the case with Fagunwa, in the individual expression of a collective myth. The difference I am trying to establish between the two may perhaps appear a specious one, and I find it difficult to articulate it in a more precise way. But I believe it to be real, and I can only point to the imagery of Tutuola's novels in order to illustrate what I feel. The

most cursory study of Tutuola's work shows the constant recurrence of images built upon the play of light through the entire range of the colour spectrum. His visual imagery communicates a sense of brilliant intensity which finds its only parallel in modern African literature in the poetry of L. S. Senghor.

Tutuola's imagery suggests the nature of his experience. His vision is that of a dreamer, exactly in the sense in which Eliot described Dante as a dreamer – of the artist seeing visions, in the primary sense of the word, a *seer*.

So that, although Tutuola's experience is very personal, and his vision extremely particularized, the elements that furnish the substance of his writing grow recognizable out of his culture. There is the channelling of the elements through the form created by Fagunwa, but done in a very individual way, and it is this that not only redeems Tutuola – and commends him to the serious attention of Yoruba scholars – but establishes his work as an important stage in the development of a new literary tradition within Yoruba culture. Fagunwa has had imitators and followers writing in Yoruba, but none of them manifests the genius of Amos Tutuola. It was not imperative therefore that Fagunwa's work should continue in Yoruba, but rather than the direction of his work be maintained. That direction has found a singular culmination today in the work of Wole Soyinka.

It is not by accident that the only full length translation into English of Fagunwa novel was done by Wole Soyinka, and his preface to the English version of the first novel, *Ógbójú Odẹ ninu Igbó Irúnmalẹ* (translated as *The Forest of a Thousand Deamons*, and published in 1968 by Nelson), also testify to his admiration for the work of his great predecessor in the tradition. The two qualities that Soyinka singles out for special praise in Fagunwa's writing are his sense of drama – 'his vivid sense of event', as he puts it – and his use of language; qualities that one recognizes as belonging also to Soyinka's works, in which the dramatic effect is carried through a sensitive exploration of language – in this case English – in its various shades. Moreover, the special trait that Soyinka shares with

Fagunwa on this question of the artist's response to his means of expression in the same blend of humour and seriousness, characteristic of Yoruba itself, the working out of the deep artistic meaning of the work by taking language through a wide range of expression.

We also know that Soyinka feels considerable admiration for the work of Tutuola. The relationship between the two writers who employ English to the older writer, who employs Yoruba, seems therefore to devolve upon Tutuola himself as a kind of link between Fagunwa and Soyinka, who can be considered the spiritual heir of Fagunwa, and spiritual brother of Tutuola. This is not to say, however, that Soyinka's work echoes in any recognizable way the work of the other two writers, with the exception perhaps of *A Dance of the Forests*, where the symbolic setting of the dramatic action is the same as in Fagunwa's novels, and where the figure of the 'Half-child' may have been taken from Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard*. Although these elements also belong directly in the Yoruba imaginative tradition. The important point to note then, is the deep grounding of Soyinka's work in this tradition, hence his intimate link with Fagunwa and Tutuola. Soyinka stands apart from the two in the extreme individuality of his art, which proceeds from a developed awareness of the multiple meanings that this art achieves. In his symbols, we see the intuitive participation of the artist which the intellectual direction given to them results in an integrated and conscious artistic statement.

This method of employing directly the materials of traditional cosmology to engage in a clearly articulate discourse, or to make an individual point, is best illustrated in his play, *A Dance of the Forests*. This was his first 'serious' play. In it, Soyinka effected a notable transition from a superficial satirical approach to social problems, towards a deeper concern with the great moral and spiritual issues. His elaborate use of Yoruba mythology in this play can be explained partly by the need he began to feel from this period onwards to give resonance to his handling of the larger problems of existence, and partly also by his evolution as an artist towards some kind of comprehensive

framework of thought that would provide a foundation for his own spiritual needs and imaginative vision.

Although *A Dance of the Forests* is not a satisfactory play, it remains a very significant work in the development of Soyinka's art, for the experience he initiates in this play evolves thereafter into a refinement both of expression and coherence. The personal elaboration of elements drawn from tradition into a new pattern of meanings attests to a desire on the writer's part to give originality to his work as well as a more important artistic preoccupation; it registers Soyinka's quest for fundamental human and spiritual values as they are expressed in the traditional world-view. So that we find an immediate connection between the use of traditional material in his expression, and the development of his individual artistic experience. In this last respect, from the evidence of *Idanre*, it appears indeed that Soyinka's exploration of tradition has led him to evolve a personal relationship with the tradition, a kind of poetic mysticism derived from Yoruba cosmology.

This development begins to unfold in an explicit way in *A Dance of the Forests*. If in this play he does not appear to be in full control of his symbolic scheme – for the dramatic medium certainly does not sustain it adequately – he does succeed in making a statement of importance. It is the first work in which the troubled awareness of the human scene, as exemplified by the African situation, which has emerged as a dominant part of Soyinka's work, is given expression at a serious meditative level. The immediate reference of the play, the celebration of Nigerian independence, is presented as a paradigm of not only the African society, marked explicitly by the fact that it is poised at a turning point in time, but also of human society generally, whose moral progress is inscribed within a historical perspective. The play examines what chances Africa, where this historical perspective has taken on an acutely felt dimension, has of fulfilling the promise of the moment by a universal renewal of moral and spiritual values. The historical moment assumes, as it were, a cosmic significance.

The direction of Soyinka's thought in this play is echoed

in one of his essays in which he makes a plea for a 'historic vision' on the part of the African writer:

A historic vision is of necessity universal and any pretence to it must first accept the demand for a total re-examination of the human phenomenon.

Clearly this vision is the objective he set himself in *A Dance of the Forests*. Soyinka presents a somewhat Voltairian view of history as a record of human follies, of mankind imprisoned within an absurd cycle of blind passions. Forest Head who represents the supreme deity in this play also acts as a kind of objective judge of human condition, and it is through him that the essential point of the play is put across most clearly:

. . . The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. . . . Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumored ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings . . .

The true significance of the moment should be the fulfilment of any genuinely creative past occurrence a spiritual regeneration, in a word. Demoke, the carver and ward of the god Ogun only dimly understands this, but he is nonetheless significant as the embodiment of the artist which Soyinka begins to conceive. The 'historic vision' is lodged in the consciousness and sensibility of the true artist, who affords society those monetary insights into the nature of existence through which a moral and spiritual intelligence of the world is built up. And it is such intelligence that empowers man to master his condition in a meaningful way. The play's theme points then to the larger issues of human experience: time and human will, man's relationship to the universe, the great mystery of life.

With such a weighty theme, it was only natural that the

dramatist should seek an appropriate and adequate symbolic scheme with which to represent it. His turning to the Yoruba 'forest of symbols' for his presentation of the drama of existence arises specifically from the local focus of the play. But beyond this fact, the very handling of the material shows that a new understanding of the traditional world is beginning to emerge in Soyinka's writing. This understanding turns on his progressive elaboration of a vision of the artist in society, and of his relationship to its organic life. The artist is the live centre of the communal consciousness, so that his experience of the collective values acquires a special meaning for his fellow men. The myth of the artist as it develops in Soyinka's writings rests on his rôle as the mediator of the inner truths that sustain collective life, and on his function in renewing the fundamental values that govern it.

This myth is demonstrated in *The Interpreters*, Soyinka's only novel to date, and a kind of sequel to the play, *A Dance of the Forests*. The novel gives a dimension to the social satires of Soyinka, for where the satirical plays, especially *Brother Jero*, focus upon manners which are the external signs of the disturbing spiritual state of the society, the novel is a direct and comprehensive analysis of that state itself. It seems that Soyinka needed to turn to narrative in order to work out this intention for, unlike the dramatic form, it allows him extensive scope for analysis and presentation.

The burden of the novel is carried by the character Egbo, in whose spiritual adventure is developed the problem that Soyinka wants to demonstrate. Egbo is presented as an unusually endowed individual who is seeking for some kind of fulfilment. His quest all through the course of the novel does not however find any form of adequate realization, not only because his innate strength is never allowed full outer expression, spending itself in inconclusive mystical strivings, but also because he does not himself have a clear understanding of his own powers. His dilemma however, is not without meaning, for it points the way to that complete reformation of the spirit through which, as Soyinka says in an essay, 'the salvation of ide-

als' can be achieved in social life, and emphasizes the heroic and exacting nature of this process. In the tragic divorce of human action from a governing source of values which characterizes the social world depicted by Soyinka in his novel, Egbo's groping towards some form of profound and abiding measure of living takes on an exemplary value. His intimations are those of the true artist, as Soyinka conceives him – the relentless seeker after the profound meaning of existence.

The Professor, in *The Road*, is a character who also corresponds to this conception, and his quest for the 'word' is, in a sense, an articulation of Egbo's strivings. As regards metaphysical issues, *The Road* takes up the themes of *A Dance of the Forests* and of *The Interpreters*. The central problem of life and death dominates the dramatic action, and the whole play turns upon the idea of death as a form of revelation upon life. It is significant that the central character, the Professor, is presented as a kind of cross between a quack and a madman, therefore essentially an individual outside the norm of society. He does not live or act by the same references as other men, but is moved rather by the force of his inner vision. His progression towards the 'essence of death' seems therefore to be prepared by some kind of illumination of the spirit.

More important still, the world of the Professor is that of the dream, which extends to the universe of myth. His relationship with Muranṣ, the dead Agemṣ cult masquerader, seems to provide his insight into a world beyond the visible, and into the connection between life and death, and their essential unity.

As with *A Dance of the Forests*, in *The Road*, Wole Soyinka is using the traditional collective myth as the organizing principle of his individual symbolic framework and as a channel for his artistic vision. Beyond this immediate factor, the issues upon which Soyinka touches in these plays have a profound human significance which has been perceived and symbolized in the traditional thought systems of the Yorubas, hence the ready availability of the traditional material with which Soyinka represents his concerns. Thus, without seeking an exact parallel

between Yoruba thought and Soyinka's work, we can say that the former serves as a foundation for the latter, that the collective system represents a global reference for the individual artist's expression.

*The Road* is a kind of fantasy in which the inner questionings and obsessions of the playwright are exteriorized and interwoven with elements of reality in a dramatic 'condensation' of multiple levels of action and symbols. It would be difficult to unravel these adequately for the purpose of elucidation. However, what appears to constitute its basic symbolic structure is the fusion of the image of the road with the Yoruba belief in a transitional stage between life and death expressed in the Agemọ cult. The obvious and general connotation of the road as the symbol of the journey through life is merged with the idea of death as a process, a gradual transformation into another form and essence contained in the Yoruba myth – to give a broader, more intense conception of life and death as connected and transitional phases in a single and vast movement of the spirit. In other words, *The Road* expresses the idea of existence as a becoming, as one long rite of passages. The Professor's search for the 'word' is not only equivalent to the artists' groping towards its profound meaning, his effort to grasp its hidden principle, but also represents man's eternal quest for ultimate knowledge.

The general theme of *The Road* as a symbol of human experience – as an image of life seen as a trial and a progression towards some kind of fulfilment and revelation, seems to command more and more Wole Soyinka's imagination. His poetry in particular can be summarized as a varied expression – in significant fragments – of this single theme. The first section of the volume *Idanre and other poems* is entitled 'Of the road' and the poems in that section are intimately related to those in the third section, entitled 'Of birth and death'. Human experience seems to be presented as consisting of a cycle involving life in the constant passage from one stage of organic development to the other, a development that is shot through with spiritual implications. One poem in particular, from the third section of the volume is vested with a special mean-

ing in relation to this general idea – it is the poem entitled 'Dedication'. It is cast in the form of the prayer at the naming ceremony of the new child (ikómq jáde), and gathers up in powerful organic imagery some of the traditional ideas associated with the mystery of birth in the framework of the cosmic order:

Camwood round the heart, chalk for flight  
Of blemish – see? It draws! – antimony beneath  
Armpits like a goddess, and leave this taste  
Long on your lips, of salt, that you may seek  
None from tears. This, rain-water, is the gift  
Of gods – drink of its purity, bear fruits in season.  
Fruits then to your lips: haste to repay  
The debt of birth. Yield man-tides like the sea  
And ebbing, leave a meaning on the fossiled sands.

In this poem, the vitalism intimated in the previous works is given full expression, and the artists' imagination and consciousness are directed towards an intimate coincidence with the elemental.

It is in the long poem, *Idanre* that we see most clearly this movement of Soyinka's artistic spirit, while the rôle of tradition attains its most developed expression. The poem itself is the record of a personal experience which recalls and extends that of Egbo in *The Interpreters*. In the poem, the natural world becomes a more expressive symbol of vital values. The landscape itself is suffused with the presence of the primal and the elemental, and *Idanre* stands as the concrete embodiment of the Yoruba myth of origin.

The central section of the poem is an evocation of the saga of Ogun, whose power is for Soyinka the archetype of the artistic endowment, of that intense energy of the mind and of the senses which is the privilege of the creative individual. This evocation indicates the essential spirit of the poem, for the re-enactment of the traditional myth is equivalent to the ritual recall of the gods in the Yoruba festivals, whose essential purpose is to revitalize the world of creation. The poem represents for the modern artist a

means of re-capturing that full sense of life, that intense organic feeling for the universe which the myth expresses, and which form the basis of Yoruba religion and world-view. Thus, the experience of *Idanre* is a mystical one, in which the poet enters into communion with the land and with its moving spirit.

The poem marks a high point in Soyinka's relationship with tradition as well as in his spiritual development. The collective myth as entered so fully into his awareness has been so profoundly interiorized as to provide a very substance of his intimate experience. For Soyinka, artistic creation has become a medium for realizing his individual sensibility in and through the collective consciousness.

The great French poet, Baudelaire, once said that he felt admiration for only three categories of men: the warrior, the priest, and the poet. This is a remarkably African point of view; more precisely, these three categories represent exactly the great points of cohesion in the Yoruba world view reflected in the work of the three Yoruba writers I have considered here, and particularly in the writing of Wole Soyinka. But my reference to Baudelaire is not intended to stress a similarity but rather a difference of outlook between him and Soyinka. When he began to write, Baudelaire strove to take French poetry beyond the rhetorical limits by which it was encompassed in order to make it a means of knowledge. Neither he nor those poets who followed his lead – from Rimbaud right up to the Surrealists – were able to find a truly coherent cultural reference for their visionary aspirations. The collapse of Christianity as the great myth of Western culture forced these poets to create an individual mythology, each one for himself (see Steiner). In English poetry, the most striking example is that of W. B. Yeats, while Eliot's efforts to give a new relevance to Christian cosmology as the source of poetic thought and feeling for the world have not met with any kind of general response.

It is fortunate for African writers that the world view which shapes the experience of traditional society is still very much alive, and poets in particular have been able to turn to the religions and the myths of African societies as

a reference for their work. The main function served by this 'return to Africa' in the writing of African writers using European languages has been to effect a cultural differentiation of their work from that of the metropolitan writers, as well as providing the poets themselves with some kind of psychological satisfaction. But in the writing of Wole Soyinka, we find a personal appropriation of Yoruba myth, so that it does not exist in his work merely as adornment, but as an authentic mode of vision. In the work of Fagunwa and Tutuola, tradition represents the matter as well as the form of the artistic experience.

In conclusion then, one can see in the transition of the literature produced by Yoruba writers from the traditional to the modern a process of integration which confirms the continuity of the imaginative life of Yoruba culture through the various phases of transformation in Yoruba society itself. Yoruba literature is therefore unified in a way which renders problematic distinction between those writers at the 'tribal' and those at the 'national' level in this respect - language is not all. In so far as this literature is part of a culture which is in turn becoming part of a national reality in the Nigerian context, it can be said to be national. And this will afford it the opportunity of renewing its tradition not only in the vertical perspective of its assimilation of Western elements, but in its horizontal relationship with other Nigerian cultures and traditions.

#### *Footnote*

- <sup>1</sup> See his article 'Yoruba Studies today' in *Odu* new series, No. 1. April 1969.

*Vowel and Consonant Harmony  
and Vowel Restriction  
in Assimilated  
English Loan words in Yoruba*

by

**Adebisi Salami**

*Introduction*

One of the characteristics of a living language is that it must reflect the changes in the culture and life of its speakers in order to keep pace linguistically with the different developments of modern life – in social and religious matters, in commerce and industry, science and technology, etc. In order to fulfil this vital function a language must, among other things, extend its vocabulary by employing to a greater or lesser extent the following three methods, (a) creation of new words out of its morphemic and phonemic resources, (b) extension of the use of words already in its vocabulary, and (c) borrowing words from other languages.

The Yoruba language has employed the last method of borrowing words from other languages with which its speakers have had appreciable contact far more than the other two. Notable among the languages from which Yoruba has borrowed words are Arabic, Hausa and English. It seems, however, that, owing mainly to the activities of the Christian missionaries, (mostly native speakers of English from either Britain or America) whose influence on education<sup>1</sup> among the Yorubas has been significantly remarkable, many more words have been borrowed from English<sup>2</sup> than from the other two languages.

The unique position of the British who ruled, for almost a century, over Nigeria, of which Yorubaland is a part,<sup>3</sup> has redounded to the influence which the English language has had and continues to have on Yoruba.

The contact with the British has affected the social, cultural and commercial life of the Yorubas so much that consequently, the English language has had a considerable influence on Yoruba. This, however, is a general linguistic trend not peculiar to Yoruba for, as E. Sapir has pointed out:

Languages, like cultures, are rarely sufficient unto themselves. The necessity of intercourse brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighbouring or culturally dominant languages. The intercourse may be friendly or hostile. It may move on the humdrum plane of business and trade relations or it may consist of borrowing or interchange of spiritual goods – art, science, religion . . . The simplest kind of influence that one language may exert on another is the ‘borrowing’ of words. When there is cultural borrowing there is always the likelihood that the associated words may be borrowed too.<sup>4</sup>

Happily the ‘intercourse’ between the British and the Yorubas can reasonably be regarded as a ‘friendly’ one, moving on the ‘humdrum plane of business and trade relations’ and consisting of ‘interchange of spiritual goods’.

This interchange of spiritual goods as well as the trade relationship between the British and the Yorubas has resulted in the borrowing of words from English to Yoruba as stated above. These loan words from English exhibit some striking features. One of these features – vowel and consonant harmony and vowel restriction – is the subject of our study in the paragraphs that follow below. But before dealing with this feature of English loan words in Yoruba, it seems appropriate to examine first of all the following three issues very briefly:

- a) the extent to which Yoruba has borrowed from English

- b) the degrees of assimilation in such borrowings, and
- c) the manner of borrowing and the effect this has on the phonology of loan words in particular and of Yoruba in general.

The significance and pertinence of these three issues to the study of loan words in Yoruba in general and the analysis of vowel and consonant harmony and vowel restriction in assimilated English words in Yoruba may be seen in its proper perspective.

*The extent to which Yoruba has borrowed from English*

The borrowing of English words into Yoruba may be said to have begun more than a century ago for S. A. Crowther recorded in his *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language*, published in 1852, some twenty loan words from English. The process of borrowing from English has no doubt continued uninterrupted since then. The tempo of borrowing seems, however, to have increased by an almost geometrical progression in the last twenty years; in the last few years alone (i.e. from the beginning of the civil war in Nigeria) for example, a large number of words such as *rẹ̀bù* (rebel), *kùù* (coup), *bùlẹ̀ẹ̀tì* (bullet), *kọ̀míṣọ̀nà* (commissioner), *amunṣọ̀n* (ammunition) have become a common feature of the vocabulary of the daily conversation and discourse of the average Yoruba native speaker, particularly of those living in the cities.

So extensive is the borrowing from English to Yoruba in the last two decades that were Samuel Ajayi Crowther, one of the earliest native pioneers of Yoruba studies, to listen today to a passage from the vernacular newspaper *Ìròhìn Yorùbá* or some of the books published in Yoruba within the last five or six years, he would have some considerable difficulty in understanding the language; obviously however, his own good knowledge of English would help him to comprehend since he would, after some initial difficulty, identify the English loan words in the passage. In contrast to Crowther a monoglot Yoruba speaker of his time, who had no knowledge of English would, after much difficulty, perhaps succeed in only partially understanding the passage, not because the grammatical structure of

Yoruba has altered at all since Crowther's time, but because 'modern Yoruba', as he would most likely describe the language, has in its vocabulary many new words with which he would, to say the least, be unfamiliar.

Most, if not all, of these borrowings from English occur so frequently in the daily speech and conversation of the Yorubas that none but the language specialist is aware of their being words of non-native stock. For instance, when a housewife or trader uses the words *pòùn* (pound), *sísì* (sixpence), *tóró* (threepence), *kóbò* (one penny) and *eépinnì* (halfpenny) she is hardly aware of the fact that these words are loans from the English words *pound*, *sixpence*, *threepence*,<sup>6</sup> *copper* and *halfpenny*<sup>7</sup> respectively. Similarly when a Yoruba man says

- i) . Mo fẹ̀ lọ ra aṣọ ní sọ̀b̀b̀ù (I want to go and buy a cloth in the shop).
- ii) Má fi ị̀d̀òtí yí mi l'áṣọ (Please don't soil my dress).

he hardly feels anything unusual or extra-ordinary about the words *sọ̀b̀b̀ù* (shop) and *ị̀d̀òtí* (dirt). To the Yoruba housewife or trader and the Yoruba man the words *pòùn*, *sísì*, *tóró*, *kóbò*, *eépinnì*, *sọ̀b̀b̀ù* and *ị̀d̀òtí* are as much a part of Yoruba vocabulary as, for example, the words *orí* (head) *ogun* (war), *oko* (farm) and *ilẹ̀* (house).

In recent months some knowledgeable Yoruba native speakers have questioned the propriety of what they described as 'injecting English words into Yoruba'.<sup>8</sup> To them the two statements above are 'counterfeit' or 'anglicised Yoruba' the use of which should be discouraged. This is, no doubt, the attitude of a purist the type of which A. C. Baugh describes as 'the conservative in matters of language', and about whose efforts he observes:

He generally looks upon change with suspicion and is inclined to view all changes in language as corruptions. In retrospect he seems often a melancholy figure, fighting a losing fight, many times living to see the usages against which he fought so valiantly become universally accepted.<sup>9</sup>

The Yoruba language, as we have said, is like any other living language subject to various changes if it must reflect or record the changes in the life and habits of its speakers. One of the ways in which such changes have manifested themselves, especially where its speakers have had social, religious, political or commercial intercourse with speakers of other languages, is through 'borrowing of words'. And in any synchronic description of Yoruba, such borrowings, particularly where they have been assimilated into the language as in the examples above, should be regarded not as 'counterfeit' additions to the language but as legitimate Yoruba words. Thus, for instance, Bamgboṣe felt no qualms about the use of *ṣòḍbù* (shop), *ṣòḍṣì* (church), *dókítà* (doctor), *bíbélì* (bible) and *kólà* (collar) in his Grammar of Yoruba<sup>10</sup> because he felt – and very rightly – that these words and many others like them are now quite legitimately Yoruba words.

For instance, a cursory glance at Babalola's *Ìwé Èdè Yorùbá*<sup>11</sup> and at Fagunwa's *Àdùtú Olódùmarè*<sup>12</sup> is enough to convince one of the extent to which Yoruba is indebted to English in respect of the large number of words which the former has borrowed from the latter. Abraham in his *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*<sup>13</sup> gives, for instance, no less than 76 English loan words in Yoruba; Delano in his *Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá*<sup>14</sup> lists some 72 of such loans from English. Indeed so many now are the English words borrowed into Yoruba that the most conservative estimate would put the number at some two thousand<sup>15</sup> which is, undoubtedly, a significant addition to the vocabulary of Yoruba.

#### *The degree of assimilation in English words borrowed into Yoruba*

It is an indisputable fact that a large number of native Yoruba speakers are now bilingual; that is, they speak Yoruba which is their native language and are fluent to some extent (varying in degrees of course) in English.<sup>16</sup> This bilingualism may be attributed chiefly to two causes: (a) the spread of education fashioned to a large extent along the British pattern and conducted, understandably,

solely in English from as early as the last two years in the primary school; (b) the unique position of the English language as the official language as well as the main language of trade and commerce and communication or contact with non-Yoruba speaking people both inside and outside Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

The existence of the two languages, English and Yoruba, side by side for different purposes has resulted in encouraging lexical borrowings – particularly of technical terms and new concepts – from English to Yoruba. In addition, it has also made possible the occurrence of code switching which Afọlayan describes as ‘the sprinkling of English words and phrases in Yoruba sentences’.<sup>18</sup> This code switching which occurs in the speech of some Yoruba native speakers may be illustrated by the following examples in which the English words are italicized.

- i) Mo *mean* pé n ò ní le wá. (I mean that I won't be able to attend).
- ii) Ọrọ̀ tí ọ̀gbéni nàà bá wa sọ *interesting* púpọ̀. (The talk the man gave us was very interesting).

There is a tendency to regard such partial code switching as illustrated in the two examples above as instances of English loans in Yoruba. While we do not deny the right to regard them as English loans in Yoruba, it seems to us very appropriate to distinguish between such borrowings as occur in code switching and those which we refer to above in the section ‘The extent to which Yoruba has borrowed from English’ as being generally regarded as part of Yoruba vocabulary. In the first place, borrowings which occur in code switching are found only in the speech of some bilingual speakers; loan words (i.e. borrowing already accepted as part of Yoruba vocabulary) on the other hand, are used by bilingual as well as mono-lingual (Yoruba) speakers. Besides, English loan words are always assimilated – fully or partially – into Yoruba; that is, they adapt themselves wholly or partially to the existing system of Yoruba phonology. English words which occur in code switching, on the contrary, are not pronounced in any obviously different way from the same



brought with them into Yoruba and by which they could be distinguished as loans. The most significant two of these features are the occurrence of (a) consonant clusters and (b) initial high tone on a vowel-initial word. These two which are not features of Yoruba native words are illustrated from the following examples:

- (a) grámà (grammar), mínístà (minister), brédì (bread);
- (b) álòmù (alum), ódà (order), émpáyàdeè (empire day).

In the first group are the clusters *gr*, *st* and *br* respectively while in the second group the initial vowels *a*, *o* and *e* are pronounced with a high tone. Three important points are, however, worth noting about such partially assimilated English loan words. In the first place, they are generally technical words and therefore occur less frequently in general conversation and discussion than most of the fully assimilated ones. Besides, they appear to be used more often by bilingual native Yoruba speakers (or at least those who have been to school) than by the mono-lingual ones. Even when used by Yoruba monoglots it seems to be the case that consonant clusters as in group (a) above are generally resolved by anaptyctic vowels (see page 110). These differences in pronunciation between monoglots and bilingual speakers often cause the varying spelling forms one finds for these loan words. For instance *grama*, *ministra* and *bredì* are sometimes found written as *gírámá*, *mínísítà* and *búrédì* respectively.

*Manner of borrowing and the effect of this on the phonology of English loan words*

The phonology of assimilated English loan words in Yoruba, can be related, among other things, to the different processes by which the words are borrowed into Yoruba. A careful study of the phonology of these words shows that some of them have been borrowed into Yoruba through their spoken forms in English. Such words may be described as 'ear-loans'. The others, it seems, first entered the language through their written form in English. These may be described as 'eye-loans'.

Words of the first group (i.e. ear-loans) seem to have derived their Yoruba pronunciation principally from the *English pronunciation*<sup>20</sup> which is imitated as closely as Yoruba phonology as well as the linguistic sophistication of the first users (i.e. those originally responsible for the introduction of these words into the language) allows. In addition to being introduced first in speech rather than in writing, it seems also possible that the 'ear-loans' are heard or spoken more often than they are read or written. Thus their written forms are a representation or orthographic encoding of their pronunciation in Yoruba. It may even be that some English loan words in Yoruba were borrowed indirectly through, for example, Hausa. Thus the Yoruba pronunciation of these words would tend to be derived from their 'Hausa pronunciation' rather than from their English pronunciation. Since such words are most likely to have been first introduced to the Yorubas by the Hausa traders who are generally not literate in English, they are bound to be pronounced differently from the way they are pronounced in English. An example of such English loans are *bàrékè* (barracks) and *dérébà* (driver) which we understand are also *bareke* and *dereba* respectively in Hausa.

In listening to the English pronunciation of these ear-loans the Yoruba native speaker tends to hear the word primarily as a whole rather than the individual sound units (phonemes) which make up the word; in addition, he hears these sounds or the entire word in terms of Yoruba and not English or Hausa phonology. Consequently certain features in the English (and perhaps Hausa) pronunciation would strike his ears more than others. Whatever strikes his ears most is, however, conditioned as already stated, by the phonological system of his own language – Yoruba.

Unlike ear-loans, eye-loans seem to derive their pronunciation from their written form in English which is also pronounced as far as Yoruba phonology permits. It is also possible that such eye-loans are read or written more often than they are heard or spoken with the result that their pronunciation is derived largely from their written form which is also based very largely on English spelling. The

two classes of loan words (i.e. ear-loans and eye-loans) may be illustrated briefly as follows:

Ear-loans		Eye-loans	
English word	Yoruba Pronunciation	English word	Yoruba Pronunciation
comb	kóòmù	bomb	bṣ̀ǹb̀ù
station	téj̄ṣ̄	star (beer)	sítáà

As can be seen in the examples above the final orthographic *b* which is silent in the words *comb* and *bomb* in English, is pronounced in the eye-loan [bṣ̀ǹb̀ù] but not in the ear-loan [kóòmù]. Similarly the two consonants in the initial cluster *st* are pronounced in the eye-loan [sítáà], but in the ear-loan [téj̄ṣ̄] only *t* is pronounced. In the eye-loans the final consonant letter *b* of *bomb* and the two consonants in the initial cluster *st* of *star* are pronounced because, it seems, these letters occur in the English spelling. In the ear-loans on the other hand, the Yoruba pronunciation follows, it seems, the English pronunciation as closely as the ears of the people who first introduced the words into Yoruba could perceive, and as much as Yoruba phonology allows.

There are, indeed, many loan words that have two or more pronunciations in Yoruba because these have borrowed into the language as ear- and eye-loans. Examples of these are:

English Word	Eye-loan	Ear-loan
bible	bíbéli	báíbù
table	tábilì	tébù/tébùrù
window	wíńdò	fíńdò
barracks	báráàkì	bárékè
paradise	párádísè	párádáisì

#### *Vowel and Consonant Harmony and Vowel Restriction in Assimilated English loan words in Yoruba*

In the Yoruba language, there is a feature of vowel and consonant harmony and vowel restriction. Indeed, this feature has already been noticed by some scholars. For instance, Abraham points out in his *Dictionary of Modern*

*Yoruba*<sup>13</sup> that Yoruba exhibits some kind of vowel harmony. Awobuluyi has also discovered some systems of vowel and consonant harmony in Yoruba.<sup>21</sup> One of these systems which he describes as 'word-final' operates according to him in 'the last two syllables of monomorphemic non-onomatopoeic polysyllabic nouns'. As a kind of justification for establishing this system or pattern of harmony in Yoruba native words, he cites examples of English loan words 'that ended in consonants before they entered' the Yoruba language, and on being assimilated into the latter took on an enclitic /u/ or /i/. On these assimilated loan word examples Awobuluyi concludes that they 'end the way they do' because the pattern already exists in the Yoruba language.

Although we do not agree with Awobuluyi's entire exposition of this feature of Yoruba native words, we shall not attempt to take up the issue here.<sup>22</sup> All that is significant for us at present is that vowel and consonant harmony is as much a feature of loan words as it is of Yoruba native words. Thus, in the sections that follow below we shall examine in some detail the extent to which this phenomenon is an important feature of assimilated English words, and what similarities or differences there are between native words and English loan words in this respect.

As a kind of general observation and comparison, we have discovered that when instances of vowel co-occurrence and/or restriction in all the different places in structure (initial, medial and final positions in words) are taken into account, there are many more instances of vowel harmony and greater flexibility of vowel co-occurrence in loan words than in native words. Our investigation has led us to recognize three different systems operating respectively at:

- a) word-initial position excluding words having initial consonant cluster in English
- b) places where in the English pronunciation there are consonants in a cluster or sequence whether initially, medially or finally in the word

- c) word-final position (i.e. words with a final closed or open syllable in English). This excludes, however, final consonant cluster which is already covered by (b) above.

The three different systems or patterns above will be treated below in this order:

*Vowel harmony in word-initial position*

It is perhaps helpful, for the sake of clarity of exposition, to establish two sub-systems of vowel harmony in word-initial position, since they exhibit some slightly different features. One of the two operates between the first two syllables in vowel initial words and the other between the first two syllables in consonant initial words.

*Vowel-initial words in English*

As in native words all the oral vowels except /u/ occur in word initial position in loan words; on the other hand the nasalised vowels /ɪ̃/, /ɛ̃/, /ɔ̃/ also occur initially in loan words. Again, there is more restriction of vowel co-occurrence in loan words than in native words in the same place in structure (i.e. initially). The following is therefore the pattern of vowel co-occurrence or harmony which has been observed; those already discovered in native words are also given in order to show the difference.

1st syllable of native and loan words	2nd syllable of native words	2nd syllable of loan words
i	i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, ɪ, ē, ɔ̃, ā, a	i, e, ε, ɔ, a, ɔ̃
e	i, e, o, u, ɪ, ū	i, e,
ε	i, ε, a, ɔ, u, ɪ, ɔ̃, ū	i, ε, o, u, a, ɔ̃
o	i, e, u, o, ɪ, ū	i, e, ε, o, u, a, ū
ɔ	i, ε, u, ɔ, ɪ, ū, ɔ̃	i, ε, o, ɔ, u, a, ɔ̃, ē
a	i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, a, ɪ, ū, ɔ̃	i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, a, ɪ, ε, ū, ɔ̃

It will be observed from the above patterns for both native and loan words that only the open neutral vowel /a/ in a word initial position can be followed by any other vowel in the second syllable in loan words. This contrasts with what obtains in native words where, for instance, both /a/ and /i/ in word initial position can be followed by any other

vowel in the second syllable. In the pattern for loan words, the front vowel /e/ in word initial position can only be followed in the second syllable by vowels of a front articulation; but the two front vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ do not co-occur. As the system would lead us to expect the two vowels to co-occur in this place in structure, their non-occurrence could only be attributed to a feature of vowel restriction whereby the presence of either of the two vowels in word initial position precludes the occurrence of the other in the syllable immediately following. This feature of vowel restriction is also responsible, it seems, for the non-occurrence of both /u/ and /o/ with word-initial /i/, /ɔ/ with word-initial /o/ and /e/ with word-initial /ɔ/.

Besides co-occurring with front vowels (except /e/) as shown above, word-initial /ɛ/ is also followed in the second syllable by the back vowels /ɔ/, /u/, /o/ and /ɔ̃/ in a few loan words only when these back vowels are preceded by alveolar or velar consonants. This is a case therefore of vowel-consonant harmony as illustrated in the following examples:

εροπυλέε̃νι	—	aeroplane
εκόνόμι	—	economy
εδुकέ̃ψ̃	—	education

Similarly word-initial back vowels are followed in the second syllable by back vowels only when these latter vowels are preceded by certain consonants; if the consonant in the second syllable is labial, the vowel in this syllable is either /o/ or /u/. Thus, besides harmonizing with the word-initial vowel in respect of backness, these vowels in the second syllable also harmonize with the preceding consonant with respect to labiality as in:

ό̃πυ̃να̃	—	opener
ό̃φ̃υ̃ν̃υ̃	—	oven
ό̃μ̃ο̃	—	omo (detergent)
ε̃πο̃σί̃ψ̃	—	opposition
ε̃πο̃ρε̃τί̃ς̃	—	operator
ε̃πο̃ρε̃ψ̃	—	operation

If the consonant is alveolar, the same vowel sound is heard in the second syllable as in the first syllable thus showing a case of vowel harmony as in:

ḡṡrítì	—	authority
ḡṡrèbù	—	honourable

### *Consonant initial words*

In this sub-system there seems to be a greater flexibility of vowel co-occurrence than there is in the first sub-system comprising vowel-initial words. In this second sub-system, for instance, any of the Yoruba vowels including /u/ and the nasalized vowels may occur in the first syllable in the word and may be followed in the next syllable by any vowel with the following few exceptions:

- (a) that half close front vowel /e/ in the first syllable is not followed by the back vowel /o/ in the second syllable;
- (b) that half close back vowel /o/ in the first syllable is not followed by the close back vowel /u/ in the second syllable.

Thus none of the consonant initial words<sup>23</sup> (in the English pronunciation) analyzed has, in the first two syllables, the sequence CeCo . . . or CoCu . . . where the phonological notation C represents the consonant element in each of the two syllables. There is in this sub-system an instance of vowel restriction as in the first sub-system above. There is also in this sub-system a tendency for the back vowel /ə/ in the initial syllable to be followed by a back vowel generally when the latter is preceded in the second syllable by a labial or alveolar consonant, e.g.

bṡtùlù	—	bottle
mṡtò	—	motor
kṡbùrù	—	corporal
kṡbḡ	—	copper

Some mono-syllabic words with a consonant ending in English, on being borrowed and assimilated into Yoruba, exhibit vowel harmony in their first two syllables. These

two syllables in the Yoruba pronunciation of the English loan words are interdependent, as the second syllable always has the same vowel sound as the first.<sup>24</sup> This is illustrated in the following examples:

i — bîdì (bead)	dʒínì — (gin)
e — kéesì (case)	léèsì — (lace)
ε — béédì (bed)	méèsì — (mess)
u — pū̀lù̀ (pools)	kú̀kù̀ — (cook)
o — pò̀sì (post)	kó̀òtù̀ — (coat) ✓
ɔ — kó̀bù̀ (cup)	bó̀lù̀ — (ball)
a — fá̀nù̀ (fan)	pá̀nù̀ — (pan)

*Vowel and Consonant Harmony in the Yoruba pronunciation of English loan words with consonant clusters (or sequences) in English*

Except when a nasal consonant is followed by another consonant, there are no consonant clusters in Yoruba. When a nasal consonant occurs in a cluster, the following consonant is always homorganic and the nasal consonant itself is syllabic as in *bè̀n̄bè̀* (drum), *alá̀ntakù̀* (spider) and *kò̀kò̀* (frog). Thus English words with consonant cluster or sequence,<sup>25</sup> on becoming assimilated into Yoruba, are pronounced in either of two ways: (a) the cluster or sequence is resolved by an anaptyctic vowel or (b) one (or more where there are more than two consonants) of the consonants is not pronounced as in *títì* (street), *té̀sò̀n* (station), *gò̀simù̀tì* (goldsmith) and *agirikò̀sò̀* (agriculture). In the analysis that follows below we shall be concerned only with (a) to show the relations between the cluster breaking vowels and the consonants in the cluster or sequence thus resolved.

Two sub-systems are again recognized here; in one the anaptyctic vowel is either an /i/ or an /u/, while in the other the anaptyctic is one of the following vowels — /e, ε, o, ɔ, a/. It is to be noted, however, that the anaptyctics /i/ and /u/ are used more often (in loan words) than the other five vowels which occur, as we shall see below, in comparatively few English loan words. Between them the anaptyctic /i/ is used more often than the anaptyctic /u/. In the first

sub-system of vowel and consonant harmony the anaptyctic vowel, as stated above, is a close vowel and may be front and unrounded (i.e. /i/) or back and rounded (i.e. /u/) depending on the requirement of harmony. Since in the Yoruba vowel system there is virtually a two term series of vowels (the front non-lip rounding and the back lip-rounding vowels),<sup>26</sup> lip-rounding in the English pronunciation of loan words is associated in Yoruba with the back rounded vowel /u/ and non-lip rounding with the front unrounded vowel /i/.

If, in the English pronunciation of the loan words, a consonant cluster exhibits only labiality without rounding and is followed by a non-lip rounding vowel as in the *br* in *bridge*, *brick*; the *fr* in *free*, *fridge*; and *dr* in *driver*, *dress*; the *tr* in *try*, *tray*, the Yoruba often interprets only the non-lip rounding feature of the whole cluster since he perceives English sounds in terms of the phonology of his own language. Also because Yoruba /r/ is fronted and non-labialized the anaptyctic vowel in his pronunciation of the clusters in the words above is front and unrounded even though /b/ and /f/ in the clusters /br/ and /fr/ are labialized consonants. But if in the English pronunciation a consonant cluster shows labiality with some lip-rounding, the lip rounding (however slight) is taken into account in the Yoruba pronunciation of the word in which the cluster occurs. Examples of such words are *bread*, *brake*, *fry* and *brown* pronounced in Yoruba as [búrẹ̀ḍì, búrẹ̀kì, fúrájì] and [búrǎú] respectively.

The rules for harmony in this sub-system vary slightly according to the different places in structure, i.e. word initial, medial or final consonant cluster. These three places in structure are examined below in this order:

#### *Word initial consonant cluster in English*

(a) After the initial labial consonants /b, p/ and /f/ the anaptyctic vowel is /u/ except when the Yoruba vowel corresponding to the English vowel in the syllable in which the cluster occurs is /i/: e.g.

	<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
	blue	búlúù
	block	búlóòkì
	brake	búrèèkì
	bribe	búráìbù
	bread	búrèédì
	plug	púlóògì
	primary	púrámáàrì
	flour	fúláwà
	Friday	fúráìdèè
but	brick	bíríkì
	bridge	bíríìd̀̀zì
	free	fírí
	principal	pírísípù
	fridge	fíríìd̀̀zì

(b) (i) after initial non-labial consonants /t (or/θ/), /d/ the anaptyctic vowel is /u/ except when the vowel in the initial syllable of the word in English is realized in the Yoruba pronunciation as a front vowel or the neutral vowel /a/:

e.g.

	<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
	drawers	dúróòsì
	through	túrúù
	drum	dúróòmù
	trousers	túrósà
but	draught	díráàfù
	tray	tírèè
	trebor	tírèbò
	try	tírájì
	tribune	tírìbúùnù

(ii) after initial non-labial /k, g, s/ the anaptyctic is usually /i/: e.g.

	<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
	glass	gílààsì
	clippers	kílfípà
	green	gírínì
	clutch	kílfóòfì
	star	sítáà
	slate	sílèètì

The initial clusters /gl, sk/ in English are resolved in Yoruba by the anaptyctic /u/ when the Yoruba vowel corresponding to the English vowel in the initial syllable of the word is /u/: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
glucose	gúlúkòdòsì
glue	gúlùù
school	súkùùlù/sùkùrù
screw	sùkùrù
scooter	sùkùtà

(c) When the first consonant in an initial English cluster is followed by a labio-velar semi-vowel /w/ the anaptyctic in the Yoruba pronunciation of the word in which the English cluster occurs is always /u/: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
queen	kúwīnì/kúwī
twenty	túwéitì
sweater	súwétà
choir	kúwájà
suede	sùwéèdì

#### *Medial position consonant cluster in English*

When an English loan word with a medial position consonant or sequence in English has the cluster or sequence resolved by an anaptyctic vowel in Yoruba the anaptyctic is usually /i/: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
tumbler	tṣńbìlà
biscuit	bisikfìtì
goldsmith	gosimfìtì
electric	ìlénfítríkì
inspector	ìsìpékíṭṣ
welfare	wélfíjà

The following, however, are exceptions to the rule above:

(a) if the first consonant in the cluster or sequence is followed by a labial consonant the anaptyctic is /u/: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
railway	rélùweè
enquiry	è̀nkúwá̀rì
Alfred	alufùréè̀dì
Albert	alubáà̀tì

(b) if the cluster in English begins with a labial or velar consonant and is not preceded by a front vowel the anaptyctic is /u/: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
helicopter	elikópù̀tà
bookshop	búkù̀ʃò̀bù̀
governor	gòfù̀nò̀ (gómìnò̀)
opener	ópù̀nà

#### *Final consonant cluster in English*

English final consonant cluster is usually resolved in Yoruba by an anaptyctic /i/ as in: e.g.

<i>English Word</i>	<i>Yoruba Pronunciation</i>
milk	mílìkì/mílìkì
belt	bélìfìtì
button	bótìnì
cotton	kótìnì
dozen	dósìnì
bolt	bólìfìtì

The following exceptions, however, have been found:

if the final consonant in the English cluster is a syllabic /l/, and the lateral sound is pronounced in Yoruba the anaptyctic is /u/: e.g. báskù̀lù̀ (bicycle), básbù̀lù̀ (bible), pénsù̀lù̀ (pencil).

Our second sub-system, as already explained on page 110, operates where the anaptyctic is neither /i/ nor /u/. For this sub-system which is different from the first one above, a phonological formula CƏRV is established. The C element in the structure represents the first con-

sonant in the English cluster or, in this particular case, its realization in Yoruba. The second consonant in the English cluster is always heard and realized in Yoruba as the voiced alveolar fricative for which we have established the phonological notation R. Thus the C . . . R . . . phonological relation represents the Yoruba pronunciation of the two consonants in the English cluster.

For the second syllable in the structure a V element is recognized and the V represents the Yoruba interpretation or realization of the vowel immediately following the cluster in English. For the first syllable, to which, in the Yoruba pronunciation, the anaptyctic belongs, no V element is established since there is no separate alterance; instead a syllabic  $\Theta$  is established. The  $\Theta V$  phonological notation indicates the interdependence of the syllables and correlates with hearing the same vowel sound in both syllables. Thus there is, as illustrated in Table 1 a clear case of vowel harmony between the anaptyctic and the vowel of the second syllable in the Yoruba pronunciation.

#### *Vowel and Consonant Harmony and Vowel Restriction in Word Final Position*

In this third and final of our three systems we are concerned in this place in structure, only with the final two syllables in the word. As in the other two systems, two sub-systems are established. The first operates in words ending in English with an open syllable (V), and the second in words with a final closed syllable (VC) in English.

- (i) In the first sub-system (that is, words with final open syllable in English) no vowel-consonant harmony is displayed. Rather there is a feature of vowel restriction and some sort of vowel harmony. Vowel restriction is much more a feature of this sub-system than of other systems or sub-systems. The pattern may be stated briefly as follows:
  - (a) the front vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ never occur in a final position in an assimilated loan word in this system if the penultimate syllable in the word

Table 1:

English Spelling	English Pronunciation	Consonant cluster	Anaptyctic vowel	Phonological formular	Yoruba Pronunciation
frame	freim	fr	/e/	CəRV	féré mù
crane	krein	kr	"		ké ré ní
Christmas	krisməs	kr	"		ké ré sí mési
concrete	kɔnkrit	kr	"		kɔnk ké ré
prayer	præ	pr	"		kpé ré jà
brocade	brəkeid	br	/o/		boroké è di
krola	krəulə	kr	"		kó ró lá
gross	grɔs	gr	"		gó ró sù
driver	draivə	dr	/ɛ/		dé ré bà
breadfruit	brɛdfɹuit	br	"		kpé ré bú tù
premier	prɛmjə	pr	"		kpé ré mǽ jà
threepence	θrɛpəns	θr	/ɔ/		tó rǒ
twine	twain	tw	"		tó rǒ jǐ
trousers	trauzəz	tw	"		tó rǒ sà
mattress	mætris	tr	/a/		mátá rá à sí
sacrement	sækri:mənt	kr	"		sáká rá mé è nti

- in Yoruba has any of the back vowels /o/, /ɔ/, /u/, and the neutral vowel /a/,
- (b) the half close vowels /e/ and /o/ and the half open front vowel /ɛ/ do not occur in a final position when the penultimate syllable has a nasalized vowel,
  - (c) the presence of /ɛ/ in the penultimate syllable precludes the occurrence of /e/ in the final syllable,
  - (d) /ɛ/ does not also occur in a final position if the syllable preceding it has an /i/.
  - (e) half close front /e/ in the penultimate syllable precludes half open front /ɛ/ in the final syllable,
  - (f) if the penultimate syllable has /e/, /o/ cannot occur in the final syllable.

It is possible to interpret the above pattern as follows: In (a) backness and neutral openness do not agree with half open and half close frontness. In other words there is a harmonizing feature of backness with backness since /u, o, ɔ/ can occur with /u, o, ɔ/; similarly there is also a feature of backness with front closeness as /u, o, ɔ/ can occur with /i/. In (b) nasalization does not harmonize with front and back half closeness nor with front half openness. In (c) half open frontness does not harmonize with half close frontness. In (d) half open frontness does not harmonize with close frontness. In (e) half close frontness does not harmonize with half close backness. In (f) half close frontness does not harmonize with half close backness.

- (ii) In the second of our sub-system (i.e. in words with a final closed syllable (VC) in English there is a different pattern of harmony. Before proceeding to analyze this pattern, however, we propose to make some general observations.

When an English loan word with a final closed syllable in English is assimilated into Yoruba there are four different ways of dealing with the final consonant since Yoruba syllables are generally open.

- (a) The final consonant in the English pronunciation may be elided or not pronounced in Yoruba as in:

kósbùrù	— corporal	móbì	— mobil
kònkéré	— concrete	rébù	— rebel
ʃílè	— shilling	džésù	— Jesus
potogì	— Portuguese	gíráfù	— gravel

- (b) When the English word ends with a cluster -nd or -ld the alveolar plosive /d/ is not pronounced and the final syllable is -nu or ni or -lu as in:

béèni	— bend	gòdù	— gold
réfùrèèni	— referendum	wáini	— wine
dájámòònu	— diamond	sékòònu	— second

- (c) If the final consonant is /n/ or /ŋ/ in English, then one of two things usually happens (i) the preceding vowel is nasalized and is now final in the Yoruba pronunciation or (ii) the preceding vowel is nasalized, the final nasal consonant is pronounced with an alveolar articulation and is then followed by a nasalized /i/ if the preceding vowel is a front vowel or the neutral open vowel /a/, or by a nasalized /u/ if the preceding vowel is a back vowel or /a/: e.g.

àkódìṣ	or akódìṣnu	accordion
kòsì	or kòsìni	cousin
òposíṣ	or òposíṣnu	opposition
látódzè	or látódzèni	lactogen

- (d) The final consonant may take an additional /i/ or /u/ that is an enclitic vowel as in:

béèdì	— bed	bíṣòbù	— bishop
kòòmù	— comb	bòòbù	— bomb
bòòsì	— bus	kòòbù	— cup
bùràìbù	— bribe	kápéètì	— carpet

Of the four different ways described above, the last (i.e. the use of an/ enclitic /i/ or /u/ is the most common way of dealing with a final consonant in English words borrowed into Yoruba. It is with this final way that we are concerned chiefly in this final of our sub-systems because it exhibits some features of vowel and consonant harmony.

The following pattern of harmony operates in this sub-system:

- (a) the enclitic vowel is /u/ if the final consonant in the English cluster and in the Yoruba pronunciation is a labial consonant. This is always the case irrespective of what vowel is in the preceding syllable: e.g.

aCu<sup>27</sup>: fáàmù (firm), sɛkáàfù (scarf), fáàbù (valve)

eCu: féré mù (frame), téèpù (tape), séèfù (safe)

ɛCu: sítéèbù (step), dʒóséèfù (Joseph)

iCu: ʃí fù (chief), dʒí pù (jeep), fí mù (film)

oCu: kó ò mù (comb), púrò ò bù (probe), sítò ò fù (stove)

ɔCu: dú r̄ ɔ̀ m̀ù (drum), t̄ ɔ̀ p̀ù (top), k̄ ɔ̀ b̀ù (cup)

uCu: k̄ é r̄ ú b̀ù (cherub), r̄ ú m̀ù (room).

- (b) the front vowels /i, e, ɛ/ and the neutral open vowel /a/, when followed by a velar or a lateral consonant, take an enclitic /i/: e.g.

eCi: bú r̄ é è k̄ ì (brake), fé è l̄ ì (fail), b̄ é è l̄ ì (bale)

ɛCi: á̄ n̄ ḡ é l̄ ì (angel), ʃ̄ é è l̄ ì (shell), ʃ̄ é è k̄ ì (check/cheque)

aCi: bá à ḡ ì (bag), bú l̄ á à k̄ ì (black)

iCi: m̄ l̄ ì k̄ ì (milk), b̄ í r̄ k̄ ì (brick), à p̄ ì l̄ ì (appeal).

- (c) the back vowels /o, ɔ, u/ followed by the labial /l/ take /u/: e.g.

oCu: kó ò l̄ ù (coal), p̄ ɛ t̄ u r̄ ó ò l̄ ù (petrol)

ɔCu: b̄ ɔ̀ ò l̄ ù (ball), p̄ ɔ̀ ò l̄ ù (Paul)

uCu: k̄ á n̄ s̄ ù l̄ ù (Council), w̄ ú ù l̄ ù (wool).

- (d) the back vowel /u/ followed by the alveolar fricative /s/ takes an /i/: e.g.

uCi: l̄ ú ù s̄ ì (lose or loss), à k̄ ú ù s̄ ì (accused),

p̄ ú r̄ ɔ̀ d̄ ú ù s̄ ì (produce)

- (e) the back vowel /ɔ/ followed by a velar or palatal consonant takes an /i/: e.g.

ɔCi: ʃ̄ ɔ̀ k̄ ì fork t̄ ɔ̀ ʃ̄ ì torch ʃ̄ ɔ̀ ʃ̄ ì church

ʃ̄ ɔ̀ k̄ ì chalk t̄ ɔ̀ ḡ ì tug l̄ ɔ̀ ò d̄ ʒ̄ ì lodge

- (f) in a large number of words the enclitic vowel is /u/ if the preceding vowel in the Yoruba pronunciation is a back vowel: e.g.

wóòdù	ward	kóòtù	court
kóòtù	coat	kúùkù	cook
fúùdù	food	lòòdù	load

### *Conclusion*

In our analysis above we have tried to establish three main points. One of these is that, although vowel and consonant harmony and vowel restriction are a feature of native words as well as of loan words in Yoruba, loan words exhibit more of these features than native ones. For instance, while in word initial position in native words only the back vowels /ə/ and /u/ do not co-occur in the sequence ə . . . u in loan words, there are many instances of such vowel restriction or non-co-occurrence. It follows from this that if, as we have already shown, assimilated English loan words are generally accepted as part of Yoruba vocabulary, any phonological analysis and description of Yoruba which fail to take account of such characteristics of loan words, should be regarded as inexhaustive.

The second point is that, although loan words display more vowel and consonant harmony and vowel restrictions than native words, this is only so because the possibility of such features occurring already exists in the Yoruba language. The third and final point is that, by exhibiting certain characteristic and common features, assimilated English loan words help, where necessary, to highlight some already significant aspects of the Yoruba language in general.

## Notes

1. i.e. Western European education.
2. In regarding these words as loans from English we are not concerned with whether they have been borrowed into English from French, German or Greek. All that we are interested in is that Yoruba has borrowed the words directly from English and not from these other languages.
3. This comprises the Lagos and Western State of Nigeria as well as the Ilorin and Kabba provinces of the Kwara State. It excludes, for the paper, the Yoruba speaking territories for instance, in Dahomey, Togo, etc.
4. E. Sapir, *Language* (New York, 1921), page 192.
5. cf. J. R. Firth, 'Sounds and Prosodies', *TPS.* (1955), page 150; 'A loan word may bring with it a new pattern suited to its class or type.' See also C. C. Fries, and K. L. Pike, 'Co-existent Phonemic System', *Language* XXV, 1 (1949), 30.
6. Pronounced in English as /'erɛpɔns/
7. Pronounced in English as /'heipni/
8. See for example (i) Olayinka Odukulẹ's article 'Anglicising Nigerian Languages' in the *Nigerian Daily Times* of Monday April 13, 1970. (ii) Adisa Balogun's further contribution on this subject, entitled 'Why Adulterate Nigerian Languages?' in the *Daily Times* of June 10, 1970. Both Odukulẹ and Balogun suggest the use of calques or loan translation instead of loan words. But calques as suggested by us in A. Salami (14 below) page 40 are often very unsatisfactory and sometimes absurd.
9. cf. A. C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), page 393.
10. A. Bamgboṣe, *Grammar of Yoruba, West African Language monographs 5*, Cambridge, 1966.
11. S. A. Babalọla, *Ìwé Èdè Yorùbá*, (Parts I & II) (London: Longmans, 1963).
12. D. O. Fagunwa, *Àdìtì Olódùmarè* (London: Nelson, 1967).
13. R. C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, (London: London University Press, 1958).
14. I. O. Delanọ, *Àtúmò Èdè Yorùbá* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).
15. cf. A. Salami, 'English loan words in Yoruba', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1969.
16. The degree of fluency in English would vary in accordance with the different academic attainments.
17. Even among some Yoruba native speakers, English is used as much as Yoruba.
18. A. Afọlayan, 'Linguistic Problems of Yoruba Learners and Users of English', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1968; this feature of code switching has also been observed by A. Babalọla who described it as '*Àsìsọ àti Àsìkọ Yorùbá*', (mistakes in spoken and written Yoruba) in his *Ìwé Èdè Yorùbá*.
19. E. C. Rowlands, 'Yoruba and English - a problem of co-existence.' *African Language Studies* IV, (1963), SOAS. London.
20. i.e., R.P., As the different native speakers of English from whom the words

were heard and bound to have different forms of pronunciation, R.P. is chosen as a common standard.

- <sup>21</sup>. O. Awobuluyi, 'Vowel and Consonant Harmony in Yoruba', *Journal of African Languages*, IV, 1, 1967, Michigan State University.
- <sup>22</sup>. cf. A. Salami, op. cit. pp. 383-389, where the issue has already been dealt with in some detail.
- <sup>23</sup>. I.e., excluding initial consonant cluster.
- <sup>24</sup>. This feature is sometimes referred to as 'reduplication'.
- <sup>25</sup>. A distinction is made between consonant cluster and sequence. For instance the *sk* and *lt* in *scale* and *belt* respectively are consonant clusters while the *dm* in *headmaster* is a consonant sequence.
- <sup>26</sup>. Of the eleven vowel phonemes generally set up for Yoruba, five i.e. /i, e, ε, ī, ē/ are front and unrounded; five i.e. /u, o, ɔ, ū, ɔ̄/ are back and rounded, while /a/ is neither back nor front.
- <sup>27</sup>. This C notation represents the inter-vocalic consonant between the enclitic vowel and the penultimate vowel in the word.

# *Lexical Borrowing in Yoruba*

by

**Oluşola Ajolore**

All linguistic borrowing presupposes language contact. The contact may be through language co-terminology religious and/or political domination of one language group by another, cultural transfusion, imitation, adoption or importation, or through commercial and trade relationship. Theoretically, borrowing is not a linguistic necessity because when faced with new linguistic challenge, speakers of any language can turn to the previously learned patterns of their language for solutions. But in fact it is not so easy to create patterns to meet the demands of new situations especially where the concepts, ideas, places and peoples are foreign. The easier solution is to copy the names given to them by the donor language. This, at any rate, would seem to be the more usual solution to the new lexical demands made upon a language.

Linguistic performance requires that the patterns and items learned should be reproduced as closely as possible to the original. In learning a first language, reproduction is nearly always perfect. But reproduction in a second language-learning situation varies a good deal. The same thing can be said for borrowing, which could range from full recognition to complete non-recognition by the native speaker of the donor language. If it is so successfully reproduced that a native speaker of the model can recognize it, then what Einar Haugen calls *importation* has taken place. If it is so produced that he cannot recognize it, *substitution* has taken place. Between the two poles, there are intermediate stages, nor are the two poles themselves absolute. There could be partial or total importation

or substitution. But whichever form it takes, borrowing is 'the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another.'

It may be necessary to explain a number of terms used in this paper. A donor or lending language is the language from which a linguistic pattern or item is borrowed.

A recipient or borrowing language is the language 'that borrows linguistic patterns or items from the donor language.

A model is the linguistic pattern or item in the donor language.

A replica is the borrowed pattern or item in the recipient language.

Importation is the term used to describe a replica that is so structurally like the model that the speaker of the donor language can easily recognize it as his own.

Substitution is the term used to describe a replica that is structurally different from the model.

The single most important factor in linguistic borrowing is the bilingual speaker, so that any large scale borrowing will depend on a sizeable, active and influential body of bilinguals. Whether borrowing will come by importation or by substitution depends on the bilingual's level of competence in the two languages involved, especially in the donor language.

In describing this competence, we may assume a tentative scale which will have at one extreme a Yoruba speaker whose competence in English is like or near a native speaker's, and at the other a monolingual Yoruba. We will express the bilingual Yoruba speaker's competence in English in terms of the native English speaker's, and reckon one as a percentage of the other.

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100                      75                      50                      25                      0

Suggested scale of a bilingual's competence in English

We may then arbitrarily fix three other points:  
90-100% for those whose competence is near to or fully

that of the native English speaker. Yoruba speakers in this category are either born and educated in an English speaking country, or they are taken there before they are fixed; 40-60% for those who have secondary education of some kind; below 30% for those who have elementary education.

Whereas those with 90% and above do not usually borrow (they may influence others) because they often do not know Yoruba, those with 70% and above will tend to import, and those below 20% to substitute. It thus appears that the group between 40% and 90% is the most significant. Those with 70% and above borrow profusely because they come into contact with new ideas, notions, and peoples daily. Those below 30% are the greatest popularizers of borrowed patterns, because they form the link between the highly competent bilinguals, and the monolinguals or near monolinguals. The most active sets of people in the latter group are drivers and mammy wagon apprentices who travel between the city and the country, motor mechanics and apprentices, household and office hands, and school pupils below secondary two.

But borrowed patterns are constantly changing form and pronunciation. If monolinguals or near monolinguals become more sophisticated, e.g., by contact with competent bilinguals, or by contact with their own children who have acquired high competence through education, their usage changes, and substitution gradually gives way to importation at least in phonology. This type of change is quickly obvious in names. We knew a man who had no English, and who till the day he heard (tit) said (tisa), but has thereafter adopted the accepted native pronunciation. Examples of this change in pronunciation are:

<i>old</i>	<i>new</i>	<i>old</i>	<i>new</i>
fayamónù	fayamòh, fayamán	tepurúlù	tepurúlù, tepùrl
lébìrà	lébrà	kòlèjì	kòlèj
kòbòdù	kòbòd	pási	pààs
skúlù, sùkùrù	skúl	sàámùèlì	sámùèl, sàámù
tfsà	tfsà	pétérù	pítà, bítà
posófisi	posófis	bátàni	pátàni, pátàn

*Yoruba Phonology:* Although this paper is strictly concerned with an aspect of form, since the only proof of the integration of a borrowed pattern in a language is its pronunciation in the language use of the monolingual, it might be proper here to say something about Yoruba phonology. As a tone language, Yoruba is syllable timed. Syllables therefore tend to receive equal stress. Tone marks operate at the level of the word and are therefore phonemic. On the whole, fully integrated borrowed patterns especially in the usage of monolinguals frequently obey the laws of the recipient language.

There are seven so-called pure vowels, and a wide range of diphthongs. Except for *p* pronounced like a combination of /k/ and /p/, and probably /t/ which most Yoruba women tend to pronounce very much like /ts/, the consonant phonemes are acceptable English equivalents. Apart from /gb/ described as a velar labial, the only clusters found in Yoruba are those that have a nasal as their first phoneme e.g., *gǒngǒ*, *tíntín*, *kẹ̀nbẹ̀*, *gbaṅgba*, *woṅkoko*. It is significant that the type of assimilation which takes place in the environment of /n/ and /k, g, b, p, f/ also takes place in Yoruba.

Initial clusters are limited to those where /n/ or /ɓ/ precedes a consonant and signifies the progressive tense, those where /n/ precedes /k/ to signal negative, and /m/, /b/ to signal 'had I'. Yoruba syllables are not arrested. They are open. So, when lexical items come into the language from languages that have arresting consonants, the monolingual tends to impose the Yoruba pattern on them. Examples of what happens are:

gold ♦ *góòlù*, pan ♦ *páànù*, scarf ♦ *síkáfù/skáfù*, wig ♦ *wígi*, gable ♦ *gébù*, watch ♦ *wọ̀ṣì wọ̀ṣì*. [As stated above these soon become *gòòl*, *páàn*, *skáf*, *wíg*, *géb*, *wọ̀ṣ*, *wọ̀ṣ*.]

Generally, monolingual Yoruba speakers might make the following changes when they borrow directly, or pick up borrowed items: (English vowels and consonants on the left. Yoruba on the right)

## vowels

i	}	↔	i
ɪ	}		
e		↔	ɛ
æ	}	↔	a
ɑ	}		
o	}	↔	ɔ
ɔ	}		
u	}	↔	u
ʊ	}		
ʌ	}	↔	ɛ a ɔ
ɜ	}		
ə		↔	a ɔ
eɪ		↔	e ɛ
əʊ		↔	o
aɪ		↔	ae
aʊ		↔	ao au
ɔɪ		↔	ɔi
eɪ	}	↔	ia
ɛə	}		
eə	}		
əʊ		↔	oo

## consonants

p	↔	kp, p, b, f
t	↔	ts [ladies esp.]
v	↔	f
θ	↔	t
ð	↔	d
z	↔	s ʃ
ʃ	↔	s s
ʒ	↔	s s
tʃ	↔	s s
dʒ	↔	j
j	↔	y

We shall see later the impact of language contact.

### How foreign patterns enter a language:

A linguistic borrower can approach borrowing from one of three angles. He may adopt the donor's word for the objects, things, peoples, places, ideas, notions and concepts, and so produce loan-words which in form and more or less in phonology are usually like the model. How phonologically close to the model a replica can be depends partly on the proficiency of the first borrower, and partly on the stage of the word or pattern's development and integration with the recipient language.

A three-point scale can be introduced in the phonology of loan words. There may be complete or partial or no phonological resemblance between the model and the replica, e.g.,

complete		partial		no	
r	m	r	m	r	m
ìjèndà	agenda (E)	sòffò	surveyor (E)	abùradà	umbrella (E)
wíndò	window (E)	ásìkí	arziki (H)	sfàrìn	steering wheel (E)
kùléri	query (E)	túlásì	tilas (H)	jíà	gear (E)
lòyà	lawyer (E)	ofat(n)	Ovaltine (E)	tábà	tabac (F)
ẹ̀njinnfà	engineer (E)	dańsíkí	yar ciki (H)	aáyèni	iron (E)

A borrower may choose not to accept the donor's names along with the things, notions, ideas, etc. He may choose to adapt or substitute materials existing in his own language. Often, however, the names he adapts or substitutes will be patterned on the donor's usage, or they may show a kind of unconscious translation, or even a description of certain physical qualities. What he produces is a loan shift. Since the recipient language is using its own phonological resources, the question of model semblance is not relevant. We have many examples in the language:

bàtā kònkò knocking shoes; ìwé ẹ̀rí certificate; ilé ìwé school, ilé ẹ̀kọ́ school; ọ̀kọ́ elèèfín – steamship; ọ̀lọ̀pàá an officer who carries a baton; ọ̀kọ́ ẹ̀rù (gustrein) goodstrain; ọ̀kọ́ ojù u rin train

The following seem to be created from the work done, or the impression given, or some sort of physical description:

panópanọ́ firebrigade; woléwolé sanitary inspector; tímùtímù cushion (texture); alùpùpù motor bike (noise); ẹ̀mí mímọ́ holy spirit; wogbówogbó (aşógbó) forestry guard.

Or, he may get names for these objects, people, and concepts for a combination of loanwords and loanshifts, i.e., he may get one part of the pattern from the donor language and the other from his own language. Like loanwords, what results here, and is known as loanblend, can have complete, partial, or no phonological resemblance with the model in the part affected. Examples of loanblends are: onímótò one who owns or drives a vehicle;

oníbàrà begger (H); isátà one who charters a vehicle (E);  
kíá kíá bọ̀s quick moving bus; orí kéréni on the crane.  
i.e., Carter Bridge; onírítírédín one who does tyre retreading;  
oní bǎtrì sǎáj one who re-charges batteries.

'Dì ónò' in 'mǎá fẹ sí ààyè dì ónò' (also called ónò's  
kọ̀nò) would seem to belong here, for although 'the owner'  
is a good English expression, it is not used in the sense  
described above.

There are two words of mixed origin, neither being  
Yoruba, 'Mègǎàdì', i.e., a security officer has as its first  
part Hausa 'mai' one who . . . and English 'guard'. But  
English does not have this usage. The second is 'mèháyà'  
meaning one who hires. 'Me' is Hausa 'mai'. 'Haya' is  
English hire. English has hirer, and one who hires, but in  
Hausa, 'maihaya' would refer to what is hired, and 'dan  
yaha' to the hirer. Apparently, both words are not in gen-  
eral currency among Yoruba people, but a good many  
know them.

The reasons for borrowing are the same for most lan-  
guages. There are the two main ones. The more common  
is the one employed when a language needs to find names  
for new people, places, objects, ideas, notions and con-  
cepts with which it has come into contact. The response to  
such challenges depends on national language policies.  
Certain nations prefer to look into their own language  
resources for solution, but this being a more tedious, usu-  
ally slower process, there is a tendency to borrow not only  
the ideas, notions, etc., but also their names in the donor  
language.

Yoruba can be said to belong to the latter group of  
languages. Scientific and technological ideas, items of  
clothing and jewellery; political, cultural, and ideological  
concepts and their names impinge on Yoruba daily from  
English, French, Arabic, Hausa and Russian. The Yoruba  
people want to know these new things and people; they  
want to become a part of the larger world that shares a  
common language in certain disciplines, and so they  
decide to learn the names of these things. And so, a good  
many new words in the language are adopted in order to  
fulfil certain needs. Two of the latest arrivals are 'Saini'

for Chinese, and 'apolo' for the conjunctivitis of the eye.

The second reason for borrowing is prestige. Where the knowledge of any particular language carries prestige, there will be frequent occasions for borrowing lexical items from it. This probably explains why there is so much use of English lexical items in Yoruba conversations, especially among social climbers.

Hockett identifies three forms of borrowing traceable to the prestige motive. A people will borrow because they admire the donor language, or its speakers. Or they will borrow, not because they admire, but because they want to be identified with those who speak it, and so attract the same recognition. Finally, they may borrow to conform to the majority, who sprinkle their speech with foreign lexical items.

Many people, however, are prompted by another factor. It appears that running through all three reasons, is a feeling of inferiority which at its extreme may well verge on servility. Thus the prestige motive is at its acutest when a speaker prefers borrowed patterns to those which do the same service in his language. He often forgets that Yoruba for instance has *fèrèsé*, *wúrà*, *àga*, *alága*, *pé lèhìn*, *ìgbimò*, *ìpàdè*, but he remembers *wíndò*, *gòólú*, *ṣià*, *ṣiámon*, *lèèti*, *kòmítì*, *míntìnnì*. He complains of the lack of this or that colour, this or that name in Yoruba. Probably the lexical item which is the most apt example of this servility is 'sà'/mà' as in 'mi ì tī rí i sà', 'èmi kò l'ó mú un mà', 'ó tì sà', 'ẹ seé púpò sà', 'ẹ kú itójú wa mà', etc. So much have these two words entrenched themselves in the language that you will find them in the remotest villages of Yoruba speaking people. And some of us who are more fortunate, seem to expect it. Thus a person is rude if he does not use it to conclude his every reply to us. We wonder what our ancestors used!

There are two other manifestations of this prestige motive. A secondary school pupil who wants to show that he comes from a superior school, or that he is more fortunate than the other boy who did not go beyond primary education may scatter English lexical items throughout his conversation like this one:

ìgbà tí n ó fí finis lánòó, ògá tí klós, mo dè nòk títí, kòntò ópùn fún mí. man tó sílèkùn èksplen pé mo léèt, sùgbòn oun máa hẹ́p mí lati àksépt aplikẹ̀sòn mí. Ó wòn mí sá pé tí irú ẹ̀ bá tún hápùn, wòn ò ní kònsídà mí. mo tiẹ̀ rò pé ó máa yáb mí gòn yù no. bọ́t ó kòn ofalúk ẹ̀ ní. Njẹ̀ o jẹ̀ mọ̀. mìì dẹ̀ ẹ̀rúú misték báyen rí o. bot, ara man yẹn mà kùkù balẹ̀ o. oò ní mo lẹ̀kì tí kò sí ògá kejì lẹ̀fís.<sup>1</sup>

A household hand who has spent sometime with educated people in the city, or an apprentice driver who constantly travels between the city and the country must make his speech like his style of walking, dress and hair reflect his contact with a higher standard of living even if he started out as a monolingual. He does not have as much facility as his high school colleague, but he will show that there is a difference between him and the stay-at-homes. He might produce something like:

awọn sisí èkó ò dẹ̀ kun páúdà mọ̀, pańkéèkì pàápàá ò gbesẹ̀ mọ̀; ara bíbó l'ó dẹ̀ tún kòn. wọn fẹ̀ dọ̀yìnbó. tóo bá ríun tó n sọ wọn dà, òmíl a dúdú lápá, a pupa lójú, ẹ̀lòmíràn a dàbí ẹ̀ni tó tí sàlson oşù méta, tó şẹ̀şẹ̀ kúrò loşpítù. wòn ò ní dẹ̀ fẹ̀ kórùn mọ̀, àt'ẹ̀ni tó fáìn, àt'ẹ̀ni tí kò fáìn, wígi nọ kòn ní gbé karí. awọn t'ó sí ní wé gèlè, skáàfù kòn báylí tọn ní pé ní gawán nọ dẹ̀ ní wé. òmíl a kun ètè ẹ̀ a dàbí ère, sùgbòn wọn tún gbé fáşon kòn dé báylí, àdìrẹ̀ ní t'òkùnrin t'òbìnrin wòn ní lò l'ékòó báylí, wọn pèè ní kànpàlà. simí ò gbáfẹ̀ mọ̀, kòşẹ̀tì nìkòn nọ dẹ̀ ní lò.<sup>2</sup>

These two examples point to some of the conditions that favour borrowing. Linguistic and cultural borrowing forms part of the normal life in administrative headquarters, commercial and educational centres, international ports, especially sea ports. This explains why Lagos and Ibadan are two important centres of linguistic borrowing, and why Lagos in particular produces more lexical borrowings than any other town in Yorubaland. Thus, the bilingual in

either of these places is a potential linguistic borrower, directly, or indirectly.

There appears to be a category of linguistic borrowing which is slightly more difficult to place. This is the group where there are both English and Yoruba lexical items for relatively the same or similar things, notions, and ideas in both languages, but where, somehow, each has acquired a specialized meaning. Examples are:

ṣèèni	= any concatenated article of jewellery for the neck or the wrist;
èwòn	= chain, but with the connotation of prison, and handcuffs;
téṣòṅ	= police station for people at Lagos, railway station for others;
ídí ọkọ	= railway station, specifically for people in Lagos, but also any place where one gets transport for long distances;
márédè	= wed legally, according to western practices;
gbéyàwó	= wed according to native law and customs; but it also applies to an arédè wedding;
ríngì	= wedding ring;
òrùka	= any kind of ring including wedding ring;
hònnù	= the honking of a car, lorry, or a motor bike;
fọṅ	= to produce a sound – could be by any type of vehicle, train, steamship, animal, e.g., elephant, or man;
ṣíf	= holder of a local chieftaincy title other than that of the paramount chief. But now that nearly every other person is a chief, it appears that ṣíf has lost the feeling of respect and awe attached to olóyè or ìjòyè;
olóyè (ìjòyè)	= a title holder in the traditional sense;
lídà	= political term, more specifically reserved for a particular individual, otherwise it means leader;

olórí, olùdarì,  
aládarí, ògá = anyone who leads a group – social, professional, or political.

There is a very interesting word which more than any other is tell-tale of the changing role of women in our society. The word is *màdam* or *màdám*, which is used for the lady worker, or the housewife (especially the literate housewife). The lady office worker cannot be called *àntí*, *iyáa* . . ., or *iyá* (which would make her furious). She would certainly resent *sisí* from her messenger even if she tolerates it from a not too over-bearing boss. No one could dream of addressing her by *iyàwó* – she might be a spinster, or a divorcee. And Yoruba respect for those in position of authority would prevent her messengers and typists from calling her by her name. Thus a real need stared the office hand in the face and he imported the neutral, but very appropriate lexical item – *màdám*.

This appears to us a very clever device for solving a 'sociolinguistic' problem, a clever use of language which avoids all that might be unpleasant. But the story of the word does not stop there. The word found its way into the household where the household hand had the problem of how to address this woman who is not a relative. There are sociological reasons why the household hand might find it difficult to know just how to address the housewife. Again, *màdám*, came to the rescue.

But in its short life, it has acquired some connotations. The single girl or divorcee who would want a good time will refer to her only rival and greatest obstacle – the housewife – as *màdám*. The office hand or household hand who has a harsh woman for a master would tend to use the word derisively for this woman.

#### *The effect of linguistic borrowing on Yoruba*

Has linguistic borrowing any influence on the recipient language? Generally, borrowed lexical items, apart from swelling the vocabulary of a language, tend to conform to the existing patterns. But it is hardly possible for any language to have borrowed so extensively as Yoruba has done, and to remain the same. Yoruba phonology, and

grammar (and meaning also) are beginning to show the influence of borrowing.

*Phonology:* Although Yoruba has partially succeeded in imposing its musical patterns on borrowed lexical items, it has also acquired new phonological patterns, and arrangements. Thus /p/ is becoming more fashionable in 'Peter' for those who say *pítà* than the Yoruba /p/. (Some say *bítà*, they will also say *filíbì* and *básítò*, or *fásítò* for Philip, pastor.) Those who say *kápintà* as against *káfintà* and those who say *péntà* tend to use the English /p/.

It appears that nobody today says *ańdérù*, or *pétérù*, *màrítà*, or *rákélì*. The tendency is *ańdérù*, *pítà*, *màtá* or *màtá*, and *résél(ì)*, (*résél* if the /l/ is omitted). But by and large, most monolinguals or near monolinguals still say /f/ for /v/, /s/ for /z/, /s/ or /ʃ/ for /ʒ/ and /tʃ/. And nothing seems to have changed in the vowel system.

It appears that the desire to conform is forcing many to drop the vowel which many borrowed lexical items took on when they ended in closed syllable positions. Thus, many will say *skáf* instead of *síkáàfù* (scarf), *yùsúf* or *jòóséf* instead of *yúsúfù* or *jòséfù* (yusuf, joseph), *wòòs* or *wòs* instead of *wòòsì* or *wòòsì* (watch), *lávál* instead of *lávànì* (lawal), *báá bis* (bar beach).

Another phonological influence is evident in the area of consonant clusters. Here this term ignores the distinction between consonant sequences operating within one syllable, and those that belong to separate syllables. It appears that consonant clusters different from those referred to above are beginning to take their right places in borrowed lexical items. Those that conform to the existing patterns in the language are:

- /mb/ in *plóm̀bà*, *nóm̀bà*, *kám̀bádì*, *áyò̀mbaà*, *bóm̀bù* (plumber, number, carbide, iron-bar, bomb).
- /mp/ *sampépà*, *kòm̀pinnì*, (sand paper, company).
- /nt/ *àkántì*, *lèntì*, *káffntà* (account, lent, carpenter).
- /nd/ *àjéńdà*, *ògáńdì*, *báńdèjì* (agenda, organdie, bandage).

- /nk/ báńkì, pańkékì, áńkò (bank, pancake, encore).
- /ng/ áńgélì, ríngì, gáńgì (angel, ring, gang).
- /nf/ káńfò (camphor).
- /nh/ jańhólù (John Holt).
- /ns/ ìnsóráńsì, àséńsòń, pòńsò (insurance, ascension, puncture).
- /nj/ ẹńjinnfà (engineer).
- /nw/ óńwòd (onward) (trade name of a photographer).

New clusters include the following:

- /fl/ sáflétì (model unknown, probably saflet?)
- /fr/ frútù, gudufràideè, frídòmù (fruit, goodfriday, freedom).
- /ks/ lẹkşò, bọksà (lecture, boxer).
- /dm/ ẹdmọnstà (headmaster).
- /lf/ sólfò (sulphur).
- /pr/ ọprẹşòń tapráétà (operation, typewriter).
- /ps/ ọpşıà (upstairs).
- /sk/ skúlù, skéllì, bískítì (school, scale, biscuit).
- /sf/ sfẹ́tíkù (spectacle – glasses).
- /sm/ wọsmọńù, posmọńù (washerman, postman).
- /sn/ wọsnọńtì (watch night = security officer).
- /sp/ ọspítò (hospital).
- /sb/ àsbẹ́stò (asbestos).
- /sr/ mísrẹ́sì (mistress).
- /st/ dístí wọtà, ẹdmọstà, míńfstà (distilled water, headmaster, minister).
- /tm/ getmọńù (gateman).
- /tr/ tráktò, rítřédìn, ilẹ́tríkì (tractor, retreading, electric).

Clusters with three consonant elements have also been identified:

- /fkl/ şífkłàk (chief clerk).
- /nks/ fọńkşòń (function – a social function).
- /ntr/ kọńtráktò, íntrodọkşòń (contractor, introduction – in courtship).
- /nsw/ kíńswèè (kínsìweè) (Kingsway).
- /str/ gústrèn (goodstrain).

These phonological developments are in keeping with what was mentioned earlier – namely that as the level of sophistication rises, monolinguals tend to *aspire* to native-like reproduction of borrowed items.

### *Effect of borrowing on grammar and meaning*

Because grammar belongs to what has been described as a closed system, it is not usual for lexical borrowing to modify it considerably. It is however possible to introduce certain morphemes into a language through the forms to which they are bound. The following examples have been identified in English words that have come into Yoruba.

bòksà, sàtárà, kòndòktò, rìpíàrà, lébìrà, wọsimọ̀nù, plọ̀mbà, lọ̀yà, lánọ̀, fọ̀kanáésà, rìwáyà, màjìkşòn, fọ̀tografà, dẹ̀rẹ̀bà, káfíntà, mísrẹ̀sì, tíşà, bíríkìlà, méşín, tútò, sọ̀fíò, sígínò, kaşíà, bábà, pánẹ̀(l) bità, gómínà, péntà. (boxer, character, conductor, repairer, labourer, washerman, plumber, lawyer, learner, vulcanizer, rewirer, magician, photographer, driver, carpenter, mistress, teacher, bricklayer, mason, tutor, surveyor, signaller, cashier, barber, panel-beater, governor, painter.)

The agentive suffix has not been applied to any native Yoruba word, nor has there been any instance of using it with any lexical item which did not originally have it in the donor language. True, some of them are used both as nouns and as verbs e.g., *péńtà nọ̀n kò péńtà ilé mi dáadáa; bá mi rìpíàrà aago yí; b'ó o bá lọ̀yà mi, wàà jìyà.*

This is also not productive.

Also, a number of them have loanblend equivalents, e.g., *onífótò, onísààtá, or isàtá, and onímájìkì.* One of them is specifically reserved for buses, especially for the Lagos Municipal Buses – *kòń-dòktò.*

It seems to us that borrowed lexical items pattern fit very neatly into the existing word classes of Yoruba. The bulk of lexical borrowing belongs to the class of words, noun, but recently, there have been borrowings from the class of words, verb e.g..

ó pónsò ká tó dé gárèjì, a sì pọ pọ pọ, kó tó gbéra. bí epo bá ní fèèlì ninu táńkì rẹ, ko lọ fẹ́ fúel pòhù wò. ọlọpáà kọn kò lè dédédé wá sáàjì ilé láì ní wáràntì lówọ. tóo bá fẹ́ kó rí lẹ̀tà yíí gbà kóo rẹ́jístà rẹ.

It appears that Yoruba treats certain English lexical items of foreign origin as if they are singular number nouns e.g., in: *kí ni àjẹ̀ndà ipàdẹ̀ tẹ̀ẹ̀ lọ se? Ó kọ̀n dẹ̀dẹ̀ gbé fọ̀múlà kọn kalẹ̀ sá.* There is no indication of number, but actual cases show that the singular is implied.

Considering the successful way in which English lexical items fit into Yoruba structures, we would like to suggest that the grammatical structures of the two languages are very similar. Examples can be duplicated, but enough of them have been given to support this generalization.

We have observed certain interesting phenomena. Some replicas have acquired meanings which either do not exist in the donor language, or are completely different from those of their models. Examples include:

*bánkà* ni ọ̀rọ̀ yẹ̀n. The model seems to be 'banker', but the sentence means: the matter is a sure horse.  
*àwa ò ní gba sọ̀bọ̀lẹ̀şọ̀n* o. The model is *subordination*; however the sentence means: we will not want nose poking or intrusion.

ó şì *mítà* tọ̀n pátápátá. The model is *metre* – and the item came with the introduction of taxi-cabs that operated on the metre system. The sentence means operating at full force and has a connotation of overdoing.

wọ̀n máa dá şẹ̀rìà fún ọ̀kùnrin yẹ̀n lọ̀la. The model is *saria* (Hausa word for judgment, law), but the meaning is that the man will be punished.

ó gbé *kú* fún mí or ó lo *wèè* fún mí. The models are *key* and *way*. The sentences mean, he deceived or duped me.

ọ̀rọ̀ yẹ̀n tí pónsò o. The model is *puncture*, but the sentence means that the matter has been made public when it ought to have remained a secret.

o kéré sí *nóm̀bà*, ló jókódó jẹ́ ẹ́. The model is *number*, but the sentence means that what the person addressed is attempting is beyond his reach – it is probably contemptuous.

There are cases of wrong formation, or formations that result from structural confusion. Examples are *fayaláùtì* (lighter), *wosnòtìtì* (security officer – one who watches at night, may be a wrong analogy from washerman), *mísrẹ̀sì* (a lady teacher), *dàńsíkí* (yar ciki – /c/ has the sound /t/ in Hausa), and *dàńdógó* which has no model, but probably was formed analogically from *dan* (son of) *dogo* (tall man) since it is a tall garment.

Other patterns which are absent in the donor, but present in Yoruba include:

má ló ra *ribòpò* jẹ́jẹ́ (rebored tyre, i.e., retreaded tyre)  
ó ti *bótà brẹ̀dì* ẹ́ fún ẹ́ kẹ́ (battered your bread)  
*wáyà sí wa ko tó gbéra* (wire us)  
ó n sọ *gírámò* (he is talking grammar)  
yé *lọyà àgbà* ẹ́ (to lawyer – meaning to argue with)

It is significant that there are certain expressions which show evidence of the English influence, because in Yoruba there are no traditional patterns. And, although a colleague has argued that there is nothing unusual about them, we would like to point to their development. Examples are:

ó n *gàrí* mi ni? (does he give me *gari* = feed me?)  
*jòpò pátàkì* ara ẹ́ (respect yourself, make yourself important)  
*ìgbà tí wọ̀n ò wèrè*, tí wọ̀n ò *rìndìn* (mad, dense)

There is a general tendency to shorten long words, especially names, e.g., *sídí*, *múlí*, *súlè*, *làtìsì*, *sàám*, *màékì*, *sọlọ*, *ẹ̀ẹ̀dì* for *sidikat*, *mulikat*, *sulaiman*, *Samuel*, *Michael*, *Solomon*, *headmaster*.

#### *An overview of borrowing in Yoruba:*

It is quite possible to argue that borrowing is not as important as we have tried to make it out to be, and that

much of what we have listed under borrowing is found in the expressions belonging to a certain class of people. It is indeed possible to dismiss what we regard as the important rôle of this aspect of linguistics. We would concede much of the first to those who hold that view, but would like to add that borrowing has got to begin with one group of people, if it is going to take place at all. We believe that, because of their association with office hands and household hands, those who are thought to be a small minority in the Yoruba society might come to be those through whom most borrowed patterns obtain in the language.

We indicated earlier that this group constitutes the section of society called 'competent bilinguals', the group who can carry out the unconscious contrastive linguistic analysis that wholesale borrowing might involve. People in this group stand in the strategic position that will lead to direct contact with the ideas, peoples, places, concepts, and notions from which names will pass into Yoruba. They are, if you like at the upper end of the linguistic ladder, the lower end of which is occupied by the household hands, and office hands referred to above. What they say, therefore, has greater significance than we seem prepared to accept.

Besides, some of the patterns that people feel uneasy about, because they come from highly educated people, are not quite as remote as they are made to be. The sentence quoted above:

ó ti bótà brédì ẹ́ fún ẹ́ kẹ́.

is hardly above the comprehension capacity of any Yoruba speaker. And the following cannot be strange to Yoruba people, if they are used in the appropriate places and to the right people:

etí kótà ní mo tí ra ọ́pá méjì léèsì ati kótà.  
 trósà ní mo fẹ́ fí wúúlù mí rọ́n o.  
 sílìn, sílìn agolo tímátì o, sílè kọ́n, sílè kọ́n ní o.  
 kó tó tú ragilétò yẹ́n, kọ́kọ́ yọ́ wótà hòsì òkè ati tìsàlẹ́.  
 kò s'ẹ́ni t'ó tún lẹ́ mú mí fódót fún ọ́nọ́rẹ̀bù yẹ́n mọ́.  
 ọ́mọ́ mí í pásì, ó gba fọ́ọ́s ní kílàsì ẹ́.

e jẹ òwòrùn ọmọ yí (de-worm), ohun tí wọ́n fí ń kúù ènìyọ̀n l'oun ẹ̀ yẹ̀n (coup), ẹ̀ ọ́ ń jọ̀mp? kó sá máá ró̀l.

. . . may be limited in currency now, but surely nobody in the Oyo State today can say that he does not know (even if he does not use) the following expressions: àsikò ìmájẹ̀nsì, kófù, ọ̀prèsọ̀n wẹ̀tì ẹ̀, a ẹ̀nkuá̀rì síí, kúèrì tún dẹ̀.

Again most people would know what is meant by the following:

tẹ̀ẹ̀ bá ti gbóhùn aropílẹ̀, kẹ̀ ték kọ̀fá, torípé ọ́ le ju bọ̀m̀bù.

ọ̀mọ̀ mi ti lọ sí frọ̀ntì, ò pọ̀sù sí wa, ọ́ dẹ̀ tún fódòmù lati bini.

kọ̀mìsọ̀nnò ti lọ sí tọ̀.

If, as we have tried to argue, many of these expressions have become part of the current inventory of a sizeable section of the Yoruba-speaking people, we do not hesitate to conclude that what today may seem neologisms, and consequently exclusively available to the very highly educated, will soon spread to the majority, and will be acceptable within common usage.

For these reasons, we maintain that borrowing is not as unimportant in Yoruba as some have tried to make out. We would say, on the contrary, that it is futile to discourage it as this would waste energy; besides if we want to enrich our language, we may have to translate, borrow, adapt and adopt names for ideas, notions and concepts from as many languages as we possibly can. As we have said above, the alternative to this is tedious and much slower. Science and technology from a unit to which we must direct our attention, and we can approach it best by importing the terms universally applied to it. Surely, the competent bilingual has an important rôle to play here since he is the only one who can give these terms a relatively model-like reproduction.

What we need to do is to organize borrowing in such a way that only the patterns we lack will be acceptable.

Thus we would be able to develop and improve the language, and enrich it with notions, ideas, concepts, and objects that would reflect the views of a wider world. This is just why we do not subscribe to the idea of 'ojúlówó èdè', if it excludes borrowing.

Even those who hold this view are not often consistent. We recall some one who advocated that we should use 'ojúlówó Yorùbá' at home, but in the office 'ati ní'bi eré, dúnfà tàbí fàáji', apparently forgetting that 'dúnfà' comes from the Hausa word 'daniya', world. We would rather agree with De Quincey, who says: 'Whereas our tongue is mixed, it is no disgrace, whenas all the tongues of *Europe* doe participate inter-changeably the one of the other, and in the learned tongues, there hath been like borrowing one from another.'

At this very time the question of borrowing has great relevance. A good many of us are committed to the noble, but not quite popular idea of giving children their first education in their mother tongue. The University of Ife is mounting a pilot project which is intended to prove, among other things, that a child who receives his elementary education in his mother tongue will not necessarily do worse later on than his colleague who was educated solely in English from the first day at school, or his colleague who learns under the present un-uniform system.

The proposal is a sound one in many respects. But to make it effective, the language of instruction must be able to do for the child what English does for him at the same level of education today. It must be a free medium for all school subjects, it must be prepared to give the notions of elementary science - so much in demand in the elementary schools of today. And this is why Yoruba must be enriched, and very quickly too. Importation seems to us preferable to indifference; for later we would find that we have to re-teach what those who are less competent have had to borrow. For, whether we like it or not, lexical borrowing is a natural linguistic development and will continue to occur.

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# 'Stress' in Yoruba

by

Adebisi Afọlayan

## *Introduction*

It is the purpose of this paper to show that without terminological ambiguity there is neither phonetic 'stress' nor its phonological counterpart 'salience' in Yoruba. Rather, what is found in Yoruba is phonetic 'prominence' together with its phonological counterpart 'accent'. But the terms 'stress', 'salience', 'prominence', and 'accent' have not been clearly distinguished in any existing literature on the subject. Hence the paper begins with a terminological discussion which may to some extent contribute to a general phonetic or phonological theory.

The main argument is presented in three stages:

- (1) a short review of existing literature on 'stress' in Yoruba, (2) a report of an experiment on the subject, and (3) a suggested treatment of 'stress' in Yoruba.

## *Different Uses of 'stress'*

Since the term 'stress' has not been uniformly or consistently used in the existing literature on phonetics and phonology, it is necessary to begin this paper with some terminological resolution. On the one hand, such a resolution will contribute to the clarification of the issues being raised, and on the other, it will do away with the misconception that the whole argument on Yoruba 'stress' may be a sort of terminological quibble.

There are three major dimensions of linguistic description along which 'stress' is usually employed: level, category, and unit rank.

*Level:* On the dimension of level, there are references to phonetic as well as phonological 'stress'. To make matters

more complicated, writers<sup>1</sup> do not always make it clear whether their 'stress' is phonetic or phonological. Typical statements on 'stress' as a phonetic term are:

- (1) *Stress* is a generic term for the relatively greater force exerted in the articulation of part of an utterance.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) When a sound or syllable is stressed, it is being uttered with more muscular effort, increased air-pressure, and greater amplitude of vibration.<sup>3</sup>

Also, typical phonological (phonemic) statements are:

- (3) The present study assumes that in English, stress is phonemic, and that there are four different phonemic levels of stress, in descending order: primary /'/, secondary / /, tertiary / \/, and weak / /.<sup>4</sup>
- (4) The stress phonemes of English are four, though it is probable that there were only three in Old English.<sup>5</sup>
- (5) Distinctions of stress must therefore be included in the inventory of the English phonological system, and in a few word pairs . . . difference of stress placement alone may differentiate lexically distinct forms.<sup>6</sup>

To make for clarity and consistency, in this paper, following suggestions by Abercombie, Halliday and Albrow we shall use 'stress' as a phonetic term, keeping 'salience' as its phonological counterpart.

*Category:* Here the concern is with the interchange in usage between 'stress' on the one hand, and 'accent' and 'prominence' on the other. Typical statements in the existing literature are:

- (6) Whereas the term 'stress' refers to the relative prominence given to syllables within a word or sentence, the term 'pitch' refers . . .<sup>7</sup>
- (7) One group is stressed ('accented' – is a familiar alternative term (on the first syllable and includes such words as *going*, *spoken*, *phoneme*).<sup>8</sup>
- (8) It is important not to confuse *stress* with *prominence* . . . The prominence of a syllable is its

degree of general distinctness, this being the combined effect of the tamber, length, stress and (if voiced) intonation of the syllabic sound. The term 'stress', as it is used here, refers only to the degree of force of utterance and is independent of length and intonation though it may be, and often is, combined with these.<sup>9</sup>

- (9) Accent: the means whereby a word in an utterance is made prominent. Accent usually entails the simultaneous occurrence of pitch change and of a strong stress on the appropriate syllable of the word . . .<sup>10</sup>
- (10) The syllable or syllables of a word which stand out from the remainder are said to be accented, to receive the *accent* . . . Any or all of four factors – stress, pitch, quality, quantity – may render a syllable more prominent than its neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

Again, to make for clarity and consistency, the three terms 'stress', 'prominence' and 'accent' will be distinguished throughout. 'Stress' and 'prominence' will be regarded as phonetic categories and the distinction between them will be along the lines suggested, in the quotations from Jones (compare Robins), Gimson, O'Connor and Arnold above. 'Accent' will then be kept as a phonological category, the counterpart of phonetic 'prominence'.

*Unit Rank:* The inconsistent reference to 'stress' which is of interest here pertains to its position in the phonological rank-scale.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that inconsistency is greatest in this dimension of the linguistic description of 'stress'. Some of the references are to units on levels other than phonological units. There are references to different grammatical units such as the word as in 'word stress' and the sentence as in 'sentence stress'.<sup>13</sup> Some references are even semantic as in 'sense groups'.<sup>14</sup>

The first step towards consistency on this dimension is to express all appropriate references to grammatical and semantic levels in phonological terms. With reference to English, the phonological units suggested by Halliday<sup>15</sup> are the phoneme, the syllable, the foot and the tone group.

And with reference to Yoruba the present writer has elsewhere<sup>16</sup> suggested the phoneme, the syllable, the tone contour-group and the range. In English, 'word'<sup>17</sup> can therefore be replaced by 'syllable' or 'foot', depending on the co-text of what is being referred to; and 'sentence' can be replaced by 'tone group'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Yoruba, 'word' can be replaced by 'syllable'; and 'sentence', by 'tone contour-group'.

This takes us to the second step necessary to clear up the terminological muddle. Besides the association of 'stress' with different grammatical units, the references above (particularly quotations (2), (3), (4) and (6) show that 'stress' may be described as belonging to the phoneme [sound], the syllable [word-stress] and the tone group [sentence-stress]).

Of the three units, the phoneme calls for a special comment because, unlike the other two units with only one sense respectively, it is related to 'stress' in two different senses. The sense in which 'stress' is related to the phoneme in quotation (2) is different from that of quotation (3) or (4). The relationship between 'stress' and the phonological linguistic unit in quotation (2) is like that of the two other units (quotations (6), (7), (8), (9) and (10)). But it seems that in this sense, 'stress' would not be assigned to the phoneme unit.<sup>19</sup> 'Sound' as used here in quotation (2) is assigned to the phoneme unit simply because the term is usually meant to refer to the minimum segment assignable to the phoneme unit rather than to a higher unit. However, it seems clear that such an assignment really arises from an interpretation of non-rank-bound (i.e. non-hierarchical) description in terms of rank-bound (i.e. hierarchical) one. This is surely a case where a sound constitutes a syllable (compare 'syllabic sound' in quotation (8) and the linguistic stretch of which 'stress' forms a part belongs to the higher unit of syllable rather than the lower unit of phoneme. This leaves us with the sense of quotations (3) and (4). In this sense, the relationship between 'stress' and the phoneme unit is different from the relationship obtaining between 'stress' and the two other units of syllable and tone group (see quotation

(6), for example). In the case of the phoneme (quotation (3) or (4)) 'stress' constitutes the unit, whereas in the other cases 'stress' is simply one of the many component features of the unit respectively. Since not all linguists subscribe to the idea of referring to 'stress' as a phoneme and since, even more important, those who do so have to recognize 'stress' as a suprasegmental (generally assignable to the phoneme unit), in this discussion, which insists on terminological consistency and clarity, it is best not to assign 'stress' to the phoneme unit.

Thus only two phonological units, to which 'stress' may be assigned, are left: the syllable and the tone group. The crucial question now is whether there are two distinct types of 'stress' assignable to the two units respectively. And the answer to the question seems to have been adequately provided by this statement of Robins:

- (11) Two fairly distinct types of stress . . . may be seen in language. As a general and perhaps universal process, the whole or any part of an utterance may be stressed, that is to say uttered more loudly and with more forceful articulation for the purpose of emphasis, so as virtually to compel the hearer to take more notice of it than to the rest . . . Separable from this is the use of differences of stress in normal speech as an inherent part of the articulation processes of particular languages, but not of all languages.<sup>20</sup>

This means that both units are distinct and necessary in general descriptive linguistic theory, since Robin's first type of 'stress' is identifiable with the type usually assigned to the higher unit of tone group, and his second type is identifiable with the type usually assigned to the lower unit of syllable. What now remains to be done in relation to the problem under examination is to resolve the terminological ambiguity in the use of 'stress' for the two distinct phonetics entities just described and assigned to two different phonological units. Fortunately the two phonetic entities are identical with what have earlier been referred to as 'stress' and 'prominence'. The solution

proposed for terminological clarity and consistency at that stage is also applicable here. The only addition arising from the discussion in the paragraphs immediately above is that 'stress' will now be regarded as a phonetic category assignable to the syllable rank, and 'salience' will be its phonological counterpart; 'prominence' will be regarded as a phonetic category assignable to the tone group<sup>21</sup> rank, and 'accent' will be its phonological counterpart.

*Review of the existing Literature on 'Stress' in Yoruba*

As far as is known, only two scholars have appeared in print on this subject: Siertsema<sup>22</sup> and Babalola.<sup>23</sup> Siertsema has suggested that the element of stress exists in Yoruba and that it is very 'closely bound up with the tonal arrangement'. Babalola agrees that there is stress, that 'there is a definite tendency to connect stress with a higher tone', but that the Yoruba stress does not yield 'rhythms which are rigid and regular, such as iambic, trochaic, anapaestic' as Siertsema implies.

He goes on to say:<sup>24</sup>

- (12) Stress is sometimes taken as the articulatory and auditory counterpart of acoustic intensity alone. But Daniel Jones has made the point, with reference to English, that '. . . much of what is commonly thought of as "stress" is in reality "prominence" effected by means other than stress . . .' by subtle degrees of vowel and consonant length and by intonation.<sup>25</sup>

and declares that his definition of stress corresponds to the one used in a wider sense by Daniel Jones. He observes that there is possible variation in the positions of the stress-point according to whether the same 'knowledgeable person reads . . . or hears'.<sup>26</sup> He significantly concludes that

- (13) The stress that can be heard in Yoruba is not inherent in particular words or syllables but is a function of the rhythm-unit, whether this rhythm-unit is a sentence itself or combined with one or more other rhythm-units to form a sentence.<sup>27</sup>

## *A Report of an Experiment on the Perception of 'Stress' in Yoruba*

### **Aims**

The aims of this experiment were to show:

- (a) how far native speakers of Yoruba perceive the occurrence of stress in their language, and
- (b) how far such perception by native speakers bears any correlation to the degree of their sophistication in English phonetics and linguistics.

### *Participants*

Seven people participated in the experiment, six native speakers of Yoruba and one native speaker of English acting as control. Thus these seven represented different degrees of sophistication in English linguistics and phonetics. They were:

1. Professor A. C. Gimson, Professor of Phonetics at University College London.
2. MR. M. A. Adesiyun, a trade officer at the Nigerian Embassy and an English Honours graduate of London University.
3. Mr. S. L. Bọlaji, an education attache at the Nigerian Embassy and a graduate of London University who had taken English as one of his subjects.
4. Mr. O. Fafowora, an education attache at the Nigerian Embassy and a History Honours graduate of London University.
5. Dr. P. O. Adeoye, a medical officer in N. Nigeria in U.K. for a post-graduate diploma course.
6. Mr. J. A. Agbeyọ, a financial executive officer at the Nigerian Embassy.
7. Mr. Şupọ Ogunbunmi, a post-graduate research student in Physics holding London B.Sc. (Honours) and M.Sc. degrees.

### *Procedure*

The Yoruba material used is a recorded conversation between two friends (who prefer to remain anonymous) on the military coup that had just taken place in Nigeria

(January 15, 1966). This subject of conversation was chosen because it was topical and because politics quickly bestirs people's emotions and consequently produces spontaneous natural speech. The recording took place in the Phonetics Laboratory of S.O.A.S. under the guidance of Mr. J. Carnochan, and a technician Mr. A. W. Stone. It was played to each of the seven participants in his own room (office or home). Each of the participants was briefed about what to do. Then each meaningful stretch was played as many times as the participants desired while he marked on a type-script the occurrence of what he would call stress in what he had heard.

A relevant part of the typescript, with the markings of each person indicated in their respective numbers above reads as follows:

A: Kíni ng tẹ̀ rò nípa àwọn ológún tí wọn tiẹ̀ gba ijọba lówó

àwọnin òṣẹ̀lú wa lẹ̀nu jọ mélò í?

B: Á! ọ̀rọ̀ àwọn ológún bá mi ní kàyẹ̀fì. Miò rò tẹ̀lẹ̀tẹ̀lẹ̀

wí pé irú ijọba Naijíríà le ṣubú lulẹ̀ báun. Sùgbọ̀n àkókò

tí an tó nùun.

A: Àkókò tí tani?

B: Tí jọ́ . . . tòmọ̀ogun láti gbà jọ́ba. Ng tí jọ́ba níṣe ò tẹ̀

ni kankan lórùn. Gbogbo èyí tá nwi kára òde le ba wí

pé àláfá m̀bẹ̀ nílẹ̀ wa ni. Àwọn ológún wọn ri pé nkan

ò lọ̀ dẹ̀dẹ̀. Àwa gan nà ti ọ̀n njọ́ba lé lórí a mò pé nkan

ò lọ̀ dẹ̀dẹ̀. A kàn ǹbà sírí ara wa ni. O dàbí nkan tí ójẹ̀

pé Ọlọ̀n ló fí ránṣẹ́ gan láti gba ogbo àwọ̀n. ènyàn lẹ́  
 1 2 123456 1 1 7  
 lówọ̀ àwọ̀n ọ̀ṣẹ̀lń wa tan fẹ́ sọra wọ̀n dọba.  
 1 1

A: Ọ̀ṣẹ̀lù àbí kí lẹ́ peun: ọ̀ṣẹ̀lù àbósẹ̀bú?  
 1246 1 1 1

B: Ọ̀ṣẹ̀lù: ọ̀ṣẹ̀lù wa.  
 126 12

1. Professor A. C. Gimson	60
2. Mr. M. A. Adesiyán	28
3. Mr. S. L. Bọlají	6
4. Mr. O. Fafowora	8
5. Dr. P. O. Adeoye	4
6. Mr. J. A. Agbeyọ	10
7. Mr. S. Ogunbunmi	9

### Observations

Professor A. C. Gimson's markings showed a high correlation with the perception of Yoruba high tone as an occurrence of 'stress'. Consequently he recognized the highest number of 'stresses'(60). He alone perceived the deliberate use by one of the recorded speakers of what he regarded as similar to 'reinforced stress in English', all others failed to perceive it as a stress, let alone a reinforced one. Next to him in recognizing a numerous occurrence of stress was Mr. Adesiyán who recognized 28. All others had recognized only between 4 and 10 (average 8). It is interesting to note that only 8 speech elements (word or syllables) can be taken as being generally recognized as locations of 'stress'. An element is regarded as being generally recognized if four or more participants mark it.

### Conclusion

It would seem that the stress perceived in Yoruba is unlike the one in English. Siertsema's recognition in Yoruba of stress patterns – like iambic and trochaic, for

example – similar to those found in English – is not borne out by the experiment. Even Mr. Adesiyan, the Yoruba native speaker who had the highest sophistication in English phonetics among the Yoruba participants in the experiment, noticed only half of what Professor Gimson perceived; he did not even point out as a 'stress' what Professor Gimson has called 'a reinforced stress'. And it seems that the more the Yoruba speaker can perceive stress in English, the more he can perceive it in Yoruba if he is called upon to do so. Professor Gimson's performance shows that the highest pitches in any environment are equated with stress. These usually expound Yoruba high tones, but they may also expound mid tones if surrounding ones expound low tones. This seem to explain why Yoruba speakers normally use high tones instead of stress in their English speech.

#### *Suggested Treatment of 'Stress' in Yoruba*

Two basic suggestions on 'stress' are made for Yoruba, and both in reply to the questions 'Is there any "stress" in Yoruba?' and 'where is it located in the phonological hierarchy?'

#### *Any 'Stress'?*

If the earlier suggestion that a consistent distinction<sup>28</sup> should be made between 'stress' (being associated with normal rhythmic patterns) and 'prominence' (referring to the phenomenon of drawing attention to a particular part in an utterance for special mention by making it prominent) is put into practice, then one can conclude that there is no 'stress' (together with its phonological counterpart 'salience') in Yoruba. What is found, rather, is 'prominence' (together with its phonological counterpart 'accent').

This suggestion seems to agree with the findings of Babalola referred to earlier. The 'stress' heard by him in Yoruba (quotation (13)) is surely Robin's first type (quotation (11)). And it is for this reason that the term 'prominence' has been suggested. Its appropriateness to the phenomenon is supported by the concept of 'prominence'

in existing literature (for example, quotations (8), (10) and 12)). Therefore the adoption of the suggestion would not lead to any terminological ambiguity or inconsistency.

*The Location of 'Prominence' in the Yoruba Phonological Hierarchy:*

Babalola (quotation (13) above) has suggested that his 'stress' (now 'prominence') 'is a function of the rhythm-unit whether this rhythm-unit is a sentence itself or combined with one or more other rhythm-units to form a sentence.' This suggestion is not entirely acceptable, partly because the first part assigns 'prominence' to the rhythm-unit and partly because it (or any other relevant statement by Babalola) ignores the matter of phonological hierarchy of Yoruba.

What in fact is the 'rhythm-unit' in Yoruba? Where is it located in the phonological hierarchy of Yoruba and where is 'prominence' (together with its phonological counterpart 'accent') to be found? In our opinion, the normal rhythmic patterns of Yoruba can be seen in terms of the tones in our language, tones being properties of the unit syllable.<sup>29</sup> If the second part of Babalola's suggestion were accepted, it would follow that 'prominence' cannot be 'a function of the rhythm-unit'.<sup>30</sup> In fact, if that second part of the suggestion were to be interpreted in terms of the earlier discussion, it would mean that 'prominence' is a property of the tone contour-group. And this is what is being proposed here, that 'prominence' (together with its phonological counterpart 'accent') is realized in the tone contour-group. The tone contour-group correlates with the information unit in the utterance. Thus phonetic 'prominence' (together with phonological 'accent') is a phenomenon focusing attention on special information points in a speech and its occurrence is at information-focus points.<sup>31</sup> In a conversation, as the experiment reported above has shown, there could be several tone contour-groups without any occurrence of phonetic 'prominence' (phonological 'accent'). 'Prominence' ('accent') is commonly used for emphasis in the options 'new' and 'given' within the theme system complex<sup>33</sup> of Yoruba. These options of 'new' and

'given' in Yoruba, as in English, are options on the part of the speaker, not determined by the textual or situational environment; what is new is in the last resort what the speaker chooses to present as new, and predictions from the discourse have only a high probability of being fulfilled.<sup>34</sup> This is the reason why the position of 'prominence' ('accent') in a Yoruba discourse changes from speaker to speaker, a situation noted by Babalola and referred to above.

### *Practical Applications*

A useful way to end this paper would be a short statement on the practical applications of its main suggestions, which refer to two principal issues namely linguistic terminology and the description of Yoruba. And the applications themselves belong in two important areas: general linguistics and applied linguistics.

In the area of general linguistics, one sees three practical results. First, an adherence to the suggestions given in this paper would end the prevailing terminological ambiguity in respect of 'stress'. In the existing literature there is systematic and unsystematic ambiguity in the use of 'stress' - systematic in the sense that two distinct phenomena are recognized on two different planes and respectively given consistently the same name by some linguists (for example, R. H. Robins, quoted earlier), unsystematic in the sense that in some writings 'stress' may mean any of four things without any order. With the adoption of the suggestions made above, four terms would be used consistently and unambiguously: 'stress' and 'prominence' to refer to the two separate phenomena respectively in the syllable and the tone group (intonation group, if Fudge (1969) were adopted generally) ranks, and 'salience' and 'accent' to refer to the phonological counterparts of the phonetic phenomena. Secondly, this would ensure a more adequate description of Yoruba. For example, Yoruba would become a language that has 'prominence' rather than 'stress'. Thirdly, one would move towards a more adequate general linguistic typology. Undoubtedly, since a sound knowledge of the relationship

between 'stress', 'prominence', and 'pitch' (phonological 'salience', 'accent' and 'tone'<sup>35</sup>) would thereby be established, it would follow, for example, that the similarity or otherwise between any two languages (say English and Yoruba or Yoruba and Hausa) regarding 'stress' and 'prominence', would be easy to detect.

In the area of applied linguistics, particularly in the field of language teaching, with special reference to the teaching of Yoruba to speakers of other languages or the teaching of any other language to the speakers of Yoruba, two useful practical results are to be used. First, since a more adequate contrastive descriptive linguistics of Yoruba and the other language would now obtain, undoubtedly the learner's linguistic problem in respect of 'stress' ('salience'), 'prominence' ('accent') and 'pitch' ('tone') would be better determined. Thus, for example, with reference to 'stress' and 'tone', the nature of the problems met by the Yoruba learner of English or the English learner of Yoruba would show clearly. Consequently the place of 'stress' in the language (course) syllabus or scheme of work would be properly determined. Secondly, what the learner needs to do exactly in order to produce deviant forms in the target language, and what he needs to do instead, would be highlighted. Hence, appropriate methodology for the language would be promoted or facilitated.

### *Footnotes*

1. See, for example W. G. Moulton (1966), pp.60 and 61.
2. R. H. Robins (1964), p.109.
3. A. C. Gimson (1962), p.24.
4. A. K. Taha (1960) reprinted in H. B. Allen (1964), p.130.
5. H. Whitehall and A. A. Hill in H. B. Allen (1964), p.489.

- <sup>6</sup>. R. H. Robins (1964). p.135.
- <sup>7</sup>. W. G. Moulton (1966), p.61.
- <sup>8</sup>. H. A. Gleason (1961), p.40.
- <sup>9</sup>. D. Jones (1957), Section 912, p.246, cf. R. H. Robins (1964 pp.108-109. '(Stress) . . . is to be distinguished from prominence . . .').
- <sup>10</sup>. J. D. O'Connor and G. F. Arnold (1961), p.271.
- <sup>11</sup>. A. C. Gimson (1962), pp.216 and 217.
- <sup>12</sup>. M. A. K. Halliday (1961).
- <sup>13</sup>. W. G. Moulton (1966), p.60.
- <sup>14</sup>. J. D. O'Connor and G. F. Arnold (1961), p.4.
- <sup>15</sup>. M. A. K. Halliday (1963) cf. Halliday (1967). It should be noted that in the 1969 October issue of the *Journal of Linguistics*, V, 2, E. C. Fudge in a paper entitled '*Syllables*' proposed a phonological hierarchy of segments, syllables, words, phrases, and intonation groups. It must be emphasized that his *word* and *phrase* are distinct from homonymous grammatical units. See in particular page 259.
- <sup>16</sup>. A. Afolayan (1968), p.159.
- <sup>17</sup>. If E. C. Fudge (1969) were to be adopted, the phonological 'word' could still be retained.
- <sup>18</sup>. This is comparable to the 'intonation group' of E. C. Fudge (1969).
- <sup>19</sup>. This is comparable to the 'segment' unit of E. C. Fudge (1969).
- <sup>20</sup>. Robins (1964). p.109.
- <sup>21</sup>. This is comparable to the 'intonation group' of E. C. Fudge (1969).
- <sup>22</sup>. Siertsema (1959), Babalola (1964) says of her: 'It appears that she had been seriously handicapped in her investigations by the fact that she has had to rely on informants since Yoruba is not her mother tongue.' Babalola's point here is apposite, as it is for the other aspects of phonology. The experiment of the subject of stress reported later in this paper confirms that each person hears stress according to its use in his own language or the language with which he is conversant. Mr. Adesiyani, one of the people who took part in the experiment, suggested that he suspected his own awareness on stress in Yoruba conversation to be greater than that of a person with less English. This was proved true by Professor Gimson's performance and that of less linguistically sophisticated Yoruba speakers.
- <sup>23</sup>. Babalola (1964).
- <sup>24</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.35.
- <sup>25</sup>. D. Jones, *Ibid.*, Section 915.
- <sup>26</sup>. The experiment reported below confirms that there is variation between one listener or speaker and the other - the same listener may even revise his opinion several times. Note also that Yoruba, in any case, is syllable-timed rather than stress-timed, as in English.
- <sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.36.
- <sup>28</sup>. This is a useful distinction, already suggested by phoneticians at University College, London. See, for example, O'Connor and Arnold (1961), and D. Jones (1957). cf. quotation (10).
- <sup>29</sup>. See Afolayan (1968) for a discussion of this point.
- <sup>30</sup>. It should be noted that there is nothing in Yoruba comparable to 'foot' in English.

- <sup>31</sup>. The term 'information - focus point' is as used by Halliday (1967).
- <sup>32</sup>. As many as seven tone contour-groups are found in the experiment; that is, where all participating native speakers perceived none.
- The seven tone contour groups stretch over three different sentences containing over forty words. Thus though this suggested Yoruba 'prominence' ('accent') and English stress are comparable, they are not equivalents. 'Prominence' is the equivalent of the marked tonicity of the English tone group as described by Halliday (1963).
- <sup>33</sup>. See A. Afọlayan (1968) for a short description.
- <sup>34</sup>. Halliday (1967), p.211.
- <sup>35</sup>. Once again, a terminological distinction is being maintained between 'pitch' and 'tone'. 'Pitch' is the phonetic phenomenon and 'tone' is the phonological counterpart. See A. Afọlayan (1968) for a discussion of this distinction.

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# *Thoughts on a Yoruba Monolingual Dictionary*

by

**S. Ayotunde Ekundayo**

This paper sets out to examine some of the problems that arise before and during the compilation of a Yoruba monolingual dictionary<sup>1</sup>. Since at present there are Yoruba bilingual dictionaries (e.g. English/Yoruba and Yoruba/English), one might be tempted to assume that they do the work of a monolingual one, and render its compilation an unnecessary task. Although we consider it a wrong assumption, we shall not defend the necessity for a monolingual dictionary. Rather, we shall concentrate on the discussion of some specific problems of content and methodology. Content is a problem because the decisions taken on what to include or exclude would have far-reaching effect not only on the volume, but also on the significance and life of the dictionary. Methodology no less is a problem, since recently, in Yoruba linguistic scholarship, attempts to reform the existing orthography has led to a lack of uniformity in the representation of Yoruba lexical items in all published works. Not only does this lack of uniformity create very difficult problems of choice for the Yoruba lexicographer, but also the type of solution to orthographic problems determines the degree of adequacy of presentation of Yoruba at the lexicological level.

The question of content will be based partly on a prescription set down by Carroll for what should make up a lexicon, and partly on some other factors not mentioned by Carroll, but nonetheless peculiar to a Yoruba monolingual dictionary. After this there will follow a discussion of three methodological problems, those of glossing, of divi-

sion into form classes, and of orthographic representations in dictionary entries. Very little will be said about the first, since it is not peculiar to Yoruba but common to all monolingual dictionaries. The second and third will be discussed in some details – the second, because of the task it creates for the Yoruba lexicographer, and the third, because of the possibility of using lexicographical procedures in order to solve orthographic problems.

A condition set down by Carroll on lexicography makes the problem of content central to a Yoruba monolingual dictionary. According to him,

*lexicography*, in linguistic analysis, is the listing of all meaningful elements in the language system, with statements of their meanings or verbal equivalences . . . the meaningful elements of a language include not only its words, such as are listed in dictionaries, but also all the morphemes which are not words, and in fact all other elements or grammatical features which carry some kind of meaning (such as gender, tense, case, aspect, etc.). A truly adequate lexicon of a language would have to list even the stress and intonation patterns of a language, together with an account of their meanings or . . . their conditional meanings (Carroll 1953 p.24).

Because of his excessive requirements, a dictionary that fulfils all the demands made by Carroll is yet to be produced.<sup>2</sup> Although many dictionaries gloss prefixes and suffixes with a morphemic status (thereby doing more work than the dictionaries of words in the Carroll quotation), it is not certain that there exist some which actually account for all the morphemes of any language. Besides, it would be very difficult for dictionaries to account for the conditional meanings of the stress pattern of a language. Nevertheless, a Yoruba monolingual dictionary could select some, but not all, of the elements suggested by Carroll at the content level, particularly the Yoruba language-specific problems which would normally determine points that are peculiar to the monolingual dictionary.

Thus, one could first decide whether some categories such as stress appear in Yoruba. If there is evidence that Yoruba has no significant stress pattern (as argued by Afọlayan [1968]), the lexicon will not have to account for the conditional meanings of categories that are non-existent. Although intonation patterning occurs in Yoruba, lexicographical procedures are not suited to the representation of intonation features and the glossing of their conditional meanings. If statements on intonation are considered important, an appendix of the intonation systems of Yoruba can easily be added. As for problem of the glossing of morphemes which are not words, Yoruba seems to have few of these, since in Yoruba most morphemes are words. The problem of having morphemes that are not words is not a serious one since such morphemes, e.g. the nominalization formative *a* of *a-pàniyàn* (murderer) from *pàniyàn* (to murder), or the abstract noun derivation formative *i* for *ifẹ* (love) from *fẹ* (to love) are a few. Hence, the monolingual dictionary can be expected to include such morphemes or formatives in its list of content.

Moreover, some of the morphemes which are not words are actually 'grammatical features' which carry some kind of meaning as in the case of *da* (Delanọ 1969: I, 67 the 14th gloss) (although *da* is a word) so that the grammatical elements criterion can be easily satisfied. For instance, gender in Yoruba is either implicit in the referent of the word (e.g. *ọkùnrin* [man] is masculine) or expressed with morphemes which are words (e.g. *akọ* [male] and *abọ* [female]). Tense and aspect are usually expressed with some overt tense markers like *ti* (perfective), *yòò* (future), etc., or through adverbs of time like *lànàá* (yesterday), *lọla* (tomorrow) and *lóni* (today). A case (unless used in the sense of Fillmore's 'The Case for Case' Bach and Harms 1968) is usually irrelevant in the Yoruba grammatical system. Thus, as for content, it is not impossible for a Yoruba monolingual dictionary to satisfy the relevant requirements set by J. B. Carroll.

There are some further problems of content, related to those mentioned by Carroll, although not actually stated there, and they are, in our opinion, really peculiar to the

Yoruba monolingual dictionary. One could argue, then, that Yoruba dialectal forms present more difficulties than a casual observer might think. It may be correct to represent dialectal forms in a dictionary with an indication of the corresponding dialect area, but sometimes two of these may use the same symbols to cover different though overlapping semantic fields. Thus, food prepared with yam flour is generally referred to as *àmàlà*, *òkà* or *èlùbò*. While Ègbá uses *èlùbò* for raw yam flour, *àmàlà* for the cooked one and *òkà* for maize or corn, Ìjẹ̀sà often uses *èlùbò* for both cooked and raw yam flour, sometimes uses *òkà* for the cooked one and rarely uses *àmàlà*. In the Ègbá dialect area, two lexical items are used for one standard Yoruba item *ǎdùn* or *àádùn* (an edible corn powder sometimes prepared with oil). When *àádùn* is prepared without oil, the Ègbá calls it *elékúté*, and when oil is used, it is *àádùn*, but standard Yoruba uses *àádùn* for both. (Note that at this stage we adopt the orthographic convention of vowel doubling merely for the convenience of the reader; later on we will deal with orthographic representations.)

It appears, then, that the problem of a lack of inter-dialectal one to one mapping between symbol and referent is harder to solve than either that of separate lexical items for the same object, or of the association of certain objects and their symbols, e.g. *ìkòkọ̀rẹ̀* (a type of food prepared from a dough made with yam) with a dialect area (say Ìjẹ̀bú), so that it has no other lexical representation outside its own dialect area. In the former case, it may be necessary to indicate in a dictionary whether one word covers a wider semantic field in one dialect area than in others. In the case of forms which are dialectal phonological variants only – e.g. ‘another’ is *òmíràn* in standard Yoruba, *imû* in Lagos, *imúrẹ̀n* in Ègbá and *òmírìn* in Ìjẹ̀sà – it would be best to list the dialectal phonological variants and indicate for example, that *imû* (in Lagos) is now so current that we can call it a standard Yoruba representation. *Ìkòkọ̀rẹ̀* which appears only in specific dialect areas, should also be regarded as a standard Yoruba representation. Since there is no contrast, *ìkòkọ̀rẹ̀* is the only Yoruba lexical item for the object and consequently the standard

Yoruba representation. Apart from dealing with the problems of dialectal forms, a monolingual dictionary should contain some indication of how the Yoruba language illustrates the general exception to Katz's interpretative assertion that 'a speaker's ability to understand sentences also depends on his knowing the meanings of their elementary components, the lexical items in the vocabulary of the language, (Fodor and Katz 1964 p.520).<sup>3</sup> The meanings of idiomatic expressions or special uses in language are not necessarily arrived at through the amalgamation of the meanings of individual lexical items. Thus, in English, the meanings of 'elementary components' will not help one to discover the meaning of 'It is foolish to quarrel with your bread and butter', 'it rains cats and dogs' or 'keep up with the Joneses', etc. But in Yoruba, in addition to idioms, there is the characteristic indulgence in the euphemisms of oppositeness – e.g. a bad or stubborn child is often called *omọ rere* or *omọ 're* (a good child) if the child is not a total stranger. Note that *rere* is used here, but *dáradára* 'good' cannot be used in this case. Also, when two Yorubas work in a place and one finishes his task and intends to leave the other one behind, the usual good-bye is either *N kò ì tũ fì yín sílẹ̀ o* (literally: I have not left you behind, i.e. I am not leaving you behind or, *E máa kálọ̀ o* (Let us go away together, or You can follow me now). Thus, Yorubas use ironically, the opposite of what is intended, because they feel reluctant to express any unpleasantness in words. So, *èmi nìkan* (I alone) is often expressed as *àwa púpọ̀* (many of us); *mo rí ibi* (literally: I see evil, i.e. I am unfortunate) is expressed as *mo rí ire* (literally: I see goodness, i.e. I am fortunate), especially when the speaker is bereaved. Then, when one is about to leave a place and another person in that same place asks him to wait for something, the usual answer is *mò ñ hò* (I am coming) although the speaker is about to leave. (hoping to come back), cf.

*Mò ñ hò*, I am getting ready: used by the host of his guest when going inside to return to him later (Delano 1969 I. p.51). Observe 'when going inside'.

Or, when a Yoruba is penniless, he usually says *owó pò lówó mi* (I have plenty of money). Information on this use of language is necessary in a monolingual dictionary, first because it shows that the meanings found by amalgamating the antecedently known meanings of individual lexical items may be in total contrast to those of the speaker and the listener; secondly, a monolingual dictionary should not refrain from representing a culturally significant use of language which has semantic significance in the linguistic entity concerned; finally, the knowledge of a language is not complete if a learner cannot understand idioms and special ways of using them. In fact, since Chief Delanọ's dictionary is successful in reflecting some aspects of the Yoruba culture by bringing in *oríkì* etc., (e.g. Delanọ 1969 I. p.185 - '*Abiḡdun a gḡ wḡn de ara ḡhin*') then the implementation of the suggestions being made here on the content level will not be an insurmountable task. Perhaps the compilation of a supplementary idiomatic dictionary may be a way of handling this aspect, since idiomatic dictionaries can be revised more constantly than monolingual ones. In any case, representation of idiomatic usage cannot be excluded from a Yoruba monolingual dictionary.

Although methodological and content problems cannot be strictly compartmentalized, we have dealt sufficiently with those that would be peculiar to a Yoruba monolingual dictionary. Now we shall try to discuss three others and although they may sometimes refer to content, we shall treat them as methodological.

The first problem deals with the glossing of Yoruba words in Yoruba. At times it may be impossible to avoid circularity in description, especially if we try to gloss some of the monosyllabic verbs. Thus, *gḡ* 'cut' can be partly glossed as *bḡ* (cut), but it is likely that *bḡ* too may be partly glossed as *gḡ*. Besides, there are other synonyms of *gḡ* with which it can be glossed, e.g. *ṣá, rḡ, yùn, kun*, etc. Supposing the arrow in this paragraph means that the item to its right corresponds to the meaning of the one on its left, we can have *gḡ* → *ṣá* → *rḡ* → *yùn* → *kun* → *gḡ*, so that the circle is complete. This circular glossing is a general problem in monolingual dictionaries and it is impor-

tant in a Yoruba monolingual dictionary. Consider English, where Chamber's *Twentieth Century Dictionary* glossed 'spaghetti' as a 'cord-like paste intermediate between macaroni and vermicell' but glossed 'vermicelli' as 'a very slender macaroni'. In the gloss of 'spaghetti', the meanings of macaroni and vermicelli are assumed, but 'vermicelli' itself is partly glossed as 'macaroni'. The problem of circular glossing may be difficult to solve, so that the definitive glossing may be less significant or less satisfactory than contextual representation, and meanings may be inferred from contexts. From contextual representations, one would see that *gě* and *bě* (cut) are not complete or total synonyms; even if one meaning *cut* seems central to both, in use, *mo bẹ́rí fún ọ* (I salute you) – as in the salute of military personnel – cannot be replaced with *mo gẹ́rí fún ọ* (I cut head for you) although the 'core' meaning of *bẹ́rí* and *gẹ́rí* is 'cut head' or 'behead'. Chief Delanọ made extensive use of contextual glossing from which he culled many meanings for single lexical items. But in his own dictionary, he had an entry for each contextually determined shade of meaning. While disagreeing with this practice, we have decided to leave the point open for the time being.

It is often helpful to enter in the glossary synonyms of Yoruba lexical items because a Yoruba thesaurus would actually be helpful to Yoruba scholars. At present, the writing of a philosophical and lexical thesaurus like Roget's, or of the proposed 'distributional thesaurus, based on substitutability and juxtaposability of 'lexical items', proceeding entirely by textual examination and using large scale computer to make and store the correlations involved' (Dixon 1965 p.734) would be premature and unrewarding.<sup>4</sup> Premature because of the paucity of available textual data, since most of the data needed would still have to be collected from oral tradition. Unrewarding because there are still many unresolved problems in Yoruba studies, and their solution may have to precede any compilation of a 'distributional thesaurus'. Nevertheless, a monolingual dictionary which adds some synonyms to the gloss of words would do some of the work of a

thesaurus by providing information about words or items in a lexical set.

A casual glance at Chief Delanọ's dictionary of monosyllabic verbs will convince one that agreement among scholars on form classes may have to precede the compilation of the dictionary. In a dictionary such as Delanọ's, items like *gùn* (to be tall) *ga* (high, to be high) are classified as verbs, cf. *Ọláo yè gùn* (Ọlaoye is tall), *Ọláo yè gígùn* (tall Ọlaoye) Delanọ 1969, I, p.187). Items like *gùn* and *ga* are treated as 'verbs' by Delanọ in 1965 and Bamgboşe in 1966, and as 'predicative adjectives' by Afọlayan in 1968. Now, if they really are 'verbs', then it is difficult to justify Delanọ's *Comparison of Adjectives* (Delanọ 1965, I. pp.123-4), where Delanọ's verb is what is actually compared. It appears that if items like *dára* (to be good), *ga* (to be tall), etc. are verbs, then there should only be a comparison between verbs and no comparison between adjectives.<sup>5</sup>

The problem that structural class assignment creates for the lexicographer is that he is made ultimately responsible for statements that appear in a dictionary based on the works of others. For instance, the Abraham 1958 edition should accept full responsibility for the multiplicity of structural class assignment to Yoruba quantifiers like *gbogbo* (all), *díẹ* (few) and *púpọ* (many), although it was not really the lexicographer's task to usurp the grammarian's functions. Since the grammarian's 'trumpet' had given 'an uncertain sound' as regards Yoruba quantifiers, Abraham could not decide on the parts of speech of any of them, hence *díẹ* (few) was variously analyzed as 'a noun', 'an adjective' (p.138) and as 'an adverb' (p.139) whereas *púpọ* (many) which behaves very much like *díẹ*, syntactically and semantically, was only 'used as an adjective', 'used as a noun' and 'used as an adverb' (p.557).

When there is disagreement among grammarians on the labelling of recognized structural class divisions, the lexicographer cannot unilaterally decide whose terminology he is to adopt. For instance, Bamgboşe (1966) treated items like *èmi* (I), *ìwọ* (you singular), *òun* (he/she/it), *àwa* (we), *ẹyin* (you plural), and *àwọn* (they) as pronominals

and called *mo* (I) *o* (you), *ó* (he/she/it), *a* (we), *e* (you) and *won* (they) the pronouns. Afọlayan (1968) called the former class (i.e. Bamgboşe's pronominals) 'emphatic pronouns' and the latter class 'unemphatic pronouns'. Ẹkundayọ (1972) has suggested that the difference between the two classes is more than one of emphasis, since the latter class, i.e. Bamgboşe's pronouns, has more Article characteristics and fewer Nominal characteristics than the former (Bamgboşe's pronominals). Thus, nominals and pronominals can be conjoined or disjoined but pronouns and articles cannot. So that we can have: *Ẹmi àti òun lẹ̀ lọ sí Ẹkó* (literally: I and he can go to Lagos), but neither *Mo àti ó lẹ̀ lọ sí Ẹkó* for He and I (literally: I and he can go to Lagos), nor *mo rí ọmọ kan ati náà* (Literally: I see child a and the = I see a [. . .] and the child) is possible. The same correspondence obtains if the conjunction *àti* (and) is changed to the disjunction *tàbí* (or). Pronominals and nominals can be modified or qualified, but pronouns and articles cannot. Hence, we cannot have *kan tí mo rí* (a which I saw) or *ó yẹn* (literally: he that = that he) or *ó tí ó ń bọ* (literally: he which he coming = he who is coming; while we can have: *òun tí ó ń bọ* (he who is coming) or *òun yẹn* (even he). In Afọlayan's terminology, we find that pronominals can be emphatic but pronouns cannot be. Note that the contrast in emphasis exists only in places where we can have both pronouns and pronominals operating together. Hence, in disjunction and conjunction, the pronominal is not an emphatic form of the pronoun since there is no unemphatic form for it to contrast with in such environments.

Now, considering that there are also features of pronouns which they share with nominals and pronominals but not with articles, e.g., those concerning selectional restrictions, we cannot say that pronouns are complete nominals or complete articles. Observe that many verbs can select nouns, pronouns, or pronominals as subjects but no verb ever selects an article as its subject or object. Hence, we cannot have *kan fẹ̀rẹ̀ kú* (a nearly died) where *kan* (a) is an article although we can have nouns, pronominals and pronouns as subjects in such places.

We find that there are terminological possibilities in the preceding argument. One can use terms that ignore almost all the differences but recognize all the similarities between pronominals and pronouns (by calling them emphatic and non emphatic), or decide to recognize all their differences but ignore most of their similarities (by calling them nominals and articles). Note that pronominals and pronouns still share some article features like + Definite. And it is possible to vary terminological practices by allowing that certain differences and similarities are more significant than others. Whatever terminological decision is taken by the grammarian, the lexicographer who adopts one or the other will still have to accept full responsibility for the grammarian's decision. Hence the structural class problem, as one sees in Abraham's *Dictionary*, is of primary importance in a Yoruba monolingual dictionary.

The last methodological problem discussed here concerns the orthographic representation of Yoruba lexical items. Problems of orthographic representations are peculiar to a Yoruba Monolingual Dictionary because the lexicographical decisions taken on orthographic representations may eventually solve the question of orthography once and for all. For instance if at the lexicographical level we decide to use a less explicit form as our orthographic representation, supplemented with a phonetic transcription of the head word, we will no longer have to wade through endless orthographic controversies similar to those elicited by the publication of Bamgboṣe's *Yoruba Orthography*.

One should not be too dogmatic about the degree of explicitness required for orthographic representations, since it may vary from word to word. For instance, monosyllabic orthographic forms may have to be more explicitly represented than the polysyllabic ones (when taken out of context), since there are relatively more tonally distinguished minimal pairs among the monosyllabic class than the polysyllabic. However, traditional orthography seems to be inadequate to express our less explicit forms. For instance, the modern *eni tí, ọkúnrin, èniyòn*, etc. may, for various reasons, be preferred respectively to their tradi-

tional counterparts *ɛniti*, *ọkanrin*, *enia*, etc. Hence, by less explicit we mean a less explicit form than the quasi-phonetic representations of many modern writers, but not necessarily a non-explicit representation.

We do not actually intend to propose an orthographic system based on the 'less explicit' representation suggested above. However, since inconsistencies are sometimes to be found in orthographic representations, we may just touch on the subject briefly.

Apart from the Report on the Yoruba Orthography Committee, the most detailed work on Yoruba orthography is Bamgboṣe's *Yoruba Orthography* (1965). In Bamgboṣe's monograph, two criteria for good orthography were put forward: first, 'that it should represent all and only the significant sounds in the language; the second is that it should have only one symbol for each significant sound', (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.1). Both criteria can be summarized into 'any good orthography must be a phonemic one'. Note that its having to be phonemic is already stated in the first criterion, while the second is just a restatement of the principle of bi-uniqueness – one of the principles of phonemicization. There is actually nothing wrong with the two criteria except that they are intended for 'a good orthography' rather than for certain classes of 'new orthographies'. Besides, we do not know what a good orthography really is. An orthography that is valid for the phonemicist is not necessarily satisfactory for other purposes. For instance, the French orthography would not fulfil Bamgboṣe's criteria; nevertheless it has its own uses. Thus, the third person singular and plural in the conjugation of verbs are usually pronounced identically, suggesting that they must also be written identically, according to the two criteria above, but their different spellings, e.g. *il parle* 'he speaks' and *ils parlent* 'they speak' provide us with some syntactic and semantic information that an identical spelling would have concealed from us. Hence 'a good orthography' is a relative concept. If we are interested in proposing an orthography that will provide one with information on the phonemic structure of a language, than Bamgboṣe's orthographic criteria can be cal-

led adequate for 'a good orthography'. But not all users of the orthography are actually concerned with the phonemic structure of the language they are using. If all we want is to be provided with syntactic and semantic information, the aspect of French orthography that we examined above would be 'good' enough. If, however, the aim of orthography is to help with writing, typing, reading or printing speed in this age when more use is being made of Yoruba in primary schools and university courses, then many of the orthographic conventions being used at present in Yoruba would be 'bad' for an orthography; although they might turn out to be useful for someone who wants to read aloud to others, since they have been devised to help readers who do not look ahead, and to forestall what Professor Bamgboṣe referred to as 'potential ambiguities'.<sup>6</sup> Bamgboṣe's criteria for 'a good orthography' may be adequate in theory for his own purposes, the phonemicist's goal, but they are not necessarily suitable for all purposes. They are not even suitable for Yoruba where, he conceded, his 'completely logical and consistent orthographic system' has limitations, since it can be rejected when applied to the *n* and *l* sounds which ideally should be represented by a single letter, because 'the former is found only before nasalized vowels, whereas the latter is found only before non-nasalized vowels', (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.6).

Although the only given reason against *n* and *l* being represented by the same letter is 'a likely rejection', the actual reason against the innovation is to be found in the first part of the last quotation, which is wrong. Bamgboṣe's statement that *n* 'is found only before nasalized vowels', is contradicted by one of his own examples, viz.: 'the spelling *a* following an *n* may represent an *a* sound as well. For example, *náín* ninepence, *náání* (to have regard for), and the personal name *Adénáikè* (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.9). In his first example *náín*, *n* is followed by a nasalized vowel, but in the second and third examples, *náání* and *Adénáikè*, the same *n* is followed by a non-nasalized vowel. So, the significance of the two examples is not that they demonstrate the need to change *a* to *o* after *n* as suggested in the monograph, but that they indicate that the

rejection or 'likely rejection' of the use of either *n* or *l* for both *n* and *l* is dictated by the facts of the Yoruba language (where *n* actually contrasts with *l* before the oral vowel *a*), rather than by the imperviousness of the Yoruba people to assimilate 'a completely new logical and consistent orthographic system' or their 'unwillingness to make concessions', (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.30).

While not proposing new criteria for 'good orthographies', it seems that we can adopt one of the suggestions made by Bamgboṣe in 1965, which was not stated as an adequate criterion for our purposes. While explaining what occurs in English, it was suggested that:

If the spelling of a language is a convention that has to be learnt by any person wanting to write the language, one will have no difficulty in accepting this situation, provided the conventions are definite and observed by everybody writing the language. English orthography, chaotic as it is, has a definite set of conventions which are observed by all writers using the medium (p.2).

This less ambitious condition would seem an adequate criterion for a Yoruba orthography, since it does not devolve on the Yorubas to simplify the task of the phonemicist at the expense of writing, reading, typing and printing efficiency. One of the dangers of a quasi-phonetic orthography similar to those that are being used by many Yoruba writers (e.g. Abraham 1958 and Delanṣo 1969) is that it makes the printing of Yoruba works more laborious and consequently more expensive. As a result of this, very few Yoruba works appeal to those publishers who often counterpoise printing costs with the saleability of the printed materials so that at the University of Ibadan, the library has rows of shelves filled with books on English literature labelled in centuries from as far back as the fifteenth century to the present day. The books of Yoruba literature do not even fill one-third of a row of shelves! (Bamgboṣe 1965, pp.4-5).

Moreover, a quasi-phonetic orthography filled with multiple vowels with detailed tone markings and assimilated low tone conventions (see Bamgboṣe 1965 and 1966) will

hinder reading and writing speed, since the tonal detail and the irregularly spaced assimilated full stop convention would be a source of distraction rather than a help to the rapid reader or skimmer while the detailed quasi-phonetic writing would tend to encourage subvocalization (one of the obstacles of reading speed).<sup>7</sup>

Besides, an orthography which is considered chaotic from the point of view of the phonemicist is not necessarily chaotic for other purposes. However, our suggestion that orthographic representations in a dictionary should be supplemented with phonetic transcriptions after head words will mean double representations (orthographic and phonetic), but this has been done before. The transcription of the phonetic form would also be necessary according to Bamgbose's proposals (see his summary, pp.31-2).<sup>8</sup> If we accept one of the recommendations of the Yoruba Orthography Committee, that all tones or no tones must be shown on lexical items, so that we can have *áláàánú* in one representation and *alaaanu* in others, it follows that here, is yet another example of double lexical representations.

It might be as well now to make a few specific comments on the present orthography, especially since orthographic representation is of immense relevance to a Yoruba monolingual dictionary. We shall comment on some aspects of word representation without discussing problems of word division or punctuation (owing to lack of space), although the former may be considered relevant to a monolingual dictionary. In discussing aspects of word representation, we shall limit our examination to two matters: (a) the representation of one significant sound with one symbol (*on* for *an* and *on*) and (b) the question of multiple vowel representation. The first question is to be taken up merely to show that it is unnecessary for us to change the orthography where the existing one can give us useful information that would be lost if it were regularized in order to conform to Bamgbose's two criteria. Note that in the case of the *an* - *on* alternation (as we will see later), traditional orthography is actually not chaotic. In the examination of the second topic we mean to focus our

attention on the problems that multiple vowel representations found in many recent works (e.g., Delano's *Dictionary of Yoruba Monosyllabic Verbs*) create for Yoruba Lexicographers.

As for the first problem, we find that the main reason for the suggestion that *on* - [ɔ̄] and *an* - [ã] do not constitute significant contrasts was stated by Bamgboṣe in 1966. He observed at the time that 'it [ã] does not contrast with [ɔ̄] in single words in the speech of many Yorubas' and that 'I (i.e. Bamgboṣe) know of no occurrence of [ã] in the speech of any Yoruba which is not substitutable by [ɔ̄] in the speech of some other Yorubas' (Bamgboṣe 1966, p.8 fn. 20, italics supplied). However, in the Ikalẹ dialect of the Yoruba language, there are significant or 'phonemic' contrasts involving [ã] and [ɔ̄] in single words. We shall illustrate this phenomenon with the example of the minimal pairs [ijɔ̄] 'beads' versus [ijã] 'arguments'. The occurrence of significant [ã] - [ɔ̄] minimal contrasts in Ikalẹ weakens the argument that '[ã] does not contrast with [ɔ̄] in single words'.

Our stand on the [ã] [ɔ̄] alteration is that [ã] should be the main member of the phoneme /ã/, and that if there is any orthographic change at all, it must be one in which *an* represents both *an* and *on* and not one in which *on* is used for the two variants of the phoneme. Otherwise, there should be no change at all from the traditional orthographic practice, since from the traditional representation we can at least obtain some diachronic information of the phonological structure of the Yoruba language. We assume that *an*, i.e. [ã] is the principal member of the phoneme standing for the *an/on* alteration for the following reason: in traditional Yoruba orthography, only very few oral consonants (b, p, gb, w, f) are followed by *on*, whereas *an* is written after all the others (t, d, k, g, s, ṣ, j, y, r, h). Note that there is an exception for *h* in the case of *ahon* (tongue) versus *fihàn* (show). After the nasals *m* is also followed by *o*, and *n* is followed by *a*. If [ã] and [ɔ̄] are really members of the same phoneme, then the member with the greater range of distribution should be the principal one. Note that [ɔ̄] occurs only after labials or

labio-velars, whereas we cannot easily define the environment of [ā]. Besides, all the labials are pronounced with some lip rounding, [ɔ̄] is a rounded vowel, and labialization itself has been treated as (+rounding) in Chomsky & Halle (1968), pp.223, 224, 306 and 310. Note that although Bamgboṣe (1966) treated Yoruba *w* as a velar consonant, Yoruba *w* cannot be pronounced without some lip-rounding. If we now go on to say that [ā] – *an* is the principal member of the /ā/ phoneme, then it might follow that it is rounded to [ɔ̄] – *on* through assimilation after all rounded consonants. There can be no exception to this condition (notwithstanding the inconsistencies of *fiḥàn* and *ahòṅ* above). However, if we say that [ɔ̄] is the principal member, then we cannot explain the conditions under which this got modified to [ā] at all. Here, we assume that there was in fact a phonetic distinction (caused by assimilation) between [ā] and [ɔ̄], and that it was precisely this that the engineers of traditional Yoruba orthography decided to represent in writing as *on* after labials and labio-velars, and *an* elsewhere. Whether this assumption is true or not, it does not alter the fact that both [ā] and [ɔ̄] are produced by the Yorubas. We can say then that the traditional Yoruba orthography provides us with some information about the diachronic status of the *an on* alternation, so that we either leave it as it is, or if we want to change it at all, we represent the two variants by *an* (the principal member of the phoneme). Another point in favour of the theory that *an* is the principal member of the two variants is the fact that in the Ikaḷe problematic cases, the [ā] form [ijā] (arguments) is identical with the Standard Yoruba form for 'arguments', traditionally spelt as *iyàn*. Hence, in a dialect area which now makes phonological distinctions between [ā] and [ɔ̄], the [ā] form is the one common to other Yoruba dialect areas. Nevertheless, there is no need to change this particular traditional orthographic practice, since some diachronic information about Yoruba phonology might be lost through the regularization of the *an on* alteration. Besides, there is nothing chaotic about this traditional orthographic system, apart from those rare cases such as *ahòṅ* – *fiḥàn*.

If we opt for no change at all, then the Ikalẹ exceptions could be easily dealt with. For instance, in Yoruba *on* occurs only after rounded consonants while *an* occurs elsewhere. In the Ikalẹ example above, the contrast after [j], i.e. *y* proves that *an* or [ã] normally occurs in Ikalẹ in circumstances where it would normally have occurred in standard Yoruba, i.e. after [j] or *y*. Thus, in Ikalẹ, and in standard Yoruba, [ijã] = *iyàn* (arguments) obeys the normal rule of the language: that [ɔ] occurs after labials and [ã] elsewhere. The contrast of [ijɔ̃] (beads) in Ikalẹ can then be represented orthographically as *iyon*. Since [ɔ] would not normally occur after [j], a non labial, in standard Yoruba, this form *iyon* found in Ikalẹ cannot be confused with any other Yoruba word. Thus, *iyon* and *iyán* could be made to represent significant contrasts in Ikalẹ, if we wanted the orthography to reflect the significant [ã] – [ɔ] contrast in that dialect area. Furthermore, *ahon* (tongue) should be modified to *ahán* since [ɔ] does not occur after [h] – a non labial. But decisions such as the above, e.g. the representation of the *iyon* – *iyán* contrast and the regularization of *ahon* are not mandatory for a lexicographical system that transfers the task of explicit forms to phonetic representations after dictionary entries. They merely constitute the granting of 'concessions' to meet the phonemicist's demands half way.

On the question of multiple vowel representation, we shall limit ourselves to a few of the lexicographical problems since space cannot permit us to discuss all the remaining ones. The justification for the introduction of 'double vowels' is that the tilde, formally used for double vowels, indicate both the vowel doubling and the two tones that usually accompany it, so that words with different tone patterns like *oòrùn* (sun) and *òòrùn* (smell) are identically and ambiguously represented as *òrùn* (Bamgbose 1965, pp.13, 16, and 17). Vowel doubling would take care of the ambiguity created by this tilde. Furthermore, the doubling of vowels is supposed to indicate significant contrasts. No one has ever dwelt on the question of the triple vowel representations found in *jòóòrùn* (to suffer too much) and *jòòòmù* (to be intelligent) (Delanò 1969, I,

p.307); although now the three vowels do not imply three different tones as do the two *o*'s in *òórùn*. However, one of the implications of the double vowel representation suggested in Bamgboṣe (1965) is that, wherever the phonetic transcription could suggest double, or triple or quadruple vowel representations, the orthographic form can do the same since the aim is to avoid the ambiguity of the tilde. Yet the solution (i.e. vowel doubling) is even more problematic than the problem it set out to solve.

First, let us examine the implications of multiple vowels for the status of the 'word' in Yoruba. Bamgboṣe (1965) offered the transcription of a sample text which obeyed the proposed orthography. In it we find dual representations of single words. For instance, we have *nọ̀ḍ̀* and *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀* (the), *àgbàḍ̀o* and *àgbàḍ̀oo* (maize), *oko* and *okoo* (farm), *kòkó* and *kòkóo* (cocoa), *abà* and *abàa* (barn), *ojú* (of *lójú àlá*) and *ojúu* (face), etc. (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.33). One point in favour of a representation of *nọ̀ḍ̀* (the) with double vowels is that it contrasts with *nọ̀* (to spend). Now, we have three 'words' or three orthographic forms: *nọ̀* (to spend), *nọ̀ḍ̀* (the) and *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀* (the) where, orthographically, *nọ̀* is to *nọ̀ḍ̀* as *nọ̀ḍ̀* is to *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀*. For instance, in *nọ̀ḍ̀* or *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀*, no two consecutive vowels have the same tone. If the difference between *nọ̀* and *nọ̀ḍ̀* is sufficient to make them two words, as any Yoruba will agree they are, how is one to be convinced that the same cannot be said of the representations *nọ̀ḍ̀* and *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀*? Suppose the arguments on the contrast - *nọ̀* (spend) versus *nọ̀ḍ̀* (the) were applied to other dual representations as we have quoted from Bamgboṣe, then we would concede that *kòkó* and *kòkóo*, etc., are different words. But since this is not the case, one of the difficulties created in practice by vowel doubling is that it makes the Yoruba word more unstable than it used to be in normal traditional orthographic scripts. And consequently, it makes the status of a 'word' in Yoruba more problematic. The lexicographer will then be unable to decide whether he should have two entries for each word e.g. *oko* = *okoo*, *nọ̀ḍ̀* = *nọ̀ḍ̀ḍ̀*, etc.

Moreover, anyone using the dictionary can no longer decide whether the lexicographer has transcribed *Jésù*

(Jesus) as *Jéésù* or *Jééésù* as very few Yoruba speakers pronounce that name with a 'single' *e* sound). Hence, he is at sea as to whether he will find *Jésù* or *Jéésù* or *Jééésù*, and whether he ought to look for it before or after the entry *jenje* 'tiny'. While Bamgboṣe's orthographic practice (1965, p.33) would predict *Jéésù*, and while his orthographic criteria could guarantee *Jésù* with a 'single' *e* we find that many of those who multiply vowels in their writing of Yoruba words (e.g. Delanṡ 1969 I, p.195) write the name as *Jésù*. Since Delanṡ is a lexicographer, one can say that in Delanṡ's dictionary, the Yoruba word for 'Jesus' would appear after *jenje*, but in Bamgboṣe's dictionary, it would precede *jenje* and possibly other words. It follows that a multiple vowel representation, apart from violating even Bamgboṣe's two criteria for good orthography, makes the alphabetical listing of lexical items in dictionaries indeterminate if not impossible. We first observed this problem of indeterminateness in the alphabetical listing of lexical items in Abraham's *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*. While the multiple vowel representation cannot be blamed entirely for the difficulties one normally encounters when using Abraham's *Dictionary*, it seems to be more responsible for the confusion in his alphabetical listing of items than any other single factor.

As space does not permit us to discuss possible solutions to the multiple vowel problem, we venture to suggest some alternatives, without necessarily showing preference for one or the other. One could restore the tilde and stipulate that it is only to be used to represent vowel length, and not tone indication. In such cases, only the phonetic representation in the dictionary would indicate the tonal contour of words on which the tilde is used. While this suggestion has the disadvantage of making it impossible for one to recognize without lexicographical assistance whether orthographic *ōgùn* is *oḡgùn* (medicine) or *òḡgùn* (sweat), or whether *ōrun* is *oḡrùn* (sun) or *òḡrùn* (smell), it avoids the complications which multiple vowel representations create for the status of a 'word' in Yoruba; also the confusion in the alphabetical listing of lexical items in dictionaries, caused by the indeterminateness of the number

of vowels to represent orthographically in certain words would be reduced. Note that there is a measure of individual variation in vowel doubling in the pronunciation of many Yoruba words, so that while Chief Delano (1969, I, p.307) could have three *o*'s in *jòóòrùn* most Yoruba speakers, except those who speak extremely slowly cannot have more than two *o*'s, e.g. *jòórùn*. The decision of the Yoruba Orthography Committee against the use of the tilde (see Report) might make it difficult for this suggestion to be adopted yet, it must be remembered that the principal fault of the original tilde is that it represents various tonal contours and not that it indicates vowel length.

Alternatively, one could introduce compound tones on single vowels, e.g. (∨) for *low-high*, (^) for *high-low*, (∩) for *mid-low*, (∪) for *low-mid*, (∩) for *mid-high*, and (∪) for *high-mid*. But this solution might involve having too many superscripts, so that it is best not to consider it further, especially now that we have the advantage of a phonetic representation in the dictionary from which the explicit forms can be found. For this reason, the six additional tone marks would produce only redundant information – redundant in the sense that they repeat on orthographic forms information that can always be recovered from the phonetic ones. If this alternative form were adopted, the Yoruba words for 'sun' and 'smell' would constitute minimal pairs, but if double vowels were used, it would hardly be possible to find two Yoruba words using double vowels that were real minimal pairs. For instance *oòrùn* and *òòrùn* in the preceding paragraph are not minimal pairs, since the tonal contrast between *oòrùn* and *òòrùn* occurs on two different vowels for each word.

Since we have already decided against a positive solution of the multiple vowel question, we leave the ultimate decision on this topic to the Yorubas, in the hope that they will not overlook the overall interests of those connected with the Yoruba language. Although the Yoruba people cannot be expected to devise their own orthography in order to help the lexicographer (just as they are not expected to help or satisfy the phonemicist), it is true that the problem of accessibility of lexical items is just as vital

to the lexicographer as it is to the grammarian, the semanticist, the phonemicist, the lonely machine intelligence worker who would like to store aspects of the Yoruba lexicon into computers, as well as to the author of Yoruba novels, or to any student who might wish to find Yoruba words in the dictionary without trying to remember whether he would have used two or three vowels within those same words as opposed to what he finds in the dictionary. Hence, it is not the assumption that the lexicographer's needs are more important than those of the phonemicist, but an appraisal of the ultimate value and utility of a monolingual dictionary as well as of the importance of reading, writing, typing, and printing efficiency that should influence the decisions of the Yorubas on whether and where to modify their orthography.

Although, regretfully, we end this paper on an inconclusive note, we hope that the problems of content and methodology discussed here may contribute in some significant way to Yoruba as a whole. Taking into account the dialectal forms under examination, one finds that as soon as the compilers of dictionaries decide to make *ikók-óré* the standard Yoruba form, because of lack of contrasts, Yoruba words of a similar type in other dialect areas will automatically become standard. One may even examine in this light, the orthographic problem given detailed treatment under methodology. If we ultimately decide to allow the phonetic representation after lexical entries in the dictionary to account for the most explicit forms of words (e.g. with full tonal details and possible multiple vowel variants), then the confusion which double and triple vowel representation has always caused in the alphabetical listing of dictionary entries in Yoruba can be reduced. Moreover, if there are dialectal phonetic variants of some words, or even if there are colloquial forms of variants restricted to certain registers, these phonetic variants plus an indication of the register or dialect area concerned may be added after the general phonetic form that follows each lexical entry in the dictionary. It is in such phonetic representations that the representation of forms having multiple vowels and those using the assimilated

tone conventions do really belong. The advantage of this suggestion is that non-phonologically distinct dialectal or register peculiar variants will not be allowed to cause confusion in the standard orthography, since we might not find it profitable to allow dialect areas to invent peculiar orthographies which standardize their own phonetic peculiarities (as suggested, though not very explicitly, in the final recommendation of the Yoruba Orthography Committee, i.e. under *General*. Note that an earlier suggestion in favour of *iyon* and *iyān* in the Ikaḷe dialect area does not contradict what we have just said, since the word *iyon* like *ikòkòrẹ́* above, will be the only Yoruba word with that representation for 'tortoise'. The standard Yoruba word for 'tortoise' is *ijápá*. Hence, there is only one Yoruba *iyon* (tortoise), which in fact, represents a significant phonological contrast in the dialect concerned. It seems therefore that Yoruba orthographic problems could even be tackled and solved through decisions made at the lexicographical level. Consequently, the task that besets the compilers of a Yoruba monolingual dictionary is not an easy one, since their lexicographical decisions may be policy decisions for Yoruba writing in general.

### Notes

1. This paper benefited from suggestions made by Professor Ayo Bamgboṣe of the University of Ibadan, who saw an earlier version and discussed it with me before it was presented at the Ife University Seminar in December 1969. I am indebted to all those who made suggestions on an earlier version of the paper and also to my Yoruba informants from various dialect areas. This version was written in 1971.

In the present form, I have tried to restrict discussion as much as possible to problems that are peculiar to a Yoruba monolingual dictionary, and even then the discussion may not be exhaustive, as limitations of space often place restrictions on what can be discussed in a single paper. Note, however, that we cannot escape detailed discussion of some of these problems if we want their significance to be fully grasped. Hence, in the methodology section, we depart from normal practice by going into some details; nevertheless, the discussion is still severely curtailed for the reason stated above.

2. And note that such dictionaries might prove impossible, since Carroll actually averred that he 'substituted *lexicography* for what Bloomfield describes as

*semantics*' (Carroll 1965, pp.24-5). Also Bloomfield's *semantics* cannot be described in a highly detailed dictionary, since Bloomfield himself stated that 'in order to give a scientifically accurate definition of meaning for every form of a language, we should have to have a scientifically accurate knowledge of everything in the speaker's world' (Bloomfield 1953 p.139, italics supplied). Hence, Carroll's *lexicography* may include the minutest of details of all things in the world and in all possible worlds.

Our use of words such as 'morpheme' etc. taken from Carroll and used in this paper should be understood in the light of the status such words occupy in linguistics in this hey day of structuralism. Since we are merely discussing problems that are peculiar to a monolingual dictionary, we have refrained from discussing concepts like 'morpheme', etc., and so would prefer to repudiate all responsibilities for the connotations they might have for particular classes of readers. There are, however, some other words we use, e.g. 'qualifiers, modifiers', and 'lexical entries' which must be divested of their technical associations. Any word that modifies a noun in the traditional sense in which an adjective modifies or limits it is a 'modifier' or 'qualifier', notwithstanding its relative surface position to the noun it limits. The entry of any lexical item in its appropriate place in the alphabetical list of items in dictionaries is a 'lexical entry' or a 'lexical representation'.

3. The indication of exceptions shows that Katz's interpretative assertion is inadequate to the interpretation of idioms and special uses in languages, nor does the interpretative model established by Fodor and Katz for generative grammar provide a valid semantic theory; hence my indication of exceptions. For instance, presuppositions are not included and these cannot be deduced for the amalgamation of the antecedently known meanings of individual lexical items used in the construction of sentences. And yet, (i) and (iii) below are not strictly synonymous since the subjects of those sentences are unaware of the information in (ii):

- (i) Oedipus and Jocasta were happy to get married and have children.
- (ii) Jocasta is Oedipus' mother.
- (iii) Oedipus and his mother were happy to get married and have children.
- (iv) Jocasta disembowelled herself because she had children from her son Oedipus.

According to Katz's theory, (i) and (iii) would be completely synonymous given (ii), since the referent of *Jocasta* is the referent of *Oedipus' mother*. However, the presuppositions of (i) and (iii) are different, and so the meanings of (i) and (iii) are not identical. The speaker of (iii) is aware of (ii), but *Jocasta* and *Oedipus* would not have been happy (as [iii] suggests they were) had they known the facts in (ii) (as [iv] now indicates). Hence, a semantic theory that concentrates on the compositional function of elementary components in sentences (and makes this its whole function) while ignoring presuppositions, focus, etc. cannot account for the underlying consistency of (i) and (iv) in *Oedipus Rex*, despite the apparent surface contradictions of (i) and (iv). See the papers by J. T. Herring, L. R. Horn, and J. L. Morgan (CLSP 6 1969) for discussions on the usefulness of presuppositions in linguistic description.

4. Perhaps the use of computers for storing correlations in textual materials might be directed at this stage towards the less ambitious task of eliciting

meanings for Yoruba words in different contexts. The development of a distributional thesaurus would then be a long term project which might not be undertaken until feasibility in other languages such as English has been established.

5. For the 'Comparison of Adjectives' only the predicative form of Yoruba adjectives, i.e. Delanq's 'verbs' can be compared. But other Yoruba verbs that have attributive adjective counterparts can also be compared. Since the attributive forms of Yoruba adjectives are never compared, one could arrive at a neat syntactic description of Yoruba by stating that all predicative forms of the adjective are verbs so that in Yoruba there would only be a comparison between verbs. Afqlayan (1968; pp.253-310) actually provided plenty of evidence to show that Yoruba has predicative adjectives. A contention similar to Afqlayan's was made by Ekundayo in 'The Adjective in Yoruba Syntactic Structure and A Contrastive Analysis with English' Spring Term Project, March 1968, English Department Library, U.C.L.A. The arguments put forward by Ekundayo in 1968, however, rest on the fact that there used to be an autonomous level of syntactic deep structure in grammar where the distinctions between verbs and predicative adjectives are pertinent. However, if the level of 'deep structure' does not exist, as suggested by J. D. McCawley 1967 in 'The respective downfalls of deep structure and autonomous syntax' paper read at the meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, then the problem of the distinction between verbs and predicative adjectives assumes new dimensions. Thus, since Bach, in Bach & Harms (1968) has argued that nouns, adjectives, and verbs actually belong to a hyperconstituent 'contentives' at an early stage in derivation, it means that the distinction between verbs and predicative adjectives does not exist at the level where we have 'contentives' in underlying representations. Note that this is not the same as maintaining that (predicative or attributive) adjectives are verbs, but that they may be surface realizations of the same abstract semantic categories. Although Bach's views have been severely criticized recently by Ray C. Dougherty - 'Recent Studies on Language Universals' in *Foundations of Language* 6 (1970), pp.505-61, the fact that Dougherty himself had a hyperconstituent or hypercategory 'X' representing 'S' (sentence), NP (noun phrase) and VP (verb phrase), mainly because each of those symbols can occur in the environment '(Q) - (ADV)', and not because they share some other features like (+ Strative) or (+ Human) etc. shows that Bach's suggestion is not swept aside, but only modified to include the 'Major categories'. Hence, Bach's arguments on 'contentives' in underlying representations would still be applicable to the distinction between verbs and (predicative) adjectives in Yoruba.
6. Professor Bamgbose holds the view that Yoruba orthography should account not only for present but also for potential ambiguities. But the fact that *alánú* up to a certain point in history, unambiguously referred to (*alááánù*) (kind person) does not help us in dealing with a later rival, e.g. Wande Abimbola's *alunu* (first born of a woman) (recently discovered in oral literature). The problems of potential ambiguities are probably magnified, since not all present ambiguities can be accounted for through vowel multiplicity and tonal niceties. For instance, no amount of tonal dexterity can dissipate the ambiguity raised by *ní* in 'òkúnrin kan *ní* Israeli gbógun ti ilẹ̀gbóná' = 'a man in Israel declares war on small-pox' or 'a man says that Israel declares war on small-pox', since

*ní* – preposition is not tonally distinguishable from *ní* – verb. The ambiguity can only be explained outside the item *ní*. For the first meaning, *òkúnrin kan ní Israẹli*, is a constituent noun phrase so that we have a mid tone on *kan*. For the second meaning, *òkúnrin kan* is the constituent noun phrase so that a grammatically conditioned high tone on the *kan* before a predicate renders the sentence clear. Since segmental tonal niceties have not yet even been able to account for present ambiguities, it seems unlikely that they will be capable of taking care of potential ones.

7. A comparison with English can be made here. If English is represented in writing as a phonetic system with stress marks, queer greek symbols, pitch contours etc., it is not impossible to find the speed of a very fast reader reduced to about 20% of his average speed. We can experiment on this by comparing the time taken by a fast reader to read a passage in English with that spent on a phonetic (I.P.A.) representation of the same passage.
8. The suggestion that a recovery of the explicit forms would be needed in Bamgboṣe's system can be substantiated through an examination of his proposed changes. According to his proposal (6) (Bamgboṣe 1965, p.31), the syllabic nasal must be spelt *n* in all cases although it is realized as *m* [m] before labial consonants, and *ng* [ŋ] before velar consonants. It is the phonetic representation in the dictionary that will explicitly indicate the phonetic realizations of this syllabic nasal. According to another proposal (4), *on* should replace *o* for the third person singular pronoun object following verbs ending in *on*. Now, this suggestion is not made for the singular pronoun object following verbs ending in any of the other three nasalized vowels *in*, *un*, and *en*. Hence, certain nasalized vowels are orthographically represented as oral vowels, e.g. the *i* representing [i] in *ò dín i* (she fried it), while others in similar contexts and serving similar purposes are represented orthographically as nasalized vowels, e.g. *on* for [ɔ̃] in *ó pòn on* (she put it [the child] on her back). But note that we still have an orthographic *i* for oral phonetic [i] for the third person singular object, e.g. *ó rí i* (she saw it). Thus, orthographic *i* ambiguously represents the oral [i] and the nasalized [ĩ], whereas there is also an orthographic *in* of *ò dín i* which still represents the nasalized [ĩ]. Unless there is a phonetic representation in the dictionary, supplemented with the information that violence has been done to the principles or criteria for 'good' orthographies in the above *ad hoc* proposal, there is nothing to stop an unsympathetic reader from saying that orthographic representations obeying the proposals in *Yoruba Orthography* are 'chaotic'.
9. We have not discussed the use of (˘) to represent the mid tone, nor will we contemplate the suggestion that all tones or no tones should be represented. However, the supplementation of the orthographic form with a phonetic representation is necessary even for those detailed orthographic representations that follow the decisions of the Yoruba Orthography Committee on tone representations. Thus, the *u* of *álááánú* is nasalized, but this is not indicated orthographically like the *un* of *ikun* (mucus). Besides, many people do not pronounce the word with three middle *u*'s. Most Yorubas actually use two vowels and use Bamgboṣe's assimilated low tone on the second vowel. There are even people who in this instance use a gliding tone on a single vowel. So that there is hardly any diachronic or synchronic evidence to support the

representation *alaanu* with or without the tone marks; and consequently, the detailed representations of polysyllabic words with multiple vowels following one of the recommendations of the Yoruba Orthography Committee cannot dispense altogether with the extra phonetic representations in the dictionary.

10. I obtained the information on the Ikalẹ examples from Funṣo Akere, a lecturer in English at the University of Ife.
11. It appears that *jòóòrìn* translated as 'to suffer too much', is peculiar. A more general gloss would have been 'to take in bad odour'.

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# *Towards a Yoruba Dialectology*

by

**Abiodun Adetugbo**

Dialectology seeks to characterize the nature, cause and course of discontinuities that exist within a given linguistic area. We know that discontinuities exist within a linguistic area because in any area in which a language is spoken the forms of speech used may never be uniform; the sub-area sharing a relatively homogeneous mode of speech we term a dialect area. A dialect is therefore a subsystem within a language, while a language is seen as an aggregate of all the dialects within its specific area. Because of shared similarities which allow for a measure of mutual intelligibility among dialects, a language is not the sum-total of all the dialects it comprises, rather it is less than this total.

The goal of dialectology is to establish 'the structural consequences of partial differences within a framework of partial similarity of dialects within a linguistic area.'<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, since dialects are by and large too logical, their most useful delimited boundaries will be those which coincide with lines of ethnological discontinuity: the interaction between language and culture being mutual. Dialectology therefore can furnish us with clues as to the cultural history of the speakers of a language.

Dialectology is not specifically a linguistic discipline though many of its data are linguistic. It straddles anthropology because culture changes yield speech changes, and sociology because there is no amount of descriptive delicacy that can match dialects established on a purely linguistic basis with those delimited by the native speaker's intuition. In fact, it has been found time and

again that the dialects as intuitively recognized by most of us are more or less products of group identity than differences in functional linguistic systems. This is not to imply that structurally defined dialects are worthless. Far from it. What we insist on is that 'linguistic dialects' may not necessarily match those heuristically and intuitively delimited by the native speaker and so, while in the case of 'Yoruba the native speaker may recognize as many dialects as there are settlements, or more, structurally the bundling of isoglosses may not permit us to recognize as many breaks within the forms of communication.

We have examined the possibility that linguistically delimited dialects may not match those of the native speaker's intuition, because it is disturbing to observe that would-be practitioners of Yoruba dialectology are scared by the multiplicity of different speech forms which might be functionally non-distinctive; on the other hand, others have contented themselves (without a preliminary survey of the linguistic area) with establishing and analyzing dialects on the basis of single settlements. In either case, such practitioners must be made to recognize the inadequacy of their approach because it is only an overall, almost comprehensive view of linguistic breaks within the linguistic area that may contribute to the ethno-linguistic goal of Yoruba dialectology.

#### *The Yoruba Linguistic Area(s)*

To date, a survey of Yoruba speaking areas of the world has not yet been made. We know that Yoruba is spoken in Cuba (though for special purposes only), in Brazil, in Nigeria, in Togo and Dahomey. Outside Nigeria, Yoruba speaking areas constitute small islands which would not give much problem to delimit. Within Nigeria, however, we have a special problem in delimiting Yoruba speaking areas. Divergence within the language is so immense here that the analyst finds it almost impossible to decide which form of speech he will call a dialect of Yoruba and which he will label an independent language. In many cases, contrary to the beliefs of native speakers, the analyst will find no linguistic justification for the inclusion of such forms of





major features and major lines of discontinuity and to hope that others to follow will pursue this study in a way that may yield finer dialect boundaries.

### *The Major Discontinuities*

On the basis of our major discontinuities, we have divided the Yoruba speaking areas of Western Nigeria into three major dialect areas – Map 1. These are Northwest Yoruba (NWY), Southeast Yoruba (SEY) and Central Yoruba (CY). The major line of discontinuity here is the shift which Proto Yoruba (PY) /ɣ/ has undergone. In the SEY areas of Rẹmọ, Ondo, Ikalẹ, Ọwọ and Ikarẹ /ɣ/ is preserved. In the NWY areas of Ọyọ, Ibadan, Oşun, etc. it has been shifted to /w/ while in the CY areas /ɣ/ has been lost. Examples are:

<i>SEY</i>	<i>NWY</i>	<i>CY</i>	<i>gloss</i>
oɣo	owó	eó	money
àɣò	awə	að	colour, skin
ɣò	wò	ò	look at
oɣíɣó	eéwo	eéo	tumour
əɣò	əwə	əð	broom

Dialect delimitation on the basis of single isogloss plotting deprives us of the very concept of 'dialect'. We shall see, however, that there is a bundling of isoglosses at all levels of description along the lines of discontinuity defined by the shifts on PY /r/.

Another relic consonant phoneme in SEY is /gw/ which has become semivocalized in both NWY and CY. This is the source of CY /w/ in such forms as:

<i>SEY</i>	<i>NWY and CY</i>	<i>gloss</i>
gwò	wà/wò	dig
gwí	wí	say, blame
gwó	wó	demolish
mé.gwa	mé.wa	ten
gwéé	wééré	tiny

One more feature of consonantal differentiation calls our attention. It is the PY /s/ which has been split into /s/ and /ʃ/ in the SEY and Egbá areas. In NWY areas and parts of

CY /s/ is retained but owing to the influence of the standardized dialect, /f/ has been introduced. The performance of speakers of NWY and CY is usually the mirror image of the standard Yoruba use of s/f opposition. Thus we have:

<i>SEY</i>	<i>NWY</i>	<i>gloss</i>
aʃɔ	asɔ	cloth
ʃifé	sisé	labour

but

<i>SEY</i>	<i>NWY</i>	<i>gloss</i>
sù	ʃù	sleep
sáré	ʃáré	run
sísi	ʃíʃi	sixpence

These sibilants have undergone some changes in some minor dialect areas. In the Ikaḷe subdialect area of SEY for instance, the shifts are /ʃ>s>h/, a type of chain shift:

	<i>Ondo</i>	<i>Okitipupa</i>	<i>gloss</i>
/ʃ/	ʃà	sà	flow
	ʃe	se	make
/s/	sá	há	run
	sù	hù	sleep

Also in the Ọwọ area of SEY /ʃ/ has been shifted to /č/

<i>Ondo</i>	<i>Ọwọ</i>	<i>gloss</i>
ʃe	če	do
ʃú	čú	be cloudy
aʃɔ	ačɔ	cloth
	iču	yam

When all these consonantal shifts are plotted the divisions that result give us finer dialect boundaries.

### *The Vowel Systems*

There are two major differences in the oral vowel systems of our dialect area:

- (a) the number of contrasts used,
  - (b) different co-occurrence rules.
- (a) While most of the area under consideration have 7 oral vowels:

i u  
 e o  
 ε ɔ  
 a ,

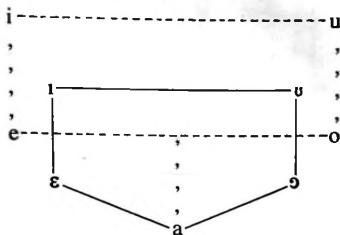
all the dialects of Ife-Ilesa, Akure and Ekiti have nine vowel contrasts<sup>2</sup>:

i u  
 ɪ ʊ  
 e o  
 ε ɔ  
 a

Examples of the use of ɪ and ʊ are:

/ɪ/	ɪta	outside
	ɪlè	soil
/ʊ/	ʊfɛ	work
	ʊɣo	marshy land
	ʊʃare	} names of towns
	òyì	

(b) The exciting thing, however, lies in the difference between the co-occurrence of vowels in the two different systems. In all the dialects of Yoruba, there are co-occurrence limitations in the distribution of vowels, but these limitations differ. In all areas /o/ and /ɔ/, /e/ and /ɛ/, and /e/ and /ɔ/ do not co-occur in the same morpheme. In the CY areas, there are greater co-occurrence rules called vowel harmony. The vowels are divided into groups – tense and lax:



that is

<i>tense</i>	i	u	<i>lax</i>		
	e	o		ɪ	ʊ
				ɛ	ɔ
					a

Tense vowels co-occur in the morpheme (word) and lax vowels co-occur, but except in the case of *a*, tense and lax vowels do not co-occur in the morpheme. As we will see later, this vowel harmony has some effect of the morphology of the dialects where it occurs.

We should mention here that the vowel system of the CY areas represents better than others the earlier stage of the language. That is, at an earlier stage, all the dialects of Yoruba had this system of vowel harmony, relics of which are still preserved everywhere (see restriction on the co-occurrence of /e/ and /ɛ/). Vowel harmony is being eliminated in all other areas, except in CY, in the form of coalescence of certain phones. In standard Yoruba, for instance, /i/ and /ɪ/ have fallen together to /i/ while /u/ and /ʊ/ have both become /u/.

There is one other difference in the distribution of vowels. In the NWY areas, *u* does not occur initially in the word whereas it does in both CY and SEY. We have:

CY-SEY	NWY	<i>gloss</i>
ukú	ikú	death
ùyà	ìyà	suffering

#### *Nasal Vowels*

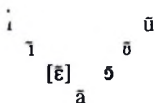
In the nasal vowel series we find a tripartite division of our area roughly paralleling the division on Map 1. Thus Oyo areas have three nasal vowels:

ĩ      ũ  
          ɔ̃

While Ondo and Ijẹ̀bú areas have five:

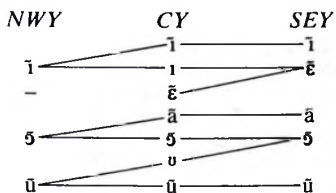
ĩ                      ũ  
          ɛ̃              ɔ̃  
                          ã

Central Yoruba areas have either 6 or 7.



with /ē/ being marginal to the system. There is also the co-occurrence restriction here:  $\bar{i}$  and  $\bar{u}$  are tense while all the others are lax.

Apart from these differences in the number of oppositions in the inventories, there are more exciting facts about the cross-dialect correspondences. These are:



Map 4 shows the differences in the vowel systems while map 5 shows the Vowel Harmony areas.

### Grammar

We shall mention at this point a few of the more obvious differences within our dialect areas.

**The Pronominal Systems:** We find that many dialects within the SEY group have fewer pronoun terms than those of CY or NWY. For instance, the  $\dot{O}w\dot{o}$ ,  $\dot{I}ka\dot{l}\dot{e}$  and  $\dot{O}ndo$  group of dialects do not distinguish between 2nd and 3rd person plural pronouns.

We have:

	$\dot{O}y\dot{o}$	$\dot{E}kiti$	$\dot{O}keigbo$
Singular 1		$\dot{e}mi$	
2	$\dot{i}w\dot{o}$		$\dot{u}w\dot{o}$
3		$\dot{o}\dot{u}$	



		<i>Ọyọ</i> [NWY]	<i>Ekiti</i> [CY]	<i>Okeigbo</i> [SEY]
Plural	1	awa	a	a ɣ a
	2	ɛyĩ	ĩĩ	
	3	awɔ̄	ĩɔ̄	a ɣ ā

Thus in the Okeigbo form a *uā* means both 'you (pl)' and 'they'. The same thing happens in Ikalẹ, while in Ọwọ and Ondo the form is *āwā*. Map 6 shows areas of the coalescence of the forms for 2nd and 3rd plural pronouns. Turning our attention to the pronoun forms, we find a feature of differentiation peculiar to the dialects of the CY group – assimilation of the singular pronoun to the verb. Relics of this phenomenon are still to be found in some areas of the NWY group extending to Ọyọ. We provide below the singular pronoun paradigm for the major dialect groups:

	NWY	CY	SEY
1	mo	mo, mɔ	mɔ̄
2	o	o, ɔ	wo
3	ó	ó, ɔ̄	ó

Dialects of the CY group have 2 terms for each person, with the selection of either of the two terms depending on the vowel of the verb. As seen earlier, the vowel system is divided into two sub-groups: tense and lax; so also are the pronouns (singular) divided into two sub-groups, the first of each pair being tense while the other is lax. Tense pronouns are subjects of verbs with tense vowels and lax-pronouns of verbs with lax vowels. For example, in *ljèṣà*, we always have

mo rí – 'I saw', but mɔ rà á (I bought it)  
 ó dé 'he returned', but ɔ bò

A related feature but with wider areas of usage is the process of pronoun change for negation. This is used in all CY areas as well as in the eastern fringes of SEY, i.e. in Ondo, Ọwọ and Okitipupa areas. While the Ọyọ, Ibadan, Ọṣun and Abẹkuta areas make use of modifications (allomorphs) of (*kò*) to express negation, it is the pronoun form that is changed in the former areas. For instance

Egba: o lə (You went) o kò [o] lə (You did not go)  
 Ado-Ekiti: wə lə (You went) wê. lə (You did not go)  
 Okitipupa: wo yú (You went) wèè lə (You did not go)

That is both CY and SEY polarize positiveness and negativeness in the short pronoun; back vowels express the former while front vowels express the latter, Map 7.

There is one other feature in the use of pronouns which sets off the eastern fringes of SEY from all the other dialects of Yoruba. This is the use of the pronoun as the carrier of tense-and-aspect distinctions:

ó lə (he went)  
 é lə (he is going)  
 áa lə (he will go)

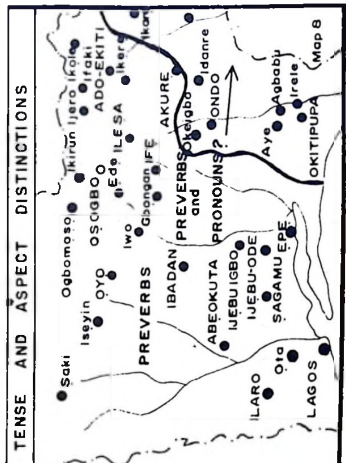
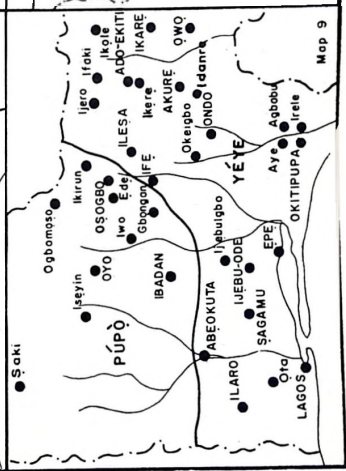
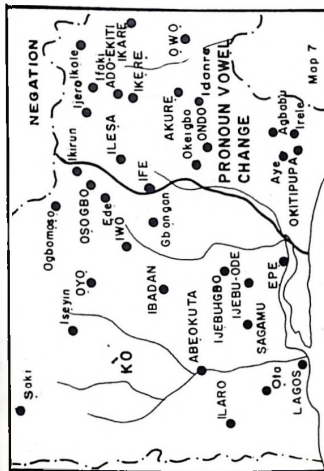
are three different sentences expressing three different tense distinctions. The verb /lə/ in each case is constant while the only changes resulting in the different tense patterns are in the pronoun. This conclusion is further strengthened when we realize that in Ondo and Ikaḷ dialects, the 3rd person singular pronoun is always used as the subject of any sentence in apposition to whatever noun may be the true subject. Take, for instance, a form of the verb 'to be' *ni* in most dialects. This verb turns out in the form of *ñi* in many dialects of the SEY group. This is a defective verb in Yoruba and its subject is always either a noun or the pro-nominal. Thus in standard Yoruba we have

'It is I' – èmi ni (never: mo ni).

In many dialects of the SEY group, the short form of the 3rd person singular pronoun has to be introduced in apposition to the subject of this verb. In Ondo we have

It is I – èmi è ñ  
 It is Ade – Adé è ñ  
 It is Olu – Olú è ñ

Map 8 shows tense signifiers. The presence of this 3rd person singular pronoun may sometimes be obscured by elision of any one of two juxtaposed vowels, but usually it



is the last vowel of the noun which is elided in this environment. Let us see what happens with the use of two nouns *Olu* and *Dele* as subjects in varying tenses.

Olu went	- Ol' ó lə
Olu is going	- Ol' é lə
Olu will go	- Ol' áa lə

So also with *Dele*

Dél' ó lə
Dél' é lə
Del' áa lə

We find that these changes between the name subject and the verb are identical with the pronoun changes we held responsible for tense distinctions.

Other dialects of Yoruba make use of pre-verb particles. In standard Yoruba, you have

Olu went	- Olú lə
Olu is going	- Olú ní lə
Olu will go	- Olú á lə

The particles between the noun subject and the verb are independent of either and affect neither the shape of the verb nor that of the noun.

### *Lexicon*

The most easily recognized cleavages lie in the lexicon and this should not detain us for long. 'All' is rendered as *gbogbo* in most NWY areas except in the southern fringes of Egbaland which shares *dede* with SEY. In CY areas, we have *gede* and *kete*. 'Many', *kpùkpò* is the form used in NWY and most CY areas. In SEY areas, we have *yéye*.

'River' and 'water' have the same form *omi* in SEY areas. In NWY and in some CY areas, water is *omi* while river is *odò* (*ęri* 'river' occurs in Ijebu and Okitipupa areas also).

One other form is worthy of note. It is *sùre* which in most areas means 'bless' but in Owo it is 'to curse'.

Maps 9 and 10 show our lexical isoglosses.

So far we have shown that Yoruba dialects are by



nature geographical. We have also claimed the existence of three major dialect areas delimited by cleavages that we, by linguistic criteria alone, regard as very significant. It will be recalled that, in our opinion, native speakers recognize (by intuition) more dialect areas than are borne out by linguistic analysis. Dialects are not delimited by linguistic criteria alone, there are extralinguistic considerations involved. In fact, the forces that act to fragment an area do not only work on linguistic features. Therefore it would be worth our while to find out whether there are cleavages in the non-verbal culture, a composite of which might yield us something parallel to the major dialect divisions.

Individual ethnographic analysis usually divides our linguistic area into two along the SEY/NWY dialect discontinuity, with CY behaving like a transitional zone which often shares features with SEY and sometimes with NWY. Let us look at some of these features.

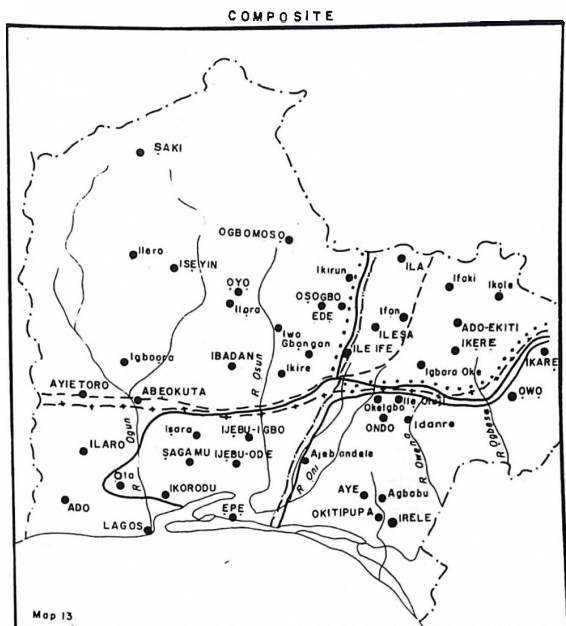
Existence of age grades or *egbẹ*. The traditional *egbẹ* into which boys of the same age group were initiated at between 8 and 10 seems to have been found in Ekiti and SEY areas while absent from NWY. The *otu* or the adult gerontocratic grade system, was also attested in the same areas where *egbẹ* was a functioning unit in the social system. Co-existent with these was a three step hierarchy of chieftaincy titles in CY and SEY areas, a division absent from NWY areas. Traditional power division in NWY areas was between civil and war chiefs.

We also find that it was in the NWY areas that the *ògbóni* cult had some political power, as well as exercising its ritual functions. Ijẹbuland is unique in the sense that, while having the three step gradation of chieftancy organization common to SEY and CY areas, it also invested its *ògbóni* (here known as *òşùgbó*) with some political functions.

In SEY-CY areas, lineage is multilinear and descent is traced both paternally and maternally. Evidences of inheritance through maternal descent abound in Ijẹbu and Ondo areas. In NWY areas, lineage is unilinear and descent is agnatic.

One more example will suffice to confirm that our lines of dialect cleavage are also ethnographic breaks. The status of members of the royal lineage seems to have been ambivalent in CY areas: sometimes relatives of the king have political functions and often they have none. In SEY areas, members of the royal lineage, except the ruling king, are excluded from holding chieftaincy titles and performing functions of any political nature. In NWY areas, they usually hold chieftaincy titles. The non-verbal features presented above show that major lines of cleavage abound in the Yoruba linguistic area.

Map 13 gives us a composite picture of the major isoglosses established.



The study presented above has made no mention of the relationship between the socially defined dialect – standard Yoruba – and the geographically delimited ones sketched. For even within the socially defined dialect there are cleavages but these are traceable to the influence of the primarily acquired first dialects. Both time and space do not permit the inclusion of a discussion of these features.

### *Notes*

1. Uriel Weinreich, 'Is a Structural Dialectology Possible?' *Word X* (1954), 390
2. The status of the high lax vowels in CY dialects has not been convincingly established as functional.

# The Yoruba Verb Phrase

by

**Oladele Awobuluyi**

In modern technical linguistic usage, the term Verb Phrase refers to everything in a sentence except its subject. For the purpose of this non-technical discussion, however, it is convenient to restrict its meaning somewhat, so that it refers to everything in the following simple sentences except nouns or any adjectives accompanying them.

1. Adé tilẹ̀ kọ̀ ilẹ̀ sí Èkó. (Ade even built a house or houses in Lagos.)

2. Adé kọ̀ ilẹ̀ sí Èkó ńá. (Ade just built houses in Lagos.)

3. Adé gbé Èkó ní. (Ade lived in Lagos before.)

4. Adé fí owó rẹ̀ ra ilẹ̀ sí Èkó. (Ade used his money to buy land in Lagos.)

5. Adé dé ní ànà. (Ade arrived yesterday.)

Thus, under this special usage, *tilẹ̀* (even), *kọ̀* (to build, erect), and *sí* (to, at) jointly constitute the verb phrase of (1), while *fí* (with), *rà* (to buy) and *sí* (at, to) form that of (4).

The verb phrase as just defined is far and away the most interesting and at the same time the most challenging element in Yoruba grammar. It is interesting because of the diversity found among its constituents, a diversity not paralleled elsewhere in the language; and challenging because this diversity calls for penetrating inquiry and systematization.

## *Earlier Descriptions of the Verb Phrase*

As far as we can tell from the written records, which go back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when serious

study of Yoruba first started, this challenge has always existed and exercised the minds of scholars. While their contributions have been very impressive, nevertheless, a great deal remains to be done before we achieve full understanding of the Yoruba verb phrase. In effect, even now we are very much in the dark regarding the types as well as the real distinguishing characteristics of the elements that form such phrases. And the information currently available on some of the sub-classes of elements that have so far been set up is in most cases rather sketchy when not downright inaccurate. There are several reasons for this state of affairs.

First, the earliest grammarians, adopting a universalistic approach to their task, modelled their analysis of Yoruba on languages like Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and English. As a result, while they instantly recognized and noted any structural aspects of Yoruba which at that time had equivalents in any one of these model languages, they completely missed those which happened to be unique in our language. Thus, whereas it has been known (though erroneously) since Crowther's time that Yoruba verbs are either transitive or intransitive or both, only recently was it pointed out that they can be emphasized and relativized as well.

The next generation of grammarians can also be blamed for over-looking aspects peculiar to Yoruba. Purely as a reaction to the methods of their predecessors, these grammarians adopted a particularistic approach as a result of which they would not see any similarity between Yoruba and other natural languages, and would not accept any facts as having even the slightest bearing on their analysis if it had not been previously shown to pertain to Yoruba. But then they often failed to observe the precaution necessary to a successful application of their extremely rigorous method, namely, to suspend judgment until all or nearly all the evidence, both structural and semantic, has been considered. Therefore, it is not very surprising that some of the claims made in their works turn out to be unjustifiable. For example, that (i) the 'verb from particles "take" verbs', (ii) the so-called verb *mí* or *ní*

indicates only continuous action, and (iii) all the items in the 'verbal group' except nouns are verbs.

Another factor contributing to the present state of affairs is that most of the existing grammars are too general, aiming, as they seem to do, primarily at breadth of coverage rather than depth of analysis. In consequence, they have so far been unable to capture more than a few of the class distinctions to be found among the verbs in the language.

Finally, and just as important as any of the foregoing points, all the grammars published so far have been too pre-occupied with mere classification and have not sufficiently attempted explanation. In other words, they have been satisfied with merely classifying words as nouns, verbs, etc., and have made little or no attempt to explain why such words display the characteristics attributed to them. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. A contemporary grammar claims that *tún se*, as in (6) below

6. Adé tún agogo náà se. (Ade repaired the timepiece.) is a 'bound verb'. It neither explains, however, why *tún* as a verb should be bound when the majority of verbs in the language are 'free', nor does it say anything at all as to why *se* (to do), which is otherwise, 'transitive', should always be used without an object precisely in the environment of the 'bound verb' *tún*. Another claim is that there are strong verbs and weak verbs in Yoruba, the latter being verbs before which a 'high-tone-junction-contracting verb' may contract either a high tone junction or a zero junction. This formulation raises several questions, however, none of which it answers directly, if at all. First, why is a verb called a 'high-tone-junction-contracting verb' in situations where it in fact never contracts a high tone junction but regularly contracts a zero junction instead? Secondly, does such a verb contract either the high tone junction or the zero junction optionally or obligatorily? Thirdly, if the latter is true, what conditions govern the incidence of either junction?

#### *The Need for a Different Approach*

The purpose of the above remarks is not so much to

expose the shortcomings of earlier works in Yoruba grammar as it is to show the need for adopting a different approach. If any further progress is to be made in the study of Yoruba grammar, care must be taken to avoid the two extremes of universalism and particularism. As extremes, these two approaches could hardly be expected to give a true or balanced picture of the language. There is in actual fact impressive and still growing evidence in the literature that, while Yoruba may not match in every detail all other languages, it will at the same time certainly not turn out to be a completely unique specimen of human language. In other words, judging from what is currently known about Language, one would expect Yoruba to resemble a few other languages in some respects and differ from them in others. If that is the case, then the proper duty of a Yoruba grammarian must be to describe the language in such a way as to highlight both its unique features and the characteristics it may share with languages of other groups. The grammarian should bring clarity to his task and never raise more questions than he is able to answer.

The analysis presented below is inspired by these two ideals.

#### *The Determination of Yoruba Parts of Speech*

Let us consider the sentences (1-5) again. As said earlier, the verb phrase (1) consists of *tilẹ* (even), *kó* (to build) and *sí* (at, to), while the one in (4) is made up of *fí* (with), *rà* (to buy) and *sí* (at, to). Suppose we call *tilẹ* and words like it adverbs, *fí* and words like it prepositions, *rà*, *kó*, etc. verbs, *sí*, *ní* prepositions, and *rí* (before adverb). Then we can represent the structure of the verb phrases in these sentences by means of the formula (7):

7. Adverbs Prepositions Verbs Prepositions Adverbs  
 Several comments are in order on this formula. The first is that the formula states that the maximum number of functional positions in the verb phrase is five. Some verb phrases will display less than this maximum, as in the case of (1-5); others will display it, as in

8. *Adé kàn fí owó rẹ̀ ra ilẹ̀ sí Èkó ńáá.* (Ade wasted his

money buying land in Lagos.) in which *kàn* is an adverb, *fi* a preposition, *rà* a verb, *sí* a preposition, and *ṣáá* an adverb. But no verb phrase appears to display more than this number.

The second is that the constituents of the formula occur in a perfectly symmetrical arrangement: the verbs occupy the centre, next to them on either side are the prepositions, which are themselves in turn bounded on the outside by adverbs. This arrangement is apparently not fortuitous, as it seems to correlate or fit in perfectly with some well-known facts. For example, the verbs constitute the most important class in the formula (a fact totally in keeping with their central place there), as shown by the fact that they alone occur obligatorily or always, while all the other parts of the sentence occur optionally, that is, only part of the time. Similarly, prepositions display closer affinity with verbs than do adverbs.

Finally, the formula makes the claim that the Yoruba verb phrase consists of three types of elements or parts of speech occurring in five positions. Given the indisputable fact that the verb phrase consists of five positions, a grammarian is normally only permitted to assume that there are five types of elements or parts of speech matching those five positions. If, however, the grammarian chooses to assume otherwise, as he may do, the burden of demonstrating the validity of his assumption rests completely on him.

To understand why we have chosen here to assume that the five places in the formula (7) are filled by only three types of words – verbs, prepositions and adverbs – it is necessary to consider briefly how Yoruba words must be classified into parts of speech.

It is now generally agreed that meaning is useless for this purpose, because it leads to the grouping together of words that should be separated, and vice versa. Form or shape of words is similarly of little value, and for precisely the same reason: words of obviously different classes share the same form. Thus nouns and conjunctions, e.g. *àti* (and), begin with vowels; nouns, verbs, conjunctions, and adverbs begin with consonants; nouns, adverbs, and

verbs can be either monosyllabic or polysyllabic, etc. Mere position, too, which might suggest itself as another criterion, has to be rejected, because, to give just one simple reason, it will not permit the grouping together of words that seem to form one class. For example, there are four nouns in (8) which, given this criterion, cannot be put in one class, because they occur in different positions in that sentence. As it turns out, the only criterion that can be used to classify Yoruba words satisfactorily is that of function. This criterion requires that words performing different functions be put in different classes, and those performing the same function be put in the same class, no matter where and in how many different places they may occur in sentences.

Now there are only three grammatical functions present in the Verb Phrase, and this is why there are also only three parts of speech corresponding to them. In other words, by naming the words capable of occurring in the first and fifth places in the formula (7), adverbs, we call attention to the fact that they perform the same function; and similarly for the words named prepositions and verbs.

### *The Characteristics of Verbs*

Verbs are individual items functioning as predicates in simple Yoruba sentences, that is, items which can occur in (9).

#### 9. # Subject — (Object) #

Where the symbol # represents sentence boundary, — marks the position of the predicate, and round brackets enclose any item that does not occur all the time. Thus, *wá*, *kọ*, *ní*, and *mọ* are shown to be verbs by their ability to occur as they do in the following sentences

10. Adé *wá*. (Ade came.)

11. Adé *kọ* ilé kan. (Ade built a house.)

12. Mo *ní* Adé *kọ* ilé kan. (I said Ade built a house.)

13. Adé *mọ* ilé *íkọ*. (Ade knows how to build houses.)

where *Adé* and *Mo* are subjects, and *ilé kan*, *Adé kọ ilé kan*, and *ilé íkọ* are objects. If elements which are not verbs are made to appear in the position of the predicate,

the resultant sentences will normally be judged ungrammatical, as in

14. \*Adé kúkú ilé kan.
15. \*Adé pàpà.
16. \*Mo dáadáa Adé kọ ilé kan.
17. \*Adé méjì ilé íkọ.

where asterisks indicate faulty grammar, and the adverbs *kúkú* and *pàpà*, the noun *dáadáa*, and the noun or adjective *méjì* are used where only verbs occur.

There are several reasons for defining Yoruba verbs as we have just done. One of them, which has already been given, is that Yoruba parts of speech, of which verbs are one, can only be defined in terms of the functions they perform.

Another reason is that speakers of the language react mentally to just any words functioning as predicates as though they were verbs. Thus, given the nonsensical utterance:

18. \*Adé bé owó,  
they would interpret *be*, which as far as we know has never yet occurred as a word in Yoruba, as a verb, simply because it functions in the position of predicate.

Yet another reason is that new verbs are formed in the language simply by making words function as predicates. This is how the verb *pàtàkì* (derived from the adjective *pàtàkì* [important]), for instance, entered the language only a few years ago:

19. Adé pàtàkì ara rẹ. (Ade flattered his own ego.)

The final reason is that the definition has no exceptions at all when applied within the total context of Yoruba grammar, as the definition of every other part of speech in the language must be applied. The definition applies directly to all verbs functioning in simple sentences of the type represented by (9), and indirectly to those functioning only when accompanied by elements not shown in (9), e.g.

20. Ó bẹ yòò. (It had a bright red colour.)

where *bẹ* is said to be always accompanied by *yòò*, and

21. Adé fì owó sí ibẹ. (Ade put money there.)  
in which *fì* (to put) never occurs without a phrase containing *sí*.

The definition applies to the verbs in these two sentences as follows. Given that (20) is a simple Yoruba sentence and that every such sentence has a predicate, on the basis of their functions *ó* and *yòdò* are only analysable as subject and adverbial respectively, leaving *bẹ* as the obvious predicate in the sentence. Similarly in (21) *sí ibẹ* (there) has to be analyzed as an adverbial, *Adé* and *owó* as subject and object, respectively, and *fí*, of necessity, as predicate.

Besides their ability to function as predicates, verbs display in the majority of cases other characteristics that deserve brief mention here.

First, they are subject to emphasis – by reduplication.

For example:

22. *kíkọ̀ ni Adé kọ̀ ilé náà.* (What actually happened is that Ade built a house.)

where *kọ̀* (to build a dwelling place) is emphasized.

Second, they are subject to interrogation – by means of the interrogative noun *kí* (what) and the pro-verbs (verbs that stand for other verbs) *şe* (do) and *rí* (seem). Thus, when the verb *wá* (to come) in

23. *Adé wá.* (Ade came).

is questioned, the resultant utterance is

24. *Kí ni Adé şe?* (What did Adé do?)

Third, as exponents of the predicate, verbs are subject to relativization – by reduplication. For example:

25. *Wíwá tí Adé wá kò yà mí lẹnu rárá.* (I am not at all surprised by Ade's presence.)

Fourth, verbs select their subjects; that is, some verbs can only be used with certain nouns as subject and not with others. For instance, the verb *kọ̀* (to build a dwelling place) selects only animate subjects. This is why we can say:

26. *Adé kọ̀ ilé kan.* (Ade built a house.)

27. *Ẹyẹ kọ̀ ilé sí ibẹ.* (Birds made their nests there.)

but not

28. *\*Òkúta kọ̀ ilé náà.*

Fifth and last, verbs also select their objects. For example, the object of the verb *kọ̀* is always a noun denoting a

dwelling place or the like, and no other type of noun will do as its object. Hence we can say

29. Adé kọ ilé méjì. (Ade built two houses.)

but not

30. \*Adé kọ mọ̀tò méjì.

### *Verbal Constructions*

As noted earlier, grammarians have long held the view that Yoruba verbs are either transitive or intransitive or both (i.e., 'neutral'). It has also been suggested that verbs may be subclassified according to the tones they bear. For our part, however, we feel that the latter classification belongs more properly in phonology, the level of description at which the spoken form of the language is considered, while the former classification is factually questionable and is, in any case, of comparatively limited practical value; for one thing, it is much too gross and, for another, it does not seem to identify any particular construction types in the language. A more fruitful way of classifying Yoruba verbs, one incidentally which many earlier writers recognized without granting it the prominence it fully deserves, is in terms of the constructions in which they operate. This is so because the major basic construction types in the language are differentiated primarily by the types of verbs functioning in them. This method of subclassification permits at least the following nine subclasses of verbs to be recognized in the language.

1. *Adjectivisable Verbs*: These are verbs like *pupa* (red), *dúdú* (black), *pẹ* (late), and *mu* (drink), some of which have been called adjectives. In fact, they are all verbs, because they satisfy the criterion for establishing verbs. The distinguishing characteristic of these verbs is that they can be turned (often without any modification at all in form) into adjectives. For example,

31. Ọkọ Adé dúdú (Ade's car is black) cf. Ọkọ Adé kú (Ade's car stalled.)

32. Adé ra ọkọ dúdú (Ade bought a black car.) cf. \*Adé ní ọkọ kíkú.

2. *Serial Construction Verbs*: The construction referred to here can be exemplified by

33. Adé gbé e tà. (Ade sold it out.)

The construction always contains at least two verbs, and each of them functions as the predicate of an original full simple sentence. Thus the two simple sentences which were combined to form (33) are

34. Adé gbé e. (Ade took it.)

35. Adé tà á. (Ade sold it.)

Many sentences which are thought in some accounts of the language to contain 'prepositions' or 'modifying verbs', such as

36. Adé dúró dè mí. (Ade waited for me.)

37. Adé dúró tì mí. (Ade stood near me.)

acutally contain serial verbs. This is so because those items in them which are thought to be prepositions, e.g. *dè*, or 'modifying verbs', e.g. *tì*, in fact function as verbs with precisely the meaning they have in sentences like (36-37).

Not every verb in the language apparently can occur in this construction; hence the necessity for setting up a class of serial construction verbs. Furthermore, those verbs that function in the construction cannot always occur in just any order. This is why we do not say

38. \*Adé tà á gbé.

where *gbé* means 'to pick up, lift, carry'.

3. *Splitting verbs*: The verbs to which this label applies are mostly idiomatic phrases formed from extant or obsolete items. Some examples are *bàjẹ* (to spoil, get spoilt), *rẹjẹ* (to cheat), *túnse* (to repair), and *dáse* (to do something single-handed). The distinguishing characteristic of these verbs is that, when they are used with objects, as they almost always are, they are split in two by their objects, as in

39. Adé ba agogo náà jẹ. (Ade spoilt the timepiece.) c.f. Agogo náà bàjẹ. (The timepiece got damaged.)

The grammarians who first posited this class of verbs for the language did so on the basis of the idiomatic nature of most of the verbs concerned. The wisdom of their decision is confirmed by various practical and theoretical considerations which we cannot go into here.

4. *Complex Verbs*: This term refers to some relatively to

absolutely fixed combinations of verbs and objects which for all practical purposes are now used as simple verbs. Some examples are *rántí* (to remember), *pàdè* (to meet), *subú* (to fall, to tumble), and *síwọ* (to stop working).

5. *Causative Verbs*: The verbs in this class are few in number, and are exemplified by *mu*, *da*, *fi*, and *se*. As their name implies, such verbs are used in situations in which an agent induces some action on the part of another agent. Their distinguishing feature is that their objects are always analysable as full sentences. For example, the sentence

40. Adé fi ebi pa mí. (Ade starved me.)

where *ebi pa mí* (I was hungry) is a sentence in its own right.

6. *Indirect Statement Verbs*: These are verbs like *sọ* (to say), *ní* (to say), *gbọ* (to hear) and *mọ* (to know), which are used in indirect statements and commands. They probably number less than twenty-five, and are shown to form a distinct class because only they can operate as main verbs in indirect statement sentences. Thus compare the following two sentences one of which is ungrammatical:

41. Mo gbọ pé Adé kọ ilé sí Èkó. (I understand that Ade built houses in Lagos.)

42. \*Mo wá pé Adé kọ ilé sí Èkó.

7. *Locative Verbs*: These are verbs which somewhat surprisingly require the preposition *sí* (to, at) (see below) when location – not motion – is indicated. Some examples are *kú* (to die), *gbàgbé* (to forget), *dúró* (to stand up), and *sùn* (to sleep, lie down), as in

43. Adé kú sí ibè. (Ade died there.)

44. Adé dúró sí ibè. (Ade stood there.)

Notice the difference in meaning between these two sentences and

45. Adé kú ní ibè. (Ade died there but was presumably buried elsewhere.)

46. Adé dúró sí ibè. (Ade stopped there.)

Given the meanings of such verbs, one would have expected them to require only the preposition *ní* when location is to be signified. The fact that they can also

occur with *sí* to indicate location rather than motion is something unique about them and one which relegates them to a class apart from the others. Twenty of them have been recorded so far.

8. *Particle-Selecting Verbs*:. These are verbs like *jí* (to steal), *kó* (to gather, steal), *yá* (to lend), etc., which in the majority of cases optionally occur with the particle *ní*, as in

47. Adé yá mi ní síṣì. (Ade lent me six pence.)

The number of verbs in this class is large, though it would seem to be less than a hundred.

9. *Reduplicated-Nominal-selecting Verbs*: The distinguishing feature of the verbs in this class is that they always occur in sentences containing nominalizations whose initial reduplicative consonants have been optionally dropped. Some of the verbs in this class are *kò* (to learn), *dùn* (to be pleasant), *ṣòro* (to be difficult), *mò* (to know), as in

48. Adé kò ọkọ íwà. (Ade learned how to drive).

Evidence for the nominal status of the key items following such verbs comes from various sources, among them the fact that (48) has the same meaning as

49. Adé kò ọkọ wíwà. (Ade learned how to drive.)  
where *ọkọ wíwà* has the unmistakable form of a nominalization.

#### *The Characteristics of Prepositions*

Prepositions are individual items which enter into construction with nouns (and any adjectives qualifying them) to form adverbials. The latter, like adverbs (see below), function as modifiers of verbs. It is therefore clear that prepositions do not perform the same function as verbs, and in consequence never occur where verbs occur in Yoruba sentences. This is why the following are ungrammatical:

50. \*Adé fi owó na.

51. \*Adé ní àná.

52. \*Adé sí Èkó.

53. \*Adé fi.

54. \*Adé ní.

55. \*Adé sí.

where *fì* means 'with, by means of', *ní* 'in, on at', and *sí* 'to, at'.

Viewed in the light of the above definition of prepositions, some of the items recognized as prepositions in other accounts of Yoruba grammar turn out not to be prepositions but verbs. Some of those items are *ka* and *mọ*, as in

56. Adé gbé ìkòkò ka iná. (Ade placed a pot on the fire.)

57. Adé lẹ iwé mọ igi náà. (Ade pasted a piece of paper on the tree.)

These items are not prepositions because they in fact function as predicates in simple sentences. As a general rule, therefore, nothing that can be shown to function as a predicate in some Yoruba simple sentence should ever be analyzed as a preposition, especially when its meaning as a preposition is not different from the one it carries as a verb. But by the same token, any item that cannot be shown to be a verb under a given interpretation or meaning should be considered, if possible, for inclusion in the class of prepositions, (see *bá* and *fún* below).

Like verbs, prepositions select nouns as objects. Thus, the preposition *ní* always occurs with nouns denoting location, manner, or time. This is why one can say

58. Adé dé ní ànà. (Ade arrived yesterday.)  
but not

59. \*Adé dé ní iwé.

However, no preposition selects nouns as subjects, as many verbs do. Moreover, the many processes to which verbs in their capacity as predicates can be subjected are not universally applicable in the case of prepositions. Thus, while none of them can be questioned, some (but not all) of them apparently can be emphasized or relativised for some Yoruba speakers but not for others – including this writer and the people consulted when this paper was first written. Thus, while every speaker will reject

60. \*Sísí ni Adé fì owó rẹ ra ilẹ sí Èkó, as an emphatic version of

4. Adé fì owó rẹ ra ilẹ sí Èkó. (Ade used his money to buy land in Lagos.) some speakers accept

61. Fífi ni Adé fi owó rẹ̀ ra ilẹ̀ sí Èkó  
also as an emphatic version of (4), whereas others (including the writer) reject it, preferring (62) instead.

62. Rírà ni Adé fi owó rẹ̀ ra ilẹ̀ sí Èkó.  
Perhaps it is a further indication of the difference between verbs and prepositions that lack of agreement occurs in connection with the emphasis and relativisation of the latter only.

### *Prepositional Constructions*

Just as there are verbal constructions, so there are prepositional constructions. As indicated in the formula (7), prepositions occur in two places in the verb phrase – in the pre-verbal position and in the post verbal position.

*Pre-Verbal Prepositional Constructions:* There appear to be only three pre-verbal prepositions in the language, namely, *bá* (on behalf of), *fi* (with, by means of) and *ti* (from).

*Bá* indicates assistance, as in

63. Adé *bá* mi rà á bọ̀. (Ade bought it for me from somewhere.)

Setting up a preposition *bá* with the meaning of 'on behalf of' as distinct from the verb *bá* (to join the company of, to overtake) helps to explain the ambiguity of

64. Adé *bá* mi ẹ̀ ẹ̀ náà. (Ade helped me to do the work/Ade did the work for me.)

When *bá* in (64) is a preposition, the number of people who actually worked is one, and the sentence means more literally 'Ade did the work on my behalf.' On the other hand, when *bá* is a verb, the number of people who worked is two, with the result that (64) is to be translated as 'Ade joined me and we did the work together' and analyzed as a serial verbal construction.

*Fi* indicates means or instrument, as in

4. Adé fi owó rẹ̀ ra ilẹ̀ sí Èkó. (Ade used his money to buy land in Lagos.)

*Ti* indicates source or origin, as in

65. Adé ti ibẹ̀ jáde. (Ade emerged or came out from there.)

The nouns occurring after *bá* are normally always animate. After *fí* a noun compulsorily acquires an instrumental meaning if it does not have one already. *Tí* is followed only by nouns indicating manner, place, or time.

3. *Post-Verbal Prepositional Constructions*: There are at least three post-verbal prepositions in the language, viz.: *ní* (in, on, at), *sí* (to, at) and *fún* (for, on behalf of).

*Ní* indicates either location or source, depending on what verb it follows, as in

66. Adé wà ní ibẹ̀. (Ade was there.)

67. Adé kūrò ní ibẹ̀. (Ade left the place.)

As in the case of *fí*, any simple noun, as opposed to nominalizations and incorporated sentences, occurring after *ní* obligatorily acquires a locative meaning if it does not have such a meaning already.

*Sí* normally indicates goal, but carries a locative meaning in the environment of a locative verb (see above). For example:

68. Adé lọ sí ibẹ̀. (Ade went there.)

43. Adé kú sí ibẹ̀. (Ade died there.)

The preposition is normally used with nouns denoting place or time.

*Fún* indicates assistance or benefit, as in

69. Jésù kú fún wa. (Jesus died for us.)

As in the case of *bá* above, a distinction between the preposition *fún* (on behalf of) and the verb *fún* (to give to) is needed to explain the ambiguity of

70. Adé ta agogo náà fún mí. (Ade sold the timepiece for me/Ade sold the timepiece to me.)

When *fún* in (70) is a preposition, the item sold did not pass to the noun (*mí*) with which the preposition is in construction, and the sentence therefore has the first of the two meanings above. However, when *fún* is a verb, the item sold passed to the noun following it; consequently, (70) has the second of the two meanings above, and contains serial verbs.

#### *The Characteristics of Adverbs*

Adverbs are individual items functioning, like adverbials (see above), as modifiers of verbs. As such, they typically

never occur where verbs occur in Yoruba sentences, namely, in the position of the predicate. This is shown by the fact that we do not say

71. \*Adé tilẹ̀ Èkó.

72. \*Adé rí Èkó.

73. \*Adé tilẹ̀.

74. \*Adé rí.

where *tilẹ̀* means 'even', and *rí* means 'before'.

The definition of adverbs just given and the criterion suggested earlier for establishing Yoruba parts of speech jointly rule out the possibility of having 'verbs' that modify other verbs, as in

75. Adé gbé e tì

'Ade failed in his attempt to lift it up.'

where the verb *tì* is said to modify the verb *gbé*. This is so because verbal status and modifier function exclude each other in the same way and to the same extent to which predicate and modifier exclude each other. If *tì* is actually a verb in (75), then its function there can only be by definition that of predicate; but if its function there is in fact that of modifier, then it has to be an adverb and not a verb, since only the former (along with adverbials) acts as a modifier.

Not only do adverbs differ functionally from verbs, the various processes which verbs can be made to undergo are also more or less completely inapplicable to adverbs. In particular, they cannot be emphasized, relativised or questioned, they never occur before nouns, and (with apparently only two exceptions) do not select subject nouns.

### *Adverbial Constructions*

Two types of adverbs occur in a verb phrase: those that occur before verbs and are, therefore, referred to as pre-verbal adverbs, and those that occur after verbs and are consequently referred to as post-verbal adverbs. The former greatly outnumber the latter. At last count thirty-seven pre-verbal adverbs had been observed, while the post-verbal adverbs recorded so far are: *sáá* 'in vain, to no purpose', *mọ̀* 'ever' (used in negative contexts only), *rí*

'ever before', *díè* 'a little, a bit', *gan-an* 'really', *púpò* 'greatly'.

Pre-verbal adverbs can be divided into five major groups, depending on the function they perform.

The first group consists of *kò* (with the variants *kì*, *ì*, *è*, *à*, *ò*, *òn*) and *máà*. These function as negators primarily in declarative and imperative sentences respectively.

The second class comprises *yóò*, *óò*, *á*, *máa*, and another adverb with no overt form. These are used to indicate tense, of which there are only two in the language – future (marked by *yóò*, *óò*, etc.) and non-future (not overtly marked).

The third class is made up of *tí* 'already', *tíí* 'yet', *máa*, *m̄* or *ń*, *á* and *a*. These indicate aspect, of which there are again only two in the language – perfective (marked by *tí* and *tíí*), and imperfective (marked by *máa*, *m̄* or *ń*, *á*, and *a*).

Of these two categories of tense and aspect, the former is basic, in the sense that, earlier views to the contrary notwithstanding, every Yoruba sentence carries an indication (whether overt or not) of it, while, by contrast, many sentences occur without any indication whatever of aspect. The co-occurrence of tense and aspect (to yield four more possibilities) is a matter of detail which we intend to omit here.

The fourth class of pre-verbal adverbs consists of *ba*, *ibáà*, *bá*, *lè* 'may' (as opposed to *le* 'to be able'), and *gbòdò*. These indicate moods such as condition (*ba*, *ibáà*) potentiality (*bá*, *le*), and obligation (*gbòdò*).

The fifth and final class consists of the remaining pre-verbal adverbs, which are too numerous to be listed here. Their function appears to be that of modification pure and simple.

The manner in which these adverbs occur together or exclude one another is difficult to describe, especially owing to a great deal of indeterminateness or variation in the way they are used by different speakers and in different dialects. Therefore we have decided to exclude this aspect of the pre-verbal adverbs from the present discussion. The function and occurrence of the post-verbal

adverbs pose no special descriptive problems, and as such need no further discussion here.

#### *Some of the Features of this Analysis*

It may be instructive at this stage to dwell briefly on some of the main features of the analysis just presented. The most prominent of them is its transparency, which takes three forms. First of all, the analysis is simple and straightforward (as grammatical descriptions are expected to be), employing only three parts of speech – verb, preposition and adverb – which, being universal, require no special definitions. Secondly, the analysis is devoid of such anomalies as long lists of exceptions and unnatural restrictions on major parts of speech of the type exemplified by what have been called 'bound verbs' in some other texts of Yoruba grammar. Finally, it is based on an explicit criterion without variants whose validity is easily testable.

It is worth noting that this analysis is more explanatory than any other we have examined so far. Take the case of *bá* 'on behalf of' for example. It has been described accurately elsewhere as always requiring a following verb. But whereas at that stage it was impossible to explain why the word should behave in this way, simply because it was being analyzed as a verb (what possible reason is there for a verb to be 'bound' and to always require the presence of another verb?), by analyzing this same word differently now as a preposition, we understand at once why it cannot occur by itself (as verbs do when they occur in frame [9]), why it does not occur in this same frame, and why it presupposes the presence of a verb rather than that of an adverb or adjective.

#### *Some of the Implications of the Analysis*

The analysis just presented relates to several other aspects of Yoruba study, and we propose to discuss very briefly a few of them.

In the area of orthography, the analysis suggested above for the so-called high-tone-junction-contracting verbs calls into serious question the existing (though by no means

universally observed) convention of writing the 'high tone junction' as part of the preceding rather than of the following item. The convention appears to be quite sound at first, motivated, it seems by the desire to avoid violating the rule which prevents Yoruba vowel initial words from beginning on a high tone. On further examination, however, especially when considered from the standpoint of syntax, the convention turns out to be not so sound. Two related reasons account for this: first, it disrupts the constituent structure of a natural construction; second it forces one to teach the construction in its disjointed and incorrect form. Given these two reasons, the convention becomes very hard to justify, the more so as the rule which it seems to have been designed to protect applies to the basic forms of words and not to their contextual forms, in which belong all items beginning with the 'high tone junction'.

In order to be more useful than they are now the existing dictionaries of the language need to become subtler. Most regrettably, for example, they rarely contain information on the selectional properties of verbs and prepositions. Yet selectional information of the type given above when dealing with prepositions is of interest to native speakers and definitely indispensable to non-Yoruba students of the language.

If the analysis of the Yoruba Verb Phrase suggested here is correct, as we believe it is, at least in its essentials, then some of the entries in these dictionaries will have to be reclassified. Thus, given this analysis and the reasons for suggesting it, Yoruba lexicographers should no longer be able to describe *ní* as a verb used as a preposition!

By far the most important implication hinted at in the course of this analysis is its relevance to language teaching. In this connection we make no distinction at all between Yoruba-speaking and non-Yoruba-speaking students, since the aim of teaching both sets is partly to make them (more) fully aware of the structure of the language – precisely the sort of thing discussed above. Furthermore, we assume that any well-conceived programme of language instruction will definitely begin with simple sen-

tences and go on to complex ones, which are by definition combinations of the former. The analysis suggested here finds direct application in such a programme in two important ways.

First, it lists Yoruba simple sentence constructions of the type that would be taught in that kind of programme, and describes their distinctive features. In other words, it supplies all the basic facts to be taught about them.

Secondly, it contains implicit suggestions regarding the best order in which these constructions could be taught. One such implied order, based on both the affinity and the relation of pre-supposition between these constructions, is the one in which the nine subclasses of verbs observed so far were discussed above.

1. Adjectivisable Verbs
2. Serial Construction Verbs
3. Splitting Verbs
4. Complex Verbs
5. Causative Verbs
6. Indirect Statement Verbs
7. Locative Verbs
8. Particle-Selecting Verbs
9. Reduplicated-Nominal-Selecting Verbs.

None of the existing school grammars or handbooks of language examined by us contains anything so detailed and systematic on verbs and the constructions in which they operate. We hope, however, that if grammar is ever to be at all useful as well as meaningful to our pupils, our textbook writers and publishers will see the necessity of thinking along lines that are at least similar to the ones outlined above.

### *Conclusion*

We have been at pains to show that this discussion is by no means the end product of a completed investigation. Rather, it is more like an unfinished progress report on a certain field of research. But even so, many prevailing views have been called into question and new problems have been identified, not only for grammarians but also for people with related interests. This should be neither sup-

rising nor disheartening, for the grammar of any language is not given like the ten commandments, but rather has to be evolved by trial and error. Besides, languages are so complex a phenomenon that they require not only the attention of one grammarian or of one lexicographer, etc., but the full collaboration of teams of experts. One of the outstanding achievements of the present seminar is to have brought a number of them together for an exchange of views profitable both to themselves and to outsiders.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Apart from a few minor modifications and additions here and there, the present version of this paper is the same as the one presented at the Weekend Seminar on Yoruba Language and Literature in 1969. Extensive changes are considered both unnecessary and undesirable because many of the criticisms made then are still valid today, and later works based on it or in reaction to it cannot be fully understood or appreciated otherwise.
- <sup>2</sup> To answer this objection, as has subsequently been done in Ayọ Bamgboṣe 'The Yoruba Verb', (a paper presented at the Seminar on the Yoruba Verb Phrase held at the University of Ibadan in April, 1971) by saying that this is how the language works is in effect to concede the point at issue.
- <sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this problem, see Olatunde Awobuluyi, 'High-Tone-Junction-Contracting Verbs in Yoruba', *Journal of West African Languages* VII (1970), 29-38. The concept of strong verbs and weak verbs has now been officially abandoned. On this, cf. Ayọ Bamgboṣe, 'The Verb-Infinitive Phrase in Yoruba', *JWAL* VIII, 1 (1971), 37-52.
- <sup>4</sup> Of course, it is completely immaterial what names we choose to give to these elements, provided that *tíḽé* and *rí* are put in one class, *fí* and *sí* in another, and *rà*, *kò*, etc. in yet another.
- <sup>5</sup> Complex sentences are by definition made up of simple sentences, and as such contain more than one predicate each.
- <sup>6</sup> The only other words which can be emphasized in the speech of all Yoruba speakers are nouns, and their emphasis does not require reduplication as is the case with verbs.
- <sup>7</sup> The only other words which can be relativised in the speech of all Yoruba speakers are nouns. Their relativisation does not require reduplication, as that of verbs does.

8. Notice that in the sentence

àpò kan kò ilé

àpò kan 'one hundred pounds (£)' is not the subject of the verb kò 'to build a dwelling place', but rather that of the verb tó 'to be sufficient', as seen in the following fuller variant of the above sentence:

àpò kan tó lati fi kò ilé

'A hundred pounds is enough to build a house.'

9. This matter is considered in detail in Oladele Awobuluyi's 'On the Classification of Yoruba Verbs', a paper presented at the Seminar on the Yoruba Verb Phrase held at the University of Ibadan in April, 1971.
10. Two other subclasses have now been added to this list, bringing the total to eleven. See Awobuluyi, *op. cit.*
11. For more on this, see Oladele Awobuluyi, 'Predicative Adjectives in Yoruba': A Critique, presented at the Seminar on the Yoruba Verb Phrase held at the University of Ibadan in April, 1971.
12. See Oladele Awobuluyi, 'Splitting Verbs in Yoruba,' *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan* (Actes du 8<sup>e</sup> Conges de la Societe Linguistique de l'Afrique Occidentale), Serie H. I (1971) 151-164.
13. See Oladele Awobuluyi, 'The Particle *li* in Yoruba', *JWAL* VI 2, (1969), 66-77.
14. See Oladele Awobuluyi, 'High-Tone-Junction-Contracting Verbs in Yoruba', *JWAL* VII, (1970), 29-38. For an opposing view-point, see Ayò Bamgboṣe, 'The Verb-Infinitive Phrase in Yoruba', *JWAL* VIII, I (1971), 37-52, and for a rebuttal of it, see Oladele Awobuluyi, 'On the So-called Infinitives in Yoruba', (in press).
15. See Ayò Bamgboṣe, 'The Yoruba Verb', referred to earlier.
16. This calls into serious question the prevailing view that words like *kláklá* 'quickly' and *díḗdíḗ* 'little by little' are adverbs. The fact that such words can be emphasized or relativised without being reduplicated (see notes 6 and 7) suggests that, far from being adverbs, they are nouns. This view is greatly strengthened by the further fact, among others, that such words sometimes occur preceded by the preposition *ní*, a word which never occurs except before nouns.
17. Bamgboṣe has subsequently charged in his seminar paper, 'The Yoruba Verb', already referred to, that this simplicity is achieved at the expense of the facts of the language. This charge appears to be completely unfounded, however, as no real facts which have supposedly been ignored or sacrificed here, nor any important changes they necessitate in our formulation actually emerge from his paper.
18. As every language teacher or learner knows, absence of exceptions and idiosyncratic or language specific groupings facilitate language learning, while their presence has the opposite effect.
19. See note 2.

# *On the use of Verbal Group Negators in Yoruba*

by

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## *Summary*

Verbal group negation in Yoruba is effected through the operation of certain negator elements on the positive verbal group. This paper discusses the uses of these negators in the language. After a brief survey of their syntactic distribution, we have attempted to demonstrate that the syntactic use of one of the negators does not always produce 'negative meaning', making it therefore necessary to distinguish the use of that negator as a semantic reinforcer from its use as a semantic negator.

## *The Syntactic Aspect*

In 1966 and 1967 Bamgboṣe successfully demonstrated that there is greater complexity in Yoruba verbal group negation and in the use of the verbal group negators than earlier grammars indicated. Even so, there seems to be room for a closer look at the syntax of verbal group negation in Yoruba. In this section, three main questions are considered:

- (a) what elements may be considered as verbal group negators?
- (b) what factors affect their syntactic use in the language?
- (c) two negators may follow each other in the negation of only one verbal group: what is the distribution of negators in such sequences in relation to the verbal groups negated by them?

### 1. *The Negator Elements*

There are two negator elements operating on the verbal group. These are: *kò* and *máà*. *Kò* has two principal forms.

- (i) *kì*, which occurs only before *yóò*, *báá*<sup>1</sup> (as in *kì báá wá* he wouldn't have come), and *ń*<sup>2</sup> (as in *kì ń sùn l'òru* 'he doesn't sleep at night').

The phonetic form of *kì* is /kì/ in clause – initial position (where the 3rd person singular pronoun is not overtly expressed) and sometimes even within the clause if the speech is slow or formal. In non-initial position in a clause, *kì* is most often realized as /i/ which may itself be assimilated by the vowel of an immediately preceding non-emphatic pronominal form; e.g.: *Wọ̀n k̀ì ń sùn* = *Wọ̀n ì ń sùn* = *Wọ̀n ọ̀n ń sùn* 'They don't sleep'.

- (ii) *kò* occurs before all verbal elements except the full verbs *nì* 'be' and *wà* 'be, exist', and the auxiliary elements

a, á, *yóò*, *máa*, *baà*, *m*<sup>2</sup>

The phonetic form of *kò* is /kò/ in clause – initial position; but in other positions, it is often reduced to /ò/ which, in turn, may be assimilated by the vowel of an immediately preceding non-emphatic pronominal form; e.g.:

*A k̀ò ọ̀ = A ò ọ̀ = A à ọ̀* 'We didn't go'.

*Máà* is normally realized in speech as *máà*; but sometimes, especially in fast speech, it comes out as *má* if the following syllable is on low tone or mid tone.

The element *kọ* (as in: *èmi kọ ní* 'it's not me') is described by Bamgboṣe (1966) as a verbal group negator.<sup>3</sup> But it seems that a stronger case could be made for it as a qualifier in the nominal group immediately preceding the verb *nì*.

In the first place, if *kọ* were to be considered as a verbal group negator, its distribution would be anomalous in the sense that the verb *nì* which it negatives may be deleted without any need to delete the negator itself, as in: *Èmi kọ ní* 'It's not me';

*Èmi kọ* 'not me':

No other verbal group negator behaves in this way.

Secondly, whenever *kò* occurs without a following *ni*, it always occurs after a noun or noun phrase.

Thirdly, it should be noted that while *kò* may occur between a thematized nominal and the verb *ni* (e.g. – Tiyín *kò* *ni* – Tiyín *ni* 'it's not yours' – 'it's yours'), it cannot occur between a thematized clause and *ni*. Thus while the sentences 1(a) and 1(b) are well formed,

1(a) Ó fẹ́ I-gbé e *ni* (i) '(the fact is that) he wants to take it';

(b) Kò fẹ́ I-gbé e *ni* (i) '(the fact is that) he doesn't want to take it';

the sentences 2(a) and 2(b) derived from them by the insertion of *kò* before *ni* are not:

2(a) \*Ó fẹ́ I-gbé e *kò ni* (i)

(b) \*Kò fẹ́ I-gbé *kò ni* (i)

On the other hand, to use *kò* grammatically before *ni* in sentences derived from 1(a), (b), it is necessary to nominalize the thematized clause. Thus, while 2(a) and 2(b) are not well formed, 3(a) and 3(b) are:

3(a) (Ti) pé ó fẹ́ I-gbé e *kò ni*? (i)

(b) Ti pé kò fẹ́ I-gbé e *kò ni*? (i).

In 3(a) and 3(b), as in other instances of nominal group +*kò*+*ni*, *ni* may be deleted; and the result is well formed non-verbal free clause.<sup>4</sup>

For these reasons *kò* is considered in this paper not as a verbal group negator, but as a qualifier element in a nominal group.

## 2. Syntactic Factors affecting the distribution of the negators

The factors examined here are clause patterns as well as the structure of verbal groups on which the negators operate.

### *The effect of clause patterns*

Two clause patterns are relevant to the syntactic use of the negators. These are the imperative and the non-imperative clause patterns.

The negator *kò* never occurs in imperative clauses.

Máà, on the other hand, occurs mainly in imperative clauses but also in non-imperative clauses where it is preceded by certain auxiliary elements and a short list of full verb elements occurring as the first element in complex or composite verb structure (see page 260 Example II (2)).

*The effect of verbal group structure*

In order to see clearly and in detail how verbal group structure affects the distribution of these negators, it is useful to recognize the following types of verbal groups:

- (a) *The simple verbal group*. This is a verbal group with only one verbal element.
- (b) *The complex verbal group*, which has a bound verb in construction with a free verb; e.g. *vb+dè*, as in: *mú un dè wá* 'hold him till we come'.
- (c) *The compound verbal group*, with two or more elements all of which are free verbs; e.g. *bó o sè*, as in *bó o sè* 'peel it and cook it'.
- (d) *The composite verbal group*, derived from a complex verb base and containing more than one bound verb; e.g. *bá . . . fí . . . gbé* as in: *bá mi fí ɔwọ gbé e* 'help me lift it with your hands'.
- (e) *The catenative verbal group*, a simple verb followed by the nominalized form of another verbal element; e.g. *dùn I-kà* as in; .  
*ìwé dùn I-kà* 'books are pleasant to read'.<sup>5</sup>
- (f) *Auxiliary followed by any verbal element* (aux. + verb), e.g. *lè wá* as in:  
*È lè wá* 'you may come'.

The three verbal group types that are most relevant in an examination of the effect of verbal group structure on the distribution of the negators are the simple verbal group, (a), the complex verbal group, (b), and the *aux. + verb* (f).

*The simple verbal group* selects the *kò* form of the negator *kò* in non-imperative clauses, and the negator *máà* in imperative clauses; e.g. (verb=*lọ* 'go') – non-imperative (positive): *Adé lọ* 'Ade went' non-imperative (neg. *Adé ò lọ* 'Ade didn't go').

Imperative (pos.): *lọ l'òsàn-án* 'go in the afternoon'

Imperative (neg.): *máà lọ l'òsàn-án* 'don't go in the afternoon'.

As already noted in l(i), (ii) on page 249, the simple verbs *ni* 'be' and *wà* 'be, exist', do not occur with the negators. When a clause containing *ni* is to be negated, the phrase *kì í ɕe* (which is the negative form of *ní + 'ɕe*) is preposed to the whole clause, and the verb *ni* becomes merely optional within the structure; e.g.:

*Tiwa ni* 'it's ours' (positive)

*Kì í ɕe tiwa (ni)* 'it's not ours' (negative)

Alternatively, the thematized nominal group occurring before *ni* – is qualified by *kọ* as explained in l(2) above: e.g.:

*Tiwa ni* 'it's ours'

*Tiwa kọ ni* 'it's not ours'

The simple verb *wà* is replaced in negation by the verbal element *sí*; e.g.:

*Ó wà n'ídìf èrú* 'he supports confusion' (pos.)

*Kò sí n'ídìf èrú* 'he doesn't support confusion' (neg.)

*Máà sí n'ídìf èrú* 'don't support confusion' (neg.)

### *The complex verbal group*

In non-imperative clauses, all complex verbal groups may be preceded by *kò*. Although none can be immediately preceded by *máà* in this type of clause, the first (bound verb) element of the following complex verbal groups may be followed by *máà*:

*fèrɛɛ + verb; jàjà + verb; mọ̀mọ̀ + verb; ɕɛɕɛ + verb.*

### *Examples:*

*Ó fèrɛɛ máà jẹun* 'he nearly didn't eat.

*Ó jàjà máà ké l'ẹ̀ẹ̀kan yif* 'for once, you managed not to cry'.

*Ó mọ̀mọ̀ máà ɕe é* 'he deliberately left it undone'.

*Ó ɕɛɕɛ máà fẹ́ í rí i gbà* 'you're only just ensuring that you won't get it'.

The first (bound verb) element of the complex verbal group *dédé + verb*, too, may be followed by *máà* in a *kí* – initiated clause, as in:

*Kí ó dédé máà wá báàyí?*

'What if we suddenly find that he hasn't turned up?  
In imperative clauses, only the following complex verbal groups cannot be preceded by *máà*:

*fèrèfè* + verb; *gbòḍḍò* + verb; *jàjà* + verb; *sábà* + verb.

All other complex verbal groups may be preceded by *máà* in imperative clauses.

### *The 'aux.+verb' verbal group*

#### *Non-imperative clauses*

Both negators are used in the negation of the type 'aux.+verb' verbal group.

#### *The use of kò in non-imperative clauses*

*Kò* may directly precede all auxiliary elements except *baà*, *a*, *á*, *yóò*, *máà* and *m̄*.

When the auxiliary in the positive form of the verbal group is *a*, it is replaced after *kò* by the synonymous *n̄*<sup>1</sup> or *máà n̄*; e.g.

(pos.) *wọn á jẹ 'lú run tán; wọn á ní kò s'ówó*  
'they ruin the finances of the state, and tell you there's no money'.

(neg.) *wọn kì n̄ jẹ 'lú run tán . . .*  
or . . . *wọn kì ní ní kò s'ówó.*

Where the auxiliary is *á*, *yóò* or *máà*<sup>1</sup>, it is replaced by *nú* after *kò*. The form of *kò* in this negation is *kò*. But in addition to the regular negative form *kò nú*, there is an accepted form which preposes the *kì* form of *kò* to *yóò* without any need for a suppletive *nú*. The resultant negative form, *kì yóò*, is found mainly in Oyo Yoruba and in religious texts. Where the auxiliary in the positive verbal group is *m̄* (as in *Wọn n̄ lọ* 'they are going'), it is obligatorily deleted after *kò*.

#### *The use of máà in non-imperative clauses*

When the auxiliary in the positive verbal group is *baà* (or *báá*), *máà* is the only negator that may be used to effect negation: and it always preposed to *baà*, as in: *Kí á máà baà lọ* 'so that we might not go'. *Máà* may also be inter-

posed between the auxiliary and 'verb' in the following verbal groups:

báà+verb; báá'+verb; lè+verb.

*Examples:*

- Ò báà máà lọ 'even if you don't go'  
Ò báá máà lọ 'you shouldn't have gone'  
Ò lè máà lọ 'you may not go'.

*Imperative clauses*

The following are the 'aux.+verb' verbal groups which occur in the positive form of imperative clauses:

- (a) 'aux.+verb' sequence in which 'aux.' is any of the following:  
mà, sàà, kàn, tiè, sì, dè, kúkú, ʃì/ì, mí (as máa<sup>2</sup>).  
(b) 'aux.+verb' sequence in which 'aux.' is any permissible cluster of the items listed in (a).

All these verbal groups are negated in imperative clauses by preposing máà to them. The verbal group sàà+verb may alternatively be negated by interposing máà between the auxiliary element and the verb, as in:

sàà máà tì mí ʃubú 'just don't push me down'  
and máà sàà tì mí ʃubú.

*Other verbal group types*

The effect of the three other verbal group types – the compound verbal group, the composite verbal group, and the catenative verbal group – on the distribution of the negators is not in any way significantly different from the effect of the simple verbal group and the complex verbal group already considered in 2.21 and 2.22 above.

*The composite verbal group*

As in the case of complex verbs from which they are derived, all composite verbal groups in non-imperative clauses can be negated simply by preposing kò. In addition to this, if their first element is one of the following items:

dédé, fèrèfè, gbòddò, jàjà, mòòmò,  
another negative may be formed by placing máà between

the first element and the rest of the composite verb.

In imperative clauses, the only composite verbal groups which cannot be preceded by *máà* are the ones with one of the following as first element.

*fèrèè, gbóòdò, jàjà, sàbà.*

#### *The compound verbal group*

In non-imperative clauses, all compound verbal groups are negated by preposing the *kò* form of *kò* to the first element of the compound verb.<sup>9</sup>

All positive compound verbal groups that are permissible in imperative clauses are negated simply by preposing *máà* to the first element of the compound verbal group.

#### *The catenative verbal group*

In non-imperative clauses, this verbal group type is immediately preceded by the *kò* form of *kò*.

Very few verbal groups of this type occur in imperative clauses. With the exception of *yé + I-verb* (which itself has a negative meaning), these are negated simply by preposing *máà* to the verbal groups; e.g.:

*máà bèrè sí I-şe é 'don't begin to do it'.*

#### *Sequence of two negators*

Sometimes, a sequence of two negators operates on only one verbal group.

#### *Permissible combinations*

The following combinations are the only ones permitted.

- (a) *kò* and *máà*: whenever these two are combined, the order is *kò+máà*.
- (b) *kò* and *kò*: In this sequence, the first *kò* is realized as *kò* and the second as *kì*.

#### *Distribution*

These sequences occur only in non-imperative clauses.

The negators may occur in direct sequence or, in the case of *kò máà* only, they may be separated by a verbal element.

Whenever they occur in direct sequence, the sequence

always precedes the verbal group that is negated.

The sequence *kò máà* may precede verbal groups of the simple, complex, compound, composite, and catenative types; but it cannot precede the 'aux.+verb' type.

*Examples* (elements of the verbal groups are underlined):

O ò máà lọ 'you are warned not to go' or 'who cares whether you go or not?'<sup>10</sup>

O ò máà bá wa lọ 'you are warned not to accompany us' or 'who cares whether you accompany us or not?'

O ò máà bọ o sè 'you are warned not to peel it for cooking' or 'who cares whether you peel it for cooking or not?'

O ò máà bá wa gbé e fún wọn 'it won't bother us if you refuse to give it to them on our behalf.'

The sequence *kò máà* may be split by certain auxiliary elements or the first element on a few complex verbs.

*The auxiliary elements:* (i) báà, báá'  
(ii) sị, dẹ, kúkú  
(iii) lè

*Examples:*

Kò báà máà sí n' ílé ọkọ rẹ 'even if she is not in her husband's house'.

O ò dẹ máà lọ 'who cares whether you go or not?'

Wọn ò lè máà lọ 'they cannot fail to go'.

*The complex verbal group elements:*

dédé, fẹrẹẹ, gbọ̀d̀d̀, jàjà, mọ̀m̀.

*Examples:*

A ò dédé máà lọ 'it was not without reason that we did not go'.

E ò gbọ̀d̀d̀ máà lọ 'you must not fail to go'.

Whenever these first elements of the complex verbal group occur in a composite verbal group, they may also split the sequence of negators, as in:

A ò dédé máà bá wọn lọ 'it was not without reason that we did not accompany them'.

There is only one instance of a constituent of a catena-

tive verbal group splitting the sequence *kò máà*. This is the sentence

*Kò ɕe í máà ní* (lit. 'it's impossible not to have'.)

The sequence *kò máà* cannot be split by a simple verb or any constituent of a compound verbal group.

The sequence *kò kò* (*kò kì*) occurs only before the auxiliary elements *báá'* and *ń'*.

*Examples:*

*Wọ̀n ò kì báá lọ* 'they wouldn't have gone'.

*Wọ̀n ò kì ní ọ̀sán* 'they don't eat lunch'.

*Summary of the Syntactic Aspect*

In Yoruba, *kò* and *máà* (in their various phonetic forms) are considered negators of the verbal group.

*Kò* is found exclusively in non-imperative clauses, where it always precedes the verbal group that is negated. *Máà*, on the other hand, is the only negator used in imperative clauses, although it may also occur between certain auxiliary elements and the following full verb, or between certain bound verb elements and the rest of a complex or composite verbal group in non-imperative clauses.

A sequence of two negators may operate on only one verbal group. The permissible sequences are *kò máà* and *kò kì*. The former may be split by certain verbal elements, while the latter permits no intervening elements at all.

**The Semantic Aspect**

*Important Issues*

Some important issues connected with the semantic aspect of the use of these negators have been neglected in Yoruba grammars, and they deserve to be raised here.

*The double semantic rôle of kò*

The operation of the negator *kò* on a verbal group does not in all cases result in a negative meaning. For instance, the semantic difference between

and *Ìbáà wá s' ilé ọ̀kọ̀ rẹ̀*

*Kò báà wá s' ilé ọ̀kọ̀ rẹ̀*

is not the difference between a positive and a negative sentence, as in:

Ó wá s' ílé ọkọ rẹ

as against

Kò wá s' ílé ọkọ rẹ.

Similarly, in the sequence of negators described in (3) above, in some cases the sequence results in a double negative meaning as in:

Kò lè máà wá (lit. 'he cannot not-come')

'he cannot fail to come')

which is the negative form of the meaning of

Ó lè máà wá 'he many not come'.

But in some other cases, the sequence of negators does not result in a double negative meaning. For instance,

Kò kì ní jẹun ọsán 'he doesn't eat lunch'

is not the negative form of the meaning of

Kì ní jẹun ọsán 'he doesn't eat lunch'.

In fact, in both sentences, there is only one single negative meaning. Similarly, the difference of meaning between

Kò báà máà sí n' ílé ọkọ rẹ 'even if she were not in her husband's house',

and

Ìbáà máà sí n' ílé ọkọ rẹ

is not a difference between a double negative meaning and a single negative meaning: it is really a difference between emphatic and non-emphatic.

It follows from all these examples that our description needs to admit of two separate types of negation: *syntactic negation* and *semantic negation*. Syntactic negation is present in any clause that contains the negator element *kò* and *máà* or both; but as pointed out above, syntactic negation does not always involve semantic negation.

Closely related to this is the fact that, in the examples given above, the syntactic negator *kò* does not always play a negativising rôle on a following verbal group; sometimes it merely reinforces the meaning (whether positive or negative) that is already contained in the following syntactic elements. It seems, then, that *kò* has two semantic functions: it serves as a negator as well as a reinforcer.

Although there is only one case in which *kò* before a positive verbal group serves merely to reinforce the positive meaning of that verbal group, it is necessary to distinguish that use of *kò* from the one in which *kò*+verbal group has a negative meaning. We may describe such use of *kò* as the 'reinforcing of the positive'. The reinforced positive occurs whenever *kò* occurs before the verbal group *báà*+verb e.g.:

*Kò báà lọ* 'even if he goes'.

On the issue of a combination of negators which sometimes produce a double negative meaning and sometimes a mere reinforcement of the negative meaning that the occurrence of one negator alone could have produced, it is suggested here that we need to distinguish again between the type of negation in which the use of *kò* results in a negative meaning and that in which it is merely a reinforcer. This means that such combinations of negators fall into two types which, for easy reference, may be labelled as 'double negation' and 'reinforced negation'.

*Double Negation* involves the interposing of *dédé, fẹrẹẹ, gbọ̀dọ̀, jàjà, lẹ, mọ̀mọ̀,* between *kò* and *máà*<sup>8</sup> e.g.:

*Kò dédẹ máà lọ* 'it was not without reason that he did not go'.

*Kò lẹ máà wá* 'he cannot fail to come'.

A deletion of *kò* from these sentences would produce different meanings, with only the verbal element after *máà* negated. Similarly, a deletion of *máà* would result in a sentence in which only the verbal element occurring after *kò* is negated.

On the other hand, we have *reinforced negation* whenever a sequence of two negators is not split by any of the verbal elements listed in the above paragraph. In such cases, the sequence of two negators produces only one emphatic negative meaning; and a deletion of the first negator would produce the same meaning, but with loss of emphasis. In the following examples, compare the sentences of (I) with the corresponding sentences of (II) from which the first negator has been deleted.

Examples:

- |     | I  | II              |
|-----|--|-----------------|
| (a) | Kó máà lọ ọ<br>'who cares whether he goes or not?' | Kí ó máà lọ ọ   |
| (b) | Kì báà máà rí i<br>'he wouldn't have found it'     | Ìbáà máà rí i   |
| (c) | Kò báà wà n' íbẹ<br>'even if she was there'        | Íbáà wà n' íbẹ  |
| (d) | Kò kì n' jẹun ọsán<br>'he doesn't eat lunch'       | Kì n' jẹun ọsán |

*Different types of meaning of 'kò+verbal group'*

The second major issue concerns the different types of negative meanings that result from the use of *kò*.

As an illustration, the difference between

(4) Ó lè máà wá 'he may not come'

and

Kò lè máà wá 'he cannot fail to come'

does not appear to be the same as between

(5) Ó dédédé máà wá 'it suddenly turned out that he didn't come';

and

kò dédédé máà wá 'it is not without reason that he failed to come'

or between

(6) Ó fẹrẹẹ máà lè wá 'he found it almost impossible to come'.

and

Kò fẹrẹẹ máà lè wá 'it isn't true that he found it almost impossible to come'.

In sentence pairs (5) and (6), the double negatives,

Kó dédédé máà wá *and* Kò fẹrẹẹ máà lè wá

have semantic equivalents.

and Kì í ẹ̀ ẹ̀ pé ó dédédé máà wá (ni)

and Kì í ẹ̀ ẹ̀ pé ó fẹrẹẹ máà lè wá (ni),

in which a denial clause *kì í ẹ̀ ẹ̀* is substituted for *kò*.

Now, if all double negatives had the same pattern of meaning, the sentence with the double negative in (4) –

Kò lè máà wá –

should have a semantic equivalent

Kì í ẹ̀ ẹ̀ pé ó lè máà wá (ni).

Similarly, the sentence

Kò gbòddò màà wá 'he mustn't fail to come',  
should have a semantic equivalent

Kì í ɕe pé ó gbòddò màà wá.

But, in fact, the last sentence is not a well formed Yoruba sentence, while the well formed

Kì í ɕe pé ó lè màà wá (ni)

is not synonymous with

Kò lè màà wá

as might be expected.

It seems, then, that a distinction is necessary between two kinds of double negatives: one in which *kò* is used to effect a direct denial of, or a negative retort to, what the verbal group without *kò* is saying; the other in which *kò* is used to make just a plain negative statement.

There may be syntactic evidence to support the distinction being made here. For instance, the sentence

Ó n bọ 'he is coming'

is not normally negated as

Kò bọ.

Forms to express an ordinary negative meaning are

A à rí i pé ó n bọ 'we can't see him coming'

Kò dájú pé ó n bọ 'it isn't certain that he is coming'

When *kò bọ* is used, a direct denial of the statement *ó n bọ* is intended as in:

Kò bọ kan kan 'there is no truth in the assertion that he is coming'.

All these, admittedly, depend very much on a hunch; but the issue is worth investigating further.

#### *Summary of the semantic aspect*

The semantic aspect of the use of the negators is discussed. The negator *kò* does not always have a negative meaning in its occurrences: sometimes it merely reinforces a meaning that would still be present even if *kò* itself were deleted. It is suggested that in the case of *kò bàà + verb*, *kò* is used for reinforcing a positive meaning and that this use be distinguished from its use as a semantic negator. Where it plays the same part of reinforcer in *kò màà* and *kò kì*, we have reinforced negation; but where it plays the part of

negator in the sequence *kò + máà* (i.e. whenever there is an intervening

dédé, fèrèfè, gbòdòdò, jàjà, lè, m̀d̀m̀m̀)  
between the two negators), we have double negation.

It is further suggested that in double negation and, it seems, even in single negation with *kò* (i.e. where *kò*, as the only negator, has negative meaning), there are two kinds of meaning expressed by the sequence *kò + verbal group*: a negative retort and the stating of a plain negative meaning.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Bamgboṣe (1966), D3.23 and D8.4.
- <sup>2</sup> The 'auxiliary elements' listed are exemplified as follows:  
*a*: Wọn a kó 'ra wọn jọ . . . 'they usually assemble'.  
*á*: À á lọ 'we shall go'.  
*yòd̀*: Yòd̀ lọ 'he will go'.  
*máa*<sup>1</sup>: Ó máa dídè 'he will rise'.  
*baà*: (or *bàá* in some people's usage)  
Kí ẹ̀ baà rí i 'so that you might see it'.  
*M*: Ó nì lọ 'he is going'.  
Ó lè *máa* lọ 'he may be going'.
- <sup>3</sup> Bamgboṣe (1966), p.36 (D3.21).
- <sup>4</sup> According to Bamgboṣe (1966), a primary distinction is made between two clause types: the *free* clause and the *dependent* clause. The *free* clause is then further subclassified into the *verbal* and the *non-verbal free* clause. 'A free clause having a predicator as one of its elements of structure is a verbal free clause. A free clause that does not have a predicator as one of its elements of structure is a non-verbal free clause . . .' (pp.31-32).
- <sup>5</sup> The nominalization of the second verbal element is effected by prefixing *cí-* (consonant + high-tone *i*) to a verb stem; in *cí-*, the consonant has the same quality as the first consonant of the verb stem; e.g. *kíkà* 'reading', from *kà* 'read'.  
In a catenative verbal group, the consonant of *cí-* is elided; and the vowel is assimilated, with its high tone unchanged, by the final vowel of the preceding word. In the example *iwè dún l-kà*, the phonetically changed form of *cí-* is spelt as *l*.
- <sup>6</sup> The following is a list of what are taken to be complex verbs in this paper.

	1. Free pattern		2. Fixed pattern	
	1(a): b+v	1(b): v+b	2(a): b+v	2(b): v+b
b= transitive	bá.....	+v v+dè.....	bà.....kù/tl	dá kàn .....
	fí.....	+v v+fùn.....	bẹ.....wò	dá sí.....
	mú.....	+v v+jù .....	dá.....dúró	gbá kò .....
	tí.....	+v v+ká.....	dá.....kojá	ta kò .....
		v+kà.....	dán ....wó	
		v+lé.....	pa.....dé	
		v+lù .....	tù .....jọ	
		v+mọ.....	sọ.....dà/di	
		v+ní .....		
		v+sí.....		
		v+tl.....		
		v+tó .....		
b= intransitive	dá	+v v+gbé	dá kù	tẹ.....ba
	dédé	+v v+pọ		jẹ.....gùn
	fẹrẹfẹ	+v		
	gbọdọdọ	+v		ká.....kò
	jàjà	+v		şẹ.....kò
	jọ(jọ)	+v		dè
	kọ(kọ)	+v		dé
	mọmọ	+v		dì
	nìkan	+v		fùn
	şẹşẹ	+v		kàn
	tún	+v		lọ
			so	
			tl	
			wé	
			yí	
			şẹ.....pò	
			yí.....pò	

7. The full list of auxiliary elements is as follows:

- (i) a, á, yóò, bàà (or bàá), báà, báá<sup>1</sup> (in Ó báá ti lọ), báá<sup>2</sup> (in t'ò báá lọ);
- (ii) mà, sáà, kàn, tiẹ, sí, dẹ kúkú;
- (iii) şl, ti máa (in Ó máa lọ), ná,<sup>1</sup> lè m (which is *máa*<sup>2</sup> in imperative clauses and after *lè, máa*<sup>1</sup> and all the elements in (i) except *báá*<sup>2</sup> and *n*<sup>2</sup> after all other auxiliaries and before the full verb in non-imperative clauses).

<sup>a</sup> For some of my informants, this list includes şẹşẹ. Such people accept the sentence:

Kò şẹşẹ máa fẹ I-şe é

as well formed and synonymous with

Kl f şe pé ó şẹşẹ máa fẹ I-şe é (ni)

(lit. 'it is not that he is just contemplating not to do it'.)

- <sup>9</sup>. In nominalized-verb forms, there is evidence suggesting that in the history of the language, *kò* probably intervened between the two elements of a compound verb. The following are just a few of such nominalized-verb forms:  
*àkóṣgbà* 'a badly behaved child' (from *kò, gbà*)  
*àwáàrí* 'that which is searched for and not found' (from *wá, rí*)  
*àṣeègbowó* 'that which is done without due reward' (from *ṣe, gb'owó*).  
 The low-tone syllable of each of these represents an assimilation of [ò] (*kò*).
- <sup>10</sup>. The meaning 'who cares . . .' for this type of negation appears to be common only among speakers of Eastern Yoruba dialects.
- <sup>11</sup>. *máà* cannot occur in non-imperative clause unless preceded by *kò*, or an auxiliary element, or the clause-initiator *kí*. To obtain a well-formed clause after the deletion of *kò* from unsplit *kò máà*, *kí* is preposed to the non-imperative clause containing *máà*.

### References

1. A. Bamgboṣe, *A Grammar of Yoruba, West African Language Monograph Series, No. 5* (Cambridge, University Press, 1966).
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# *Tense and Aspect in Yoruba*

by

**Segun Odunuga**

We already have a traditional approach to the problem of grammatical tense in Yoruba – a tradition that can be traced back to the 19th century, when Samuel Crowther published *A grammar of the Yoruba Language*, in which he gave the tenses of Yoruba as three – the present, the past indefinite and the future.

The question of tense in Yoruba has not up till now been given special attention and linguists silently accept the presence of the grammatical category of tense as a fact. Different linguists have attributed different numbers of tenses in Yoruba oscillating between three, five and even thirty.

The difference in existing views of the number of tenses in Yoruba shows the lack of a general theory of word and grammatical form in this language. And often the systems of other languages have been superimposed on Yoruba – a wrong procedure, since languages that are even related do not always share the same grammatical categories. Besides, when treating the tense, many Yoruba grammarians omit the aspect.

Ida C. Ward, as if challenging the traditional school wrote: 'in no aspect of grammar, perhaps, is a modern approach needed so much as in the study of the verb forms. In African Languages the "aspect" of an action, i.e. its completion or non-completion, is perhaps more important than the actual time. Yoruba should be examined from this point.'

This suggestion has not gone unheeded in that in recent times attempts have been made to examine the aspect of Yoruba alongside the tense, which some have come to regard as two instead of the traditional three.

In this paper the form system of Yoruba verbs will be described on the basis of the distribution of morphemes constituting the verb-forms. Comparing the sentences: *Mo rí i* (I see him/I saw him), *Mo rí i lánàá* (I saw him yesterday), *Èmi yóò rí i fọla* (I shall see him tomorrow), we see that in the last two sentences two basic meanings of the standard system of absolute time are expressed, while the first sentence does not show either. However, the three sentences could, in some measure, show the correspondence of action with the moment of speech, the occurrence of action before the moment of speech, and the occurrence of action after the moment of speech. In the explication of the meanings of the last two sentences, lexical means have been used. But what would happen if these lexical means were removed? Would the other parts make communicative, independent and grammatically correct sentences? The answer is Yes: *Mo rí i* (I see/saw him), *Èmi yóò rí i* (I shall see him).

Other questions arise: are the three basic meanings of absolute time expressed in the three sentences or do we have only two meanings? Or are the grammatical meanings we see there neutralized?

Answers to these questions show that only two meanings could be distinguished – the one after the moment of speech and that not after the moment of speech. Formally, *Mo rí i* and *Èmi yóò rí i* differ from each other. In order to have a clear picture of the full description of the semantic oppositions in the sphere of tense and aspectual meanings and the formal means by which these oppositions are realized a special analysis is necessary, and we will divide it into two parts: formal and semantic.

Formal analysis of the Yoruba verb shows that in its elementary form it could be equal to one morpheme, that is, the stem could be a mono-syllable of the type *consonant plus vowel* (*rí*). By analogy, we can distinguish the simple forms of a number of other verbs.

Our second task is to define the environment of the elementary verb (in the sense of semantic – syntactical classes). According to the universal syntactical typological classification (based on word order in the sentence), world languages could be grouped into six possible types – svo, sov, vso, osv, vos, ovs. Yoruba belongs to the first, i.e. svo, and the analysis of our material shows that words that could perform the function of the subject occur before the verb, while those that belong to the object group come after the verb. These are words in the noun and personal pronoun class. Thus, with the great number of elementary verbs combined into class (v) and those described as being before and after it into (s) and (o) respectively, we have a representation of the elementary verb and its environment as the sequence of the morpheme classes (s) (v) (o) – *Adé rí ilé; Mo rí wọn; Àwa ra aṣọ*.

The next step in our analysis is to find out whether other words might appear between classes (s) and (v), (v) and (o). If this is possible, then the redistribution of (v) in relation to such words could be viewed as verb construction. From the definition of the construction, it is clear that the structure (s) (v) (o) contains, so to speak, the neutral construction, since the immediate environment of (v) does not contain dependent words. This form is defined as the first construction.

In the course of our analysis the inclusion of dependent elements in the position between (s) and (v) has been established, and the following constructions with the inclusion of a morpheme could be distinguished:

s	ń	v	o	–	Àwa	ń	rí	yín
s	ti	v	o	–	Adé	ti	rí	wa
s	máa	v	o	–	Sọlá	máa	rí	ìwé
s	yóò	v	o	–	Ìwọ	yóò	kọ	ilé
s	á	v	o	–	Olú	á	gba	ẹ̀bùn

The elements *ń, ti, máa, yóò, á*, are combined into one class (c). Class (c) is the class of single-morpheme elements occurring between (s) and (v). This chain could be termed the second type of verb construction.

Consequently, the second type of verb construction will have a string such as the following: (s) (c) (v) (o).

Similarly, the following constructions are established:

s	ti ní	v	o	-	Adé ti ní ka létà
s	máa ní	v	o	-	Àwa máa ní gba èbùn
s	yóò máa	v	o	-	Sùpò yóò máa ka ìwé
s	á máa	v	o	-	Dòtun á máa rí wa
s	yóò ti	v	o	-	Olá yóò ti kọ ilé
s	a máa	v	o	-	Túnjí a máa gbá bọ̀lù

In the above constructions immediately before the verb, that is, between (s) and (v) we have a combination of two (c) elements. This we classify as (d). Thus the third type of construction will be (s) (d) (v) (o) which is the double-component combinational complication of (c).

By the same analogy we can distinguish the constructions:

(s)	ti máa ní	(v)	(o)	-	Àwa ti máa ní rí i
s	yóò ti máa	v	o	-	Adé yóò ti máa gun mòtò
s	á ti máa	v	o	-	Dúpé á ti máa kọ ilé

In this construction we have a combination of three dependent elements before the verb, that is, between (s) and (v). Such combinations could be grouped into class (e). Accordingly, the fourth type of construction will be (s) (e) (v) (o), where (e) is a triple component complication of class (e).

The construction (1, 2, 3, 4 types, see below) give the absolute definition of (v) since no other words could be between them.

It is clear that classes (c) (d) (e), which we have analyzed above, are found in a position between (s) and (v). All these we shall represent by F – a class of auxiliary elements that go along with the verb. The elements of F are defined as verbal formants, i.e. the elements of the analytic forms of the verb. With the inclusion of the neutral component into F, the whole collection of the analytic forms of the verb in Yoruba could be represented by the following:

F <sup>0</sup> :	(s)	(v)		(o)
F <sup>1</sup> :	s	ń	v	o
F <sup>2</sup> :	s	ti	v	o
F <sup>3</sup> :	s	máa	v	o
F <sup>4</sup> :	s	yòò	v	o
F <sup>5</sup> :	s	á	v	o
F <sup>6</sup> :	s	ti ń	v	o
F <sup>7</sup> :	s	máa ń	v	o
F <sup>8</sup> :	s	yòò ti	v	o
F <sup>9</sup> :	s	yòò máa	v	o
F <sup>10</sup> :	s	á máa	v	o
F <sup>11</sup> :	s	ti máa ń	v	o
F <sup>12</sup> :	s	á ti máa	v	o
F <sup>13</sup> :	s	yòò ti máa	v	o

Fourteen constructions from the full paradigm of the Yoruba verb with four sub-paradigms. The four sub-paradigms form the 4 types of verb constructions:

1. The first type of construction (i.e. the construction with the neutral formant) – (s) (v) (o).
2. The second type of construction (i.e. the construction with single-component formant) – (s) (c) (v) (o).
3. The third type (i.e. with two components) – (s) (d) (v) (o).
4. The fourth type (i.e. with three components) – (s) (e) (v) (o).

Since it is clear from the preliminary description of the system of the Yoruba language that elements of the class forming the paradigm, F, do not express person, mood, voice or number, it follows that they can only show either (1) tense (2) aspect of (3) tense-aspect (in correspondence to the fourteen forms shown above).

Certainly, the hypotheses (1) and (2) do not appear to be alternatives, since the formal differentiation of temporal and aspectual meanings is difficult, if not impossible. But (1) and (2) on one hand and (3) on the other are alternatives. In this case the testing of the hypothesis put forward could best be carried out in the explication of their meanings. This leads us to the next stage.

### *The meanings of formants*

Formants in Yoruba serve to express grammatical meanings. In grammatical literature of Yoruba grammar these formants are often referred to as auxiliaries and at times as auxiliary verbs. The latter cannot be correct since auxiliary verbs have their own lexical meaning and could be used independently. Yoruba formants cannot be grouped with verbs either semantically or syntactically since they are used only in the position of class F (the position before the verb).

Words that are deprived of lexical meanings and used as elements of forms of other words with full lexical meaning could rightly be called formants and so be clearly endowed with their grammatical rôle.

In Yoruba there are five elementary formants – ti, ní, yòò, máa, á. These formants and their combinations produce, as shown above, different forms of the verb. It is now for us to give the semantic characteristic of each formant.

The formant ní/mí shows an action taking place at the moment of speech or an action that is generalized in time. This double rôle gives room for the correlation of the present tense in Yoruba with the English present definite, present continuous and with the Russian present tense. With some verbs this formant may convey either the meaning of *actual* present or habitual:

Èmi ní jẹun	– I am eating (now)
À ní sọrọ	– We are speaking

But with others the meaning could be that of a general action:

Àwọn ẹyẹ ní fò	– Birds fly
Ayé ní yí oòrùn pọ	– The earth rotates round the sun
Oòrùn ní ràn	– The sun shines

Samuel Crowther held the view that only this form corresponds to the present tense. This opinion, expressed over 100 years ago, is still upheld by many. The formant in question could then be termed as one playing a double rôle

and not only that of action passing at the moment of speech, i.e. that of habitual action and the present.

The formant *ti* shows action in its perfective environment. There is no doubt that the formant indicates that an action is completed. As Silva says, the formant shows *preterito perfecto compuesto*. This formant, which determines the end of an action, could be compared with the English pluperfect.

Such a meaning of the formant *ti* allows the possibility of its use to determine or rather express an action that goes before another, especially in the past.

\*Mo ti rí àwọ̀n ìwé rẹ̀ – I have seen (received) your letters;

Mo ti lọ́ kí wọ̀n kí o tó dé – I have gone to greet them before you arrived.

*Yóò* in conjunction with the verb shows a future action –

Èmi yóò wá – I shall come; Ìwọ yóò lọ – You will go.

Bámidélé yóò kọ́ ìwé sí ọ́ – Bamdele will write a letter to you.

*Máa/á* shows that an action takes place after the moment of speech, that is, in the future:

Mo máa lọ – I shall go

Adé máa kọ́rin – Ade will sing

The absence of a general experience of aspect has affected many researchers in the establishment of tense-aspect nuance in the forms of the Yoruba verb. And the superimposition of the English grammar on Yoruba has not been of help either. Whenever we speak of tense we tend to omit the aspect.

We have established that in Yoruba there are five formants expressing different forms of tenses and aspect. In fact, we have given *máa* and *á* the same meaning, but the fact remains that in compound formants *á* joins other formants and even the formant *máa* (habitual) in expressing a different meaning altogether.

The combinations of the five formants described above form the tense – aspectual forms of the Yoruba language.

There are seven such combinations: *ti n̄*, *máa n̄*; *yòò ti*; *a máa* (these we call double-component formants); *á ti máa*; *ti máa n̄*; *yòò ti máa* (these we call triple-component formants). Each of these combinations in turn is linked with the verb.

We will now analyze the compound formants. The formant *ti n̄* is used to denote an action that started sometime ago but still continues at the moment of speech:

*Mo ti n̄ gba létà rẹ* – I have started to receive your letters.

*Àwa ti n̄ ɕiɕẹ* – We have started to work.

Delanç calls such a compound formant the form of 'perfect continuous' while de Gaye and Beecroft call it the 'progressive form of the perfect and pluperfect tenses!' However, such meanings are mostly expressed when adverbs of time are used before nouns playing the rôle of the subject:

'*Bí ó ti n̄ jà bọ tagbáratagbára . . .*'

'*. . . ibi tí mo ti n̄ bá ọba jiyàn*'

In the absence of an adverb in the sentence we have:

*Èmí ti n̄ fẹràn* – I have started to love

*Òún ti n̄ wá* – He has started to come

It can be seen then that *ti n̄* as a compound formant underlines the beginning of an action that still continues, i.e. it shows the 'fixed beginning' which is the opposite of the simple formant *ti*, (fixed end). When Delanç, de Gaye and Beecroft talk of the 'perfective meaning' of *ti* they undoubtedly hold the view that the perfect carries an inference of 'accomplishment' at the beginning, though action still continues.

Nunes da Silva also points at this aspect of the formant in his book:

*Òun n̄ fẹràn* – Ele esta amando – He loves

*Òun ti n̄ fẹràn* – Ele tem estado amando – He has started to love.

All this shows that the form (s) *ti n̄* (v) (o) shows the

beginning of an action that still continues, i.e. the beginning + actual present.

The compound formant *máa ñ* expresses the meaning of a regularly repeated action, habitual.

Mo *máa ñ rí i* – I always see him.

Òótò nìkan ni Bìşòḡbù yìí *máa ñ sọ* – This bishop always speaks the truth. But this construction takes on a new meaning with the presence of an adverb of time:

Àwa *máa ñ kí i rí* – We used to greet him.

Nígbaa ni Àjàyí *máa ñ sáré* – Ajayi used to run in those days.

The meaning expressed here points to the end of a process that lasted sometime – an indication of its gradual dying down or extinction. This could be termed habitual in the past.

The formant *máa ñ* stands in opposition to *tí* which shows a fixed end. The function of *máa ñ* (with the aid of adverb of time) is to ascertain the fact that an action is regularly repeated, i.e. the formant indicates habitual action.

The combination of formants *yóò* and *máa* at first looks like a contradiction, since we have just explained their meanings when used directly with the verb – they both indicate future tense. But the *máa* that combines with *yóò* here is not indicative of the future tense but of a habitual action. Therefore, *yóò máa* is a combination that indicates future habitual.

Ìwọ *yóò máa rí i* – You will be seeing him.

Àwa *yóò máa kọwée* – We will be reading.

Delano regards this as future continuous (I. O. Delano: Atúmò Èdè Yorùbá). The reason is that *máa* indicates duration or repetition.

As already shown, *tí*, wherever it is used, shows the perfect, and similarly a 'fixed end' or a 'fixed beginning', its main rôle is to show these shades. In combination with *yóò*, *tí* shows an action that will end at a future time:

Èmi *yóò tí lọ kí o tó dé* – I will have gone before you come.

Da Silva calls this *future composto*; Delanç, de Gaye and Beecroft – future perfect. This time opinion is not divided.

An expression which was used for a long time and which has already died out is found in the compound formant *ti máa n̄*. This combination can, without the help of any adverb of time, indicate the end of a process.

Adé ti máa n̄ gbá bọ̀lù – Ade (at a time) played football.

Mo ti máa n̄ jẹun níbẹ̀ – I used to eat there.

This combination can be used with the adverb *rí*

Mo ti máa n̄ lọ sí ọ̀dọ̀ rẹ̀ rí – I used to go to him before.

Àwa ti máa n̄ gbé pọ̀ rí – We used to live together before.

An action that will take place in the future, and before another action, is expressed by the compound formant *á ti máa* with the elementary form of the verb.

Ìwọ̀ á ti máa sùn – you would have been sleeping.

But we have a different picture in this case:

Nígbà tí àwa yóò dé ilé ẹ̀yin yóò ti máa sùn – When we get home you will be sleeping.

(The course of first action)

Ìwọ̀ á ti máa sùn – Nígbà tí àwa yóò dé ilé.

What is important here is the fixed beginning of an action that has already begun when the other starts. When this formant is used in a compound sentence we can establish the relative meaning of time absent in a simple sentence. The correlative duration of two actions in the future can be represented graphically.

Such a combination – *á ti máa* – is called perfect habitual by Delanç. But this definition lacks the indication that the action is related to the future.

The formant *á máa*, when used with the verb, indicates that an action takes place in the future just like the formant *yóò máa*.

Dúpẹ̀ á máa wá sí ọ̀dọ̀ wa – Dupẹ̀ will be coming to visit us.

Adé á máa kọ̀wé sí wọ̀n – Ade will be writing to them.

Construction with the formant *yóò ti máa* is one of long

duration in future but with a 'fixed beginning' before another action:

Èmi yòd ti máa kólé – I will be building a house.

This form is almost like *á ti máa*.

The analysis of the linguistic material shows that verbal formants combine with all the lexical categories of the verb.

We can now move on to the synthesis of the tense-aspect system in Yoruba.

### *Tense-aspect system of Yoruba*

According to what we have said above, the existing tense-aspectual forms of the active voice in Yoruba should be defined along two axes. On the one hand cognizance should be taken of the aspectual meaning of the forms. On the other of the temporal meaning.

In this connection, we have:

- (i) a collection of all the formal constructions and
- (ii) a description of the meanings of formants obtained as a result of the analysis carried out in the previous section.

Our next task is to define the distribution of meanings relative to the construction, i.e. to describe the whole system of the aspectual and temporal meanings that exist in Yoruba.

We have been able to work out the first temporal meaning. The formants *yòd/máa* mean that action is not taking place at the moment of speech, and it has not taken place before it. Therefore, *yòd/máa* denote future tense.

Consequently, the category of future tense exists in Yoruba, e.g. Èmi yòd rí i.

The category of non-future tense that stands in opposition to this is characterized by the absence of formants: Èmi rí i. This form contains the meaning of the present as well as of the past. It means that in Yoruba the present-past tense is unmarked while the future tense is marked. All other constructions, as can be seen in the general list, add a degree of complication to the elementary form.

Therefore, the first opposition to be signed out is:

Present	Future
Past	

which has a fundamental meaning for its system. This opposition, as we can see, has got a temporal character.

Further, the formant *ti* evidently has no temporal meaning since it combines with the neutral, (elementary) form and the form of the future tense (Èmi yòd ti rí i). The meaning expressed by the formant *ti* can be put above the temporal opposition.

Consequently, it gives an aspectual modification to those meanings. This aspect we will call the terminative aspect.

When two other formants *máa* and *ń* join *ti* and the elementary form of the verb, the combination shows an action that spanned some time in the past but has now ceased. In the marked tense, the formant in opposition to this is *yòd máa*.

The other aspect in whose formation *ti* takes part shows an action which is still continuing. This tense has an opposition in the marked tense with the use of *yòd*. Therefore, the formant *ti* combines with the form of the non-future as well as with that of the future.

But here other formants have a definite rôle to play. The formant *ń* is used in order to show an action of the unmarked tense which gives the combination *ti ń*, while the future equivalent would be *yòd ti máa*. If *ti* shows the perfect in the unmarked as well as in the marked tense, the formant *ń* indicates duration in the unmarked tense while *máa* indicates the same in the marked one. Consequently *ń* in an unmarked tense is often functionally equal to *máa* in the marked one. Since *ń* expresses duration in the non-future and *máa* in the future, the only rôle that *ti* plays with its implication of a perfect tense is to show the beginning – a fixed beginning. This aspect we will call ingressive.

The use of *ń* and *máa ń* in the non-future shows the repetition of an action – *Mò ń rí i*. *Mo máa ń rí i*. A similar meaning is conveyed by the combination *yòd* and *máa*. This aspect will be called durative.

And so, the system of the tense-aspectual forms of the active voice in Yoruba could be presented in the form below:

ASPECT	TENSE		Future	
	Non-Future			
Neutral		V	yóò máa	+V
Durative	ń	+V	yóò máa	+V
	máa ń	+V	a máa	
Ingressive	ti ń	+V	a ti máa	+V
			yóò ti máa	
Terminative	ti máa ń	+V**	yóò ti	+V
	ti	+V		

\*\* Although the action has terminated, it shows that there is evidence of duration.

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11. Edson Nunes da Silva, p.20.
12. *ibid.*, p.25.
13. I. O. Delanọ, p.33.
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# *The Yoruba Language in Education*

by

**Agboola Ologunde**

## **Introduction**

This paper concerns itself with the place of Yoruba in the education of the Yoruba people, and not, in this context with the traditional education that was meted out to them in the past, although that system was efficient and effective and it employed Yoruba as its medium. Rather, this discussion centres on the education of the Yoruba people as citizens of Nigeria, with reference to the formal Western educational system. Since the place of Yoruba within this system typifies the place of other Nigerian languages, we are in effect making a general appraisal of the educational system of Nigeria with particular reference to the rôle of indigenous languages. Besides the fact that this seminar is on Yoruba language and literature, what makes Yoruba an obvious choice for the basis of so general an appraisal?

First, Yoruba is a valid choice because it is one of the major languages of Nigeria, and among the many languages spoken in our country it has probably the largest population. Three of our twelve states use it as their mother tongue, two of them as their major language, and the third as its only mother tongue. The Nigerians who use Yoruba as their mother tongue constitute the largest speech community – some ten and a half million out of a total population of fifty-five.

Our choice, however, is not determined solely by sheer numerical strength and distribution of native speakers within Nigeria, but also by the force of its literary

development which is second to none among other Nigerian languages, and generally considered a suitable subject for academic study. For instance, at present, three Nigerian universities teach Yoruba at the degree level, and the very fact that our language could provide a rallying ground for a meeting of so many distinguished Yoruba scholars justifies our claim.

Lastly, only three of the twelve States of the Federation are unilingual: Central Eastern State, Kano State, and Western State. Of these, three, Western State, as a Yoruba unilingual state, occupies a special position. The Central Eastern State is yet to function, nor was there in the past a corresponding or comparative Igbo-unilingual political unit. Also, even though the Igbos constituted the major ethnic group in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, the Igbo language did not play a major educational rôle, partly because of other large ethnic groups such as the Efik and the Ijaws, and partly because of the lack of literary development of Igbo. In some respects the position of Hausa is more than that of Igbo, and in others it is. Like Igbo, Hausa was a major language in the old Northern Region, and until the creation of the States, one of the languages of a multi-lingual political unit. Unlike Igbo, Hausa has a well-developed literature and a literary code that has not been challenged as unrepresentative of the general phonetics and phonology of the language. But the Hausa monolingual Kano State is a more recent political unit than the Western State. For, although simultaneously created with the Kano State, the Western State has been virtually in existence since the creation in 1964 of the Mid-Western Region (now the Mid-Western State).

The Western Region, until the creation of the States, was a Yoruba-speaking community, and the creation of the States removed from it the people who were able to claim that they were not Yoruba. Thus the administrative and educational traditions of the Western State could be dated as far back as the beginning of Regional administration in 1945, when the Secretariat was established in Ibadan and one of the effective Departments (later Ministries) was that of Education. It is pertinent to note that since

then Yoruba has been the major (and later, only) language of local administration, commercial transaction and every-day communication. The Department (later Ministry) of Education could not but take note of it, and so it was recognized as the medium of instruction in the first four years of primary education. The choice of Yoruba, therefore, rests on the fact that it has been the language of political and economic interaction in a sizeable part of the country, served by a dynamic Ministry of Education with the longest life and experience within Nigeria.

### **The Yoruba Language Educational Policy**

#### *An Historical Survey*

In this appraisal we will look at the history of Nigerian education, with reference to the place given to Yoruba within the system. The changing rôle of Yoruba has undergone three stages: the period of missionary control; the period of government participation; and the period of government control.

#### *Yoruba in Mission-Based Education*

The first stage of missionary control, between 1842 and 1882, started with the advent of the christian missionaries and ended with the beginning of government intervention and policy making. It was a period of intensive and extensive missionary activity which has education as its inevitable by-product. Why should this have been so? The Yoruba speaking people were the target of christian missionary evangelism, hence Yoruba had to be the language of sermons and instructions. The foreign missionaries were fortunate to find Yoruba freed from Sierra Leone settlement as interpreters and coadjutors (one of them was Ajayi Crowther), but a handful of interpreters could not cope with such a great population spread over a wide area of land, especially since full initiation into christian ideas, doctrines and practices involves a long process of religious education.

Obviously two solutions were needed. The training of more hand, and even more important as many people as possible were to be made sufficiently literate in Yoruba so

that they might get involved on their own in the long process of educating others through the reading of the bible and tracts. The latter was of particular importance, because the missions were largely protestant and believed in man's right and ability to read, study and interpret the bible.

These two answers made it necessary for the language to be written, so that the bible, religious tracts, magazines, and great religious evangelical books, such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* could be set down in Yoruba for the education of a reading public, literate in their language.

Surely these requirements were all educational, and so an era of educational activity and achievement began. The orthography of the language was the subject of conference in 1854 and 1875, after Yoruba had been studied and converted to the written form. The bible was translated. Moreover, as early as 1849, Ajayi Crowther's first primer appeared, and between 1859 and 1867 a Yoruba newspaper, *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, was published by Townsend at Abeokuta. Schools sprang up here and there with the limited objective of producing people who, through their literacy in Yoruba, could become catechists and teachers.

Seen in relation with the topic under discussion, this was really a period when the Yoruba language dominated educational policies, activities and achievements. It was not only a medium of instruction but also the main subject at school. In the educational history of Nigeria it was indeed the golden age of Yoruba.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Yoruba During Mission-Government Collaboration*

This stage, during which mother tongue played a central rôle in Nigerian education, was replaced by one between 1883 and 1964, in which the language suddenly played almost no rôle. At first education was administered and financed entirely by the christian missions, but now the colonial administration began to interfere.

The first result of government participation was a change in objective. Schools were no longer to operate solely or largely for the training of teacher-catechists. The

government needed civil servants, clerks and court-interpreters. This, at least, would mean more emphasis on the language of colonial administration, which was English. Government participation meant government financial involvement. The various missions were naturally interested in the three christian ministries; preaching, teaching and healing and did not mind passing part of the educational bill to the government. Two major repercussions resulted from this. First, the government wanted to tailor the educational output to fit its own requirements. Secondly, it could not afford to finance most, let alone all educational programmes. Therefore, as soon as it started to give grants in aid of education to the mission schools, it had to do so according to principles that would ensure the two objectives just mentioned. Therefore it introduced the principle of giving grants according to results. Pupils were examined in two or three subjects and grants reckoned at a fixed rate per pupil per successful subjects. In more general terms, only two subjects were really tested, language and arithmetic. After all, reading and writing are just two of the four basic language skills (the others being listening and speaking).

Clause 10, Section 5 of the ordinance on government grants provided that grants would be paid for English only, and not for the vernacular. This policy might have been dictated by various objectives: the desire of the government to limit the number of successful pupils and therefore reduce the amount of grants to be paid; the need to save the examiner or the expatriate inspector the embarrassment of acknowledging his lack of proficiency in Yoruba; and the desire to ensure that Yoruba-English bilinguals needed by the government formed the core of the actual educational output. Whatever the motive, on the one hand it had the effect of making English the privileged language in the system, and on the other of undermining the status of Yoruba. The early promoters of education saw the far-reaching effect of this policy and promptly sent a memorandum signed by seventy-one people protesting to the secretary of state to the colonies, and attacking an education code that virtually abolished their mother-

tongue. This as was expected, yielded no positive results. The christian mission-based voluntary agencies needed financial assistance from the government and therefore devoted more time to the teaching and use of English in the schools, and less to Yoruba. Similarly no institution of higher learning taught Yoruba.

#### *Yoruba in government-controlled education*

The third stage, from 1964 to the present day, was ushered in by two historic occurrences. As has already been mentioned, the Mid-Western Region was created while what was left of the former Western Region remained almost entirely Yoruba-speaking. In the past it had seemed impossible for the government (or more precisely for the ministry of education) even after independence to put Yoruba in too central a position in its educational policy without risking a protest from the minority ethnic group of the Mid-West. Thereafter, sound educational policy on Yoruba became possible without any body feeling cheated in any way. The only people who might possibly claim to be non-Yoruba, the Ègùn people of the Badagry division, were not likely to complain.

The second important incident was the arrival home of the first Yoruba scholars. First, a Nigerian linguist specializing in Yoruba grammar, then the first literary scholar specializing in Yoruba oral literature. Thus it was possible to begin an academic undergraduate course in Yoruba in the newly created Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages in the University of Ibadan. Similarly, research programmes on Yoruba history and literature began at the University of Ife. Shortly thereafter, undergraduate courses in Yoruba began respectively at the Universities of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the University of Lagos.

As a result of the first occurrence, i.e. the political creation of the Mid-Western State, it was possible for the government of Western Nigeria to embark upon a more virile educational policy centred on the Yoruba language. It is worthy of note that that year saw the first proposal<sup>2</sup> to make the teaching of Yoruba compulsory in all secondary

schools in the Western Region, although it was not acted upon till 1969. Also, greater significance had to be attached to Yoruba in the primary school leaving certificate examination. With the arrival of specialists, protests against the inadequacy of the School Certificate Examination began to be heard. The Yoruba Orthography Committee was set up in 1966 by the Government of Western Nigeria. The following year the first holiday course for teachers of Yoruba was initiated and the Yoruba Teachers Association was inaugurated.

Yet, the position of the Yoruba language in the education of the Yoruba people has not had connotations of dignity. It is still being treated as a stranger in its own home, while English is still considered the real language. In recent developments, whereby more modern European languages are being introduced, the order of priority and importance seems to be English, then French, any other European language such as German or even Portuguese, and, lastly, Yoruba. How else can one explain the fact that the Univeristy of Ife, which was given its name to honour Yoruba culture and heritage, finds it impossible to teach Yoruba. In contrast, it finds it very easy to teach modern European languages – English (understandably) from the inception of the Univeristy; French, for about three years; German, for two years; and even Portuguese, from the beginning of this session. Surely, an academic study of Yoruba is more important and of greater value to this country in general, and to the Western State in particular, than an academic study (however brilliant) of Portuguese.

In terms of effective and careful planning of the rôle of Yoruba in the education of the Yoruba people, the recent progressive policy has got a very low score. Three examples of hopeful development already mentioned may be cited: the Yoruba Orthography Committee, the mandatory teaching of Yoruba in all Western State secondary schools and the establishment of academic courses and research programmes in Yoruba at the university level. The Yoruba Orthography Committee has had to be constituted twice because of lack of sound administrative machinery.

The teaching of Yoruba has been made mandatory in all secondary schools in the Western State without corresponding provision for teachers, text-books or even syllabus contents or schemes of work being made available. Yoruba is not taught at the Adeyemi College of Education. Neither does the University of Ife, established and largely financed by the State, provide any programme for producing graduate teachers for the language. Consequently very limited positive education results can be expected from the highly publicized, recent progressive policy of the Ministry of Education.

#### *Suggestions on Yoruba for the Future*

In order to secure the most appropriate position for Yoruba in the education of the Yoruba speaking people in this modern age, three major points need consideration. The language needs a more central position in the educational programme and machinery than it holds at the present time. Secondly, in order that the language may hold most effectively so central a position, certain developments, external and internal to the language itself, are necessary. Finally, there are major issues of national interest needing satisfactory solution before Yoruba or any other Nigerian language may attain supremacy.

#### *Central Position in Education*

Before suggesting what is to be done, even at the risk of repeating<sup>3</sup> what others may have clearly stated in this and other sessions of this seminar, it is necessary to summarize the assumptions underlying the suggestion that Yoruba must be given so central a position. There are three of these. First, it is generally agreed that a person's linguistic competence is in his own mother tongue.<sup>4</sup> Since an individual communicates and exerts his intellectual activity most through his linguistic competence, it follows that his potentiality for education as well as his educational attainments almost certainly depend upon his knowledge of his mother tongue. Secondly, learning a second language seems to require a sort of translator's mentality.<sup>5</sup> The facility and efficiency with which a second, or foreign, language may be acquired and used would then

depend on the effectiveness of the individual's knowledge of his own tongue. And finally, it is generally agreed that the language of an individual's innermost feelings is his mother-tongue. This suggests to us that anything learnt in one's own mother tongue will have more personal meaning and relevance to one's own being.<sup>6</sup> If that is so, then Yoruba should be given a central position in the education of the Yorubas so as to make it more meaningful and relevant to their present needs.

Now, four things may conduce Yoruba to a central position in the education of the modern Yorubas. First, greater academic stress on Yoruba studies. In this respect two issues need immediate attention and action. All efforts should be made to persuade the University of Ife to accord academic recognition to Yoruba studies in the context of viable undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Moreover, a working party should be set up to suggest guidelines to all our universities and educational agencies on what constitutes appropriate, viable and respectable academic courses of this kind. This suggestion does not overlook the ultimate responsibility, for example, of a university for its own courses (one of the corner stones of the well-guarded principles of academic freedom). Rather, guide lines are not thought to resemble a detailed syllabus or scheme of work. The discussions heard during the first session of this seminar do to some extent justify this view. Secondly, a sounder training programme for teachers of Yoruba should be rigorously planned. To this end, all teacher training colleges and institutes of education should make provision for effective education in principles of methodology of Yoruba teaching.

Thirdly, one should look into the questions of adopting Yoruba as the medium of instruction in all primary schools located within the Yoruba speaking community. This point has been made by other scholars<sup>7</sup> both before and during this conference. Admittedly, there is bound to be some measure of disagreement on the advisability of such a policy. Hopefully, the experiment being embarked upon by the Ife University Department of Education will supply necessary data for appropriate decision.

Finally, more areas of use for Yoruba in the machinery of our government should be created. For example, there is no reason why Yoruba could not be used in the legislature, in local government administration, for government announcements and even in the administration of justice in the Western State. If such official uses were recognized, the language would automatically assume greater importance, people would feel prouder to study it and more avenues for employment for graduates in Yoruba would be opened.

#### *Conditions to be Fulfilled*

In order that Yoruba may fill so central a position effectively, some conditions must be fulfilled. Five of them are mentioned here.

In the first place, a general language policy within not only the State and Federal educational programmes, but also the Federal political framework, should be worked out for immediate adoption. Without this overall policy, any attempt to give Yoruba (or any Nigerian language) central position in the local state, or in national educational policy is bound to result either in educational failure or in a national disaster. Obviously educational insularity or even parochialism and political disintegration are potential consequences.

Secondly, an adequate syllabus for Yoruba studies is needed. Fortunately the planners of this seminar have recognized this and have given the pride of place to the discussion of this issue. The respectability and the usefulness of a course largely depend upon its syllabus.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, one must evolve a language in such a way as to meet the demands that will be made upon it. Four of the areas needing development and a body of fundamental agreement among scholars are orthography, a monoligal dictionary, bibliography and grammar. Fortunately, all these are subjects of discussion in the seminar. What must now come about is the emergence of a body of fundamental agreement on these issues and the establishment of working parties to oversee the effective execution of plans and programmes of action.

Not only the language but also its literature needs development. It is educationally unsatisfactory to give a central position in an educational programme to a language which is not supported by a respectable literature of its own. The amount of literature available should be considerable and its quality must be high. There is no doubt that Yoruba literature is not yet ready to meet such requirements.

Finally, necessary textbooks should be available qualitatively and quantitatively. Perhaps this is the least satisfactorily met requirement today. Suppose, for example, Yoruba were to be adopted as the medium of instruction for all primary school education, where are the textbooks written in Yoruba on relevant materials in history, geography, mathematics, and elementary general science, to name but a few? This may be the greatest single uphill task to be overcome by the Ife University Project.

#### *Wider State and National Problems*

Before an effective policy of establishing a central position for Yoruba (or other Nigerian language) in the educational programme can be pursued satisfactorily, answers must be found to questions relating to some wider state and national issues. Four of them are raised now for discussion: national unity, personnel, finance, and parental wishes. The problem of national unity is indeed a grave one. No people in their right senses would thoughtlessly pursue a policy that might lead to the political disintegration of this country, after fighting such a costly civil war 'to keep Nigeria one'. For example, some critics of the suggestion that Yoruba should be made the medium of instruction within the Yoruba speaking community have rightly argued that such a policy may breed a sectionalism or even parochialism which might shipwreck the Nigerian political vessel? Admittedly, there are such dangers, chauvinism being one of them. But the question is whether these dangers are not there even without the policy advocated; whether, for instance, the Nigerian civil war has been caused by the use of one Nigerian language rather than another as a medium of instruction? As long as our

many Nigerian languages are not decreed out of existence, dangers of some sort will exist, particularly as self-centred politicians will always be there to fan the flame of sectionalism. It seems better to recognize this and to find ways of preventing it. An adequate overall national language educational policy seems to be the only answer. After all, the Yorubas, for example, are as numerous as (even more numerous in some cases than) the citizens of other world nations such as Sweden and Denmark and have as proud a cultural heritage as these other peoples. Unfortunately, because of understandable missionary misrepresentation with a view to getting financial support at home and because of racism perpetuated in the Hamitic Theory concerning civilization in Africa, their own rich culture has been maligned. How can these people be so completely depersonalized in our modern age?

Granted that a national language policy were possible, has the country got the necessary personnel or the facility for producing the required number? Even at the state level, are there solutions to the problem? No. All primary school teachers (with no exception) will have to be retrained before, for example, Yoruba can be adopted as the medium of instruction for all primary education. Similarly, all officials of the Ministry of Education dealing with primary education will need to be trained anew. Textbook writers, syllabus-designers and even examiners must be produced. Suppose then that the national programme were to stipulate that Yoruba must be taught in many or even all states, the problem assumes impossible dimensions for our economic capacity. Yet Yoruba, of all Nigerian languages, is the most advantageously placed in this regard! Perhaps, as suggested by Afọlayan in his paper (on the issue of the medium of instruction) to the NESAC, within the national educational growth it may be necessary to adopt a phased-out policy.<sup>9</sup>

This leads to the next great national problem, that of finance. Can the State or the Federal Government afford the expenses necessary to carry out the policy of giving a central position to Yoruba (or any other Nigerian language) in the educational programme? This must be a

moot point, particularly in view of the need for economically multidimensioned national priorities. The view of the present writer is that the potential educational gains endemic in the policy make the expense imperative. Also, a phased-out policy, perhaps characterized by the type of minimum size experimentation of the often-cited Ife University might be an adequate answer.

Finally, there is the thorny problem of parental control or wishes as regards the education of their children. Definitely the population of English-speaking nursery schools and the pride of certain parents in seeing their children speak only English in their homes would suggest a strong nation-wide opposition to the suggestion of giving a central place to Yoruba in the educational policy. There will always be a division of opinion on this matter. But this parental opposition seems to come from a minority. May we suggest that the opposition might even lose much of its strength if Yoruba were to become a language of greater respectability and were accorded a greater national recognition through its use in more official situations, as was suggested earlier.

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5. *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association* III, (1969): see Ayo Bamgboye, 'The Relationship of the Vernacular to English,' Adebisi Afọlayan, 'The Change-over from Vernacular to English as the medium of Instruction'.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. One of the questions raised in one of the monthly meetings of the day school teachers in the Lagos circuit of the C.M.S. within this period reads: 'Does each school devote at least one day in the week to acquire knowledge of reading of Yoruba?' Probably during the later stages of our educational history such a question would not be as bad because Yoruba would no longer be considered important enough to demand such attention.
- <sup>2</sup>. See Western Regional Ministry of Education, circular No. 11, 1964.
- <sup>3</sup>. What is being said here is not really mere repetition. In fact one of the papers in this same session advocates the very opposite policy because, it says, it is not educationally sound to give so central a position to Yoruba.
- <sup>4</sup>. As pointed out earlier by Afọlayan at this meeting, some famous linguists – the Transformational-Generativists do in fact equate a person's linguistic competence with his knowledge of his mother tongue.
- <sup>5</sup>. Again, this point was made by Afọlayan in an earlier paper, already referred to. He quoted Rabin to support his view.
- <sup>6</sup>. Compare the opinion expressed by Professor Fafunwa in his paper. It is interesting to note that we have independently come to the same conclusion in interpreting available data.
- <sup>7</sup>. Notably Dr. A. Afọlayan and Professor Fafunwa have been strong advocates of this view. See, for example, Afọlayan's paper read to the NESA Conference at Ondo in 1969 (Compare his early paper read to the British Council, during a seminar on this subject, attended by Yoruba scholars and authors, and officials of the Western State Ministry of Education, and Ford Foundation officials) and Professor Fafunwa's paper in the present session of this seminar.
- <sup>8</sup>. This is not to deny that the quality of the teaching staff is equally important. The issues of teachers have been raised in the appropriate place.
- <sup>9</sup>. See in particular *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association*, III, 1, 1969, 92–93.

## *Yoruba in Education*

—An integrated primary school curriculum Scheme in Nigeria: A six-year project—

by

**A. Babs Fafunwa**

The broad aim of an integrated primary school curriculum is to help the child develop his natural abilities by creating the necessary environment that will stimulate, challenge and involve him socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally in the art of learning and doing. It is therefore the job of the school to create the ideal situation for the child to discover things for himself. The main goal of primary education is to develop the whole child through a variety of activities: language arts, science exploration, manipulative activities, civics, mathematical processes, physical exercises, creative thinking and the like.

The primary school in the African context is faced with many problems, many of which are unknown to European and American schools. The aim of primary education in many parts of Africa is unclear. Many see it as an end itself, as the majority of children are denied opportunities for further education because of the governments' inability to finance their education beyond this level; consequently, thousands of school leavers look for employment in urban areas. On the other hand there are too few job opportunities and many school leavers roam the streets looking for jobs that are not there. Worse still, the nature of the primary school curriculum is such that in most countries it does not prepare the children for any gainful employment. Somehow the idea is created in the minds of the school

leavers that those with six-year primary education should not engage in any labour-intensive activities such as agriculture, fishing, weaving, building, construction, etc. These jobs are intended for their less fortunate brothers who have no primary education. Ironically the school leavers are quite right, because the non-literate 11 or 12 year old boy or girl works with father on the farm or helps mother sell her wares in the market or learns a trade. The non-literate group does not create a labour problem for the government or the parents. This then means that most African primary schools educate the child *out* of his environment, unfit to relate himself fully to his family, his community and his society. There is a historical background to this social phenomenon, but lack of space will not allow us to look into it.

Many educators in Africa today are concerned with the relevance of the traditional primary-school curriculum to the needs, interests and environment of the child. There are those who hold the view that the curriculum should be drastically modified, while others call for a new organization, radically different from the conventional western pattern of primary education. The writer belongs to the latter group. Thought has been given to the need to replace the present system with a 'fundamental education' school, teaching only literacy, numeracy and civics in a 3 or 4 year school, with two years of practical work with parents either sandwiched within the four year course or at the end of it.

### **Cultural Heritage**

Many institutions in Africa have not devoted sufficient attention to African culture in their curriculum. The following should be reflected strongly in the curriculum:

- (a) African folklore, mores and literature.
- (b) African music.
- (c) African languages.
- (d) African ethics and religions.
- (e) African art.
- (f) African social and political institutions.
- (g) African history and civilizations.

Indeed, these subjects should be given prominence in the primary and secondary schools as well as in the teacher training colleges and universities.

### *Scientific Attitudes*

We live in a world where science has become a dominant culture. It is essential that African children be brought into the main stream of this world culture if they are to survive the 21st Century. Science and mathematics, technical and commercial subjects should be emphasized.

### *Economic efficiency, vocational skills and dignity of labour*

We need to instil into our youth the need to be economically responsible and vocationally efficient. We should make it clear to them that education does not make man a loafer, a parasite, a victorian gentleman or one who thinks that certain chores are below his dignity. Until recently the English secondary school was content to turn out a 'gentleman' who had no pretensions or ability for anything in particular. Africa cannot afford this luxury. On the contrary, African youth must be trained to be builders and reconstructionists.

To sum up what we have been saying, the goals of education in Africa should be to help develop 'a well-integrated person who is socially adjustable, morally dependable, mentally and physically alert, intellectually honest, economically efficient, scientifically literate, vocationally equipped, nationally and internationally oriented and culturally adjusted'.\*

### *Primary Education in Nigeria*

The Primary school Course in Nigeria lasts six years in certain states, and seven in others. Until recently in many states; the duration of the course was eight years; however, the ultimate objective of all states in Nigeria is a six year primary school education. The entry age is either five or six; consequently most children complete their school course at the age of eleven or twelve.

\* A. B. Fafunwa, *New Perspectives in African Education*. (Macmillan, & Co., London & Lagos; 1967), pp.54-55.

The problem of bilingualism is perhaps the most bewildering one to the Nigerian curriculum planners and teachers. In a wholly Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo speaking area, the child starts out with his mother tongue as medium of instruction in the first two or three years. The medium then switches to English in the third or fourth year, either gradually or abruptly. In most schools some rudiments of English, e.g. alphabet and sight reading are introduced right from the first year. In some areas, where linguistic groups abound, English is introduced actively from the first year.

The upshot of all this is that no one is really happy with the curriculum. Parents, government officials, teachers and others complain that the products of these primary schools are neither proficient in English nor in their mother tongue. The primary school child is expected to think and communicate effectively in his mother tongue within the first two or three years of school and switch over to English for the last three.

A study entitled 'The Effect of bilingualism on the abstract and concrete thinking of Yoruba Children', was conducted by the Faculty of Education, University of Ife, during the 1966-67 academic session. The purpose of the study was to examine the learning and thought process of young Yoruba children when they are forced to work in two languages, Yoruba and English. The children were presented with a set of stimuli (a series of pictures) and were asked to identify them in either English or Yoruba depending on which experimental group they had been assigned to. They were then asked to recall as many of the objects as they could in either English or Yoruba, again depending on their experimental group. Two hundred primary school children took part in the experiment and were selected from Ile-Ife town and nearby villages.

The first group was taught in Yoruba and was asked to recall in English. The second was taught in English and asked to recall in Yoruba. The study showed that the children were at their best when taught in Yoruba and asked to recall in Yoruba.

An earlier experiment showed that in most primary schools in Nigeria, the teacher 'does a double take' with his pupils in primaries four, five and six; that is to say, the teacher employs Yoruba as a medium whenever the children fail to follow instructions in English, particularly in the last three classes. This is unavoidable, because the children's level of proficiency in English is minimal. We found for instance that all subjects, except Yoruba are treated in this fashion even up to the last year of primary education.

Of course one can attribute the lack of language effectiveness to a number of factors: poorly prepared teachers, lack of adequate teaching aids, paucity of appropriate textbooks or the absence of a national or state language policy.

#### *The importance of the mother-tongue as medium of instruction*

The state of affairs described above led the writer to wonder aloud as to whether the African child is not being unnecessarily maimed emotionally and intellectually. It is universally accepted (except in most African countries) that a child learns best in his mother-tongue and that the mother-tongue is as natural to him as mother's milk. The writer also observed that no other nation in the world, except most of the ex-colonies or those countries still under colonial rule, prepare their children for adult undertakings in languages foreign to them. The first twelve years are the most formative period in a child's life, for it is during this period that attitudes and aptitudes are developed. It is also during this period that the child requires intelligent care for his physical needs and trained guidance in his mental, emotional and social potentialities. It is our thesis that if the Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, initiative, industry, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire these skills and attitudes through his mother-tongue; after all this is the *most natural* learning medium. This is where the average

European or English child has a decided advantage over his African counterpart. While the former is acquiring new skills during the first six years in his mother-tongue, the latter is busy struggling with a foreign language during the greater part of his primary education. The American, English, German, French and Italian children explore their own natural environment and communicate in their native tongue, thus acquiring at very early stages self-confidence, initiative, resourcefulness, creative reasoning and adaptability – skills necessary for further growth in later stages of development. It is our contention that a child, if helped to lay the foundation of his future development in his own mother-tongue, will most likely be in a position to build upon it in later years even in a different language.

### *The Six-Year Primary Project*

It is this impelling thought that led the Institute of Education at the University of Ife to launch a six-year primary school project using Yoruba as a medium of instruction throughout the six year primary course and teaching English as well, but as a second language, throughout.

The Institute launched the project in January 1970, with financial assistance from the Ford Foundation of America, the moral support of the West Ministry of Education and the active participation of language scholars from the University of Lagos, Ibadan and Ife. The project adopted the entire Year one class of an Ile-Ife township school. Some one hundred and twenty children take part and the class is divided into A, B and C streams of 40 each. Class A and B constitute the experimental group while class C is the control. However, C is not an ideal control class due to its proximity to the other two classes, so that the real control are all primary one classes across the Western State.

An experienced Nigerian woman teacher is given the responsibility of teaching English as a second language to classes A and B. She was selected after careful screening by primary education specialists in language arts and represents a very good model. The other teachers, who are regular staff members of the school, are responsible for

teaching *all* subjects through the medium of Yoruba in each of the two experimental classes. They too were carefully screened and selected out of the staff in the said school.

Regular in-service and orientation courses are given to the two Yoruba-medium teachers and the English language teacher. The control class is left to continue with the traditional system which is prevalent in most of the schools in the State. All the teachers involved both in the experimental and the control classes are Grade II teachers by qualification. The teacher of English is also Grade II, although she has had considerable local and overseas experience.

The subjects taught through the medium of Yoruba are: Civics, Social and Cultural Studies, Health and Sanitation, New Mathematics, Elementary Science with particular reference to observation and classification, and Yoruba.

Aural-oral English is taught from the first day of the child's school experience through play and other activities and this in the first instance will continue for two years. It is anticipated that the child will be able to speak the language fairly fluently within this period even though he may not be in a position to read or write in it. English will continue to be taught as a second language for the six years while other subjects will be taught through the medium of Yoruba for the same length of time.

#### *Organization and Administration of the Project*

The writer is the over-all director of the project while a project co-ordinator handles the day to day supervision of the programme. He ensures that the syllabus is followed to the letter and runs a small secretariat. He consults the teachers frequently, and they consult him. He organises orientation programmes and short intensive in-service courses.

In addition to the above, three committees are set up by the project. The first one is an advisory group made up of some twenty-eight members drawn from the Universities of Lagos, Ife and Ibadan, selected teacher training col-

leges, some ministry officials, secondary school teachers and the primary school teachers who are actively connected with the project. The advisory committee meets once or twice a year to review programmes. The second committee is a small task force made up largely of University of Ife lecturers chosen from the Faculty of Education, the Department of English and the Institute of African Studies. The group meets frequently to handle urgent matters that cannot rest until the larger advisory group is ready to meet. This group has a famous artist and a seasoned Yoruba expert and writer as members. Then, there is the executive committee of the project. This committee comprises the director, the co-ordinator, the language consultant, the specialist English teacher and the teaching-material-production manager. It is this committee that directs the day to day running of the project and it may co-opt other people to advise it as necessary, such as the consultant evaluator. Consequently it handles such matters as use of words, coining of new words, particularly in science and mathematics, writing of new units, production of new materials and text books, and the suggestion of methods of approach and audio-visual aids.

During the summer of 1970, a one month writing workshop was organized by the project to bring together writers, educators, specialists and artists to assemble and try out units for Primaries I and II. This first writing workshop was a huge success. The work of the group will be carried forward by a small group of curriculum writers and translators, who will continue to develop new materials from time to time.

### *Future Plans*

Meanwhile, the project plans to arrange with a selected secondary school in Ile-Ife the admission of the entire class to secondary I with or without any entrance examination. At the completion of their six-year primary education, the children will be transferred to the selected secondary school to form a separate stream.

The initial stage of secondary education in secondary one will largely be devoted to an intensive English course,

if this is found to be necessary. The children will then proceed to complete their secondary school education through the medium of English and will sit for their West African School Certificate Examination at the end of the fifth year like their counterparts who follow the regular routine.

If agreement is reached, the succeeding classes at the primary school will follow the same scheme. All being well, the entire population of this particular primary school (from primary I to VI) will be converted to this system of education and will proceed to the selected secondary school to complete their secondary education under the new scheme.

#### *Anticipated Outcome*

It is anticipated that by the end of the programme this group of children will have had a richer school experience both emotionally and intellectually than the children who follow the conventional system. It is indeed expected that they will be better adjusted, more relaxed, more enterprising and more resourceful than their counterpart. To determine whether this is true, a system of regular evaluation will be built into the programme from primary I to secondary V. The experiment and the control (the parallel classes in the adopted Schools) will be evaluated. It is hoped that at the end of the programme we shall have gained some insight into the nature of the Nigerian child, developed materials that could be used in all primary schools in the Yoruba speaking areas as well as new materials in the teaching of English as a second Language in all elementary schools in Nigeria. It is also hoped that the Yoruba medium approach may, with modifications, be applicable to other Nigerian languages, such as Hausa, Igbo, Efik, Nupe, Edo and others.

However, like any other experiment, its success cannot be guaranteed. Even if the result does not meet our expectations, we shall have learnt something that may be of use to us and others who are equally concerned with the problem of the integrated primary school and its relevance to the needs of our children.

## *Yoruba as a Medium of Instruction?*<sup>1</sup>

by

**Olasope Oyelaran**

Yoruba is the vernacular of the Western State of Nigeria. Since the very concept of 'vernacular' implies the existence of a linguistic alternative, any consideration of the vernacular must be within the framework of multilingualism. The limit of this appears to be a situation in which only two languages are involved, as in the Western State of Nigeria, where only Yoruba and English are spoken.

The consideration of Yoruba as a medium of instruction is then a particular case of the recurrent problem of multilingualism and the choice of language in education. There exists a vast amount of literature on the subject. The following limited selection will give us an idea of the range of discussion on the issues involved, from the universal to the most particularistic.

### *On Multilingualism*

- 1953 (b) UNESCO Monograph on Fundamental Education No. 8.  
*The use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, Paris.
- 1965 Department of Education and Science. United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO.  
*Bilingualism in Education* (Report on an international seminar, Aberyswyth, Wales, 20 August–2 September 1960).
- 1967 *Problems of Bilingualism* Special supplement of The Journal of Social Issues, xxiii.

- 1967 The Canadian National Commission for UNESCO, International Seminar on the Description and Measurement of Bilingualism. University of Moncton, 6-14 June, 1969.

*On African languages*

- 1953 (a) UNESCO: *African Languages and English in Education*, Paris.
- 1962 Scientific Council for Africa. Publication No. 87.  
*Symposium on Multilingualism* (Second Meeting of the Inter-African Committee on Linguistics. Brazaville 16-21, VII 1962). London.
- 1963 John Spencer, *Language in Africa*, London.
- 1968 Julian Dakin, Brian Tiffen, and H. G. Widdowson, *Language in Education: The Problem in Commonwealth Africa and the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent*, O.U.P.

*Nigerian Languages and English*

- 1968 The National Universities Commission and the Federal Ministry of Education. *English Language in Nigeria* (A report of a special Study financed by the Ford Foundation) Lagos. See especially Chapter V:  
'Linguistic Background' prepared by Ayo Bamgboṣe.
- 1969 *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association*, III, 1.  
Ayo Bamgboṣe, 'The Relationship of the Vernacular and English'  
Adebisi Afọlayan, 'The change-over from Vernacular to English as the Medium of Instructions'.  
D. O. Oke, 'The vernacular as a Medium of Instruction in Nigerian Primary Schools'.

We see from the pattern of past preoccupation on this question that it is only logical to inquire into the practicality of any choice between a particular Nigerian language

and English. On the occasion of the present conference on the development of Yoruba for modern usage, it is pertinent then to ask whether Yoruba need be the medium of instruction, rather than English, in order that Yoruba be developed for modern usage. Many valid arguments have been advanced in the references cited on the pros and cons of this question. It is not our intention to rehearse them. Four major factors, however, must be taken into account before making a decision on the matter. These factors relate to socio-political, educational, linguistic, and psychological issues.

### **Socio-political factors**

If Otunla's contention 'that the combination of a disintegrative myth and a pyramidal authority constitutes strong centrifugal forces and that communities which exhibit this pattern may not be capable of associating in harmony for a long period of time either as a distinct and unified political system or as a homogenous part of a federal arrangement', is correct then it is evident that within the context of one Nigeria, it would be advantageous for a Yoruba state which exemplifies Otunla's 'communities' not only to develop one language without dialectal variations, but also to use this language as the medium of instruction so as to offset the centrifugal forces. But the validity of Otunla's thesis is debatable.

The Western State of Nigeria is an anomalous entity, not only in Nigeria, but also in the context of political Africa. It is one of very few states of which it may be said that it is truly linguistically homogenous.<sup>3</sup> In a country which boasts of over 180 languages, the Western State, with about one-fifth ( $1/5$ ) of the total population of the country has only one. This fact in itself should be of no small consequence to any constituted authority which must decide whether or not the Western State shall adopt the Yoruba language as the medium of instruction. For instance, if the West were a sovereign State, it would quite justifiably be taking the type B decision of Fishman's 'National Languages and Languages of Wider Communication' hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> That is, since the Western State

would then be characterized by only one great traditional (divisive or not) and by a sense of one historical past at the national level, its selection of the language of affairs would be governed only by considerations of authenticity. The use of, say, English as a language of wider communication (LWC) for educational purposes would then be merely transitional, that is, pending the 'modernization' of standardized variety of Yoruba. The goal of such a policy would be the realization of a monolingual state. Fishman calls such a state a *uni-modal Nation* (p. 112).<sup>5</sup> But it so happens that the Western State is not a sovereign state. It is a part of a Federal system which does not conform to any of Fishman's models. The Western State fits type B, as has just been shown, but no other state in Nigeria does, and not even Nigeria as a whole country fits any of the models.<sup>6</sup> The first question, therefore, to be answered by any educational planning authority seeking to adopt Yoruba as a medium of instruction must be not only how this would fit into the political realities of the entity of which the Western State is a part, but also why within this context Yoruba must of necessity be used as the medium of instruction in order to be modernized. What would be the implications of adopting Yoruba as the medium of instruction in the Western State for other States such as Dahomey, Kwara State and Lagos State? We are aware, of course, that the adoption of such a policy does not mean excluding English, or any other language for that matter. But if there is any reason at all why a foreign language should play a decisive rôle in the educational system of a state for the foreseeable future, then it appears justifiable that that foreign language be used at least as a medium of instruction.

### **Educational Factors**

The argument that culture education depends specifically on the language used as the medium is common to most of the works listed above. There is a sense, they seem to assume, in which language determines the content of education. This assumption may well turn out to be true, but up to now there is nothing to substantiate the claim.

Instead, it appears that deliberate efforts have been made to use particular languages as media of cultural transmission. Malcom Guthrie ('Multilingualism and Cultural Factors', Brazaville, 1962) makes the observation cogently in comparing the effects of French and English in African Education. He writes:

Put in its most crude form the difference between French and English in this respect would seem to be that the acquisition of French is normally as an end in itself with certain valuable by-products, but the learning of English as a means to end.

This prompts the reflection that English is probably in peculiar position among the languages of education and administration in that it can operate in a cultural void. This is not to say that it must do so, but simply to suggest that cultural factors do not appear to be an essential characteristic of the operation of the English language . . .

It is possible, too, that the cultural disassociation of English would mean that its adoption need not militate against the preservation of traditional cultures, whereas in the case of a language like Arabic, with its specific cultural atmosphere, the situation might be different.

If Guthrie is right, and we believe that he is, then the argument based on cultural deprivation cannot justifiably be given for using Yoruba as a medium of instruction rather than English.

It is true that a child, or anybody for that matter, would find learning relatively easy if conducted in the language he knows best. Since Yoruba is the better known of the two operational languages of the Western State, it is suggested that it be used as the medium of instruction. This argument assumes either that the content of education in the State's school system is easier to handle in Yoruba, or else that it must be handled in Yoruba at all cost. It assumes quite correctly that there exist serious problems in the teaching of English as a second language. But the educational lag which is attributed to the use of English as

a medium of instruction is not very meaningful. The concept of educational lag is contrastive. But just what the metric is for assessing the educational lag in the context of Nigerian education is not quite clear. Obviously one cannot seriously compare the level of attainment here with the level of attainment in another culture where goals and aspirations differ widely from our own.

There is also the bugbear of miseducation where the second language is the medium of instruction. In this respect, one would assume that no amount of training can produce teachers sufficiently proficient in the language as to obviate miseducation. But need this be the case? And does this same problem not exist where there is hardly a coherent content for the vernacular education? It appears that before we can seriously raise the question of miseducation in English we must make sure that Yoruba education itself has content. Anything short of that may constitute a misdirected effort.

All over the world, but more so in developing countries, as for example in Nigeria, a vast majority of primary school pupils do not continue their education beyond that level. It is reasonable, then, to suppose that the goal of an educational system should be to equip every citizen with a general education so that he might remain viable within a socio-economic system which changes according to the basis of the cumulative knowledge in the society. In the final analysis, therefore, the educational planner must place emphasis not only on the language which provides the material towards his goal, but also on the language which will ensure a gratifying socio-economic rôle for the individual.

In the case of the Western State of Nigeria, the planner must show either that Yoruba but not English fulfils both functions, or that although both languages fulfil both functions equally adequately, Yoruba has an advantage over English. It is not sufficient to argue from the premise of how many or how few people use English or ever come in contact with it, but of how many people believe that they should.

Assuming now that we have made a choice of language

of instruction, the next question of importance is the level at which the language must be fully mastered from a functional point of view. One would venture to recommend that any language which must bear the burden of instruction in a given educational system had better be introduced and be thoroughly grasped at the primary level, so that the large number who will not go on shall have been given a chance. For the Yoruba-speaking Nigeria, and for the foreseeable future, the candidate for this rôle appears to be the English language. Therefore our preoccupation for the present and with respect to the Yoruba language should be what to teach, linguistically, and how, in order to develop the language in readiness for a rôle which it may someday be called upon to assume. That is to say, we need at this time to take a good look at the Yoruba language itself as the real object of epistemology, the thing to be acquired, and we must ensure that it has the coherence demanded of a reasonable efficient medium. The next two sections take up these questions.

### **Linguistic Factors**

The present volume contains many relevant proposals on what the linguistic content of Yoruba education should be. For example, if we believe that our literature can only find authenticity in its tradition, then we must do all that lies in our power to preserve what is left of the tradition, and delve into the past in order to revive it. But does the resilience of a living literature necessarily depend on tradition? One could say that literature is cultural, and is bound to reflect the living aspects of the culture that produces it. The big question then is what medium one should employ to propagate this literature, and this is where the linguists come in. If the medium is to be Yoruba, and I believe this to be right, then we cannot rest until we have produced reasonable coherent descriptions of the language which will provide an adequate input to the works of textbook writers. We have a modest start with efforts such as Bamgboşe's (Heinemann, 1967) and Ashiwaju's (Leipzig, 1968), and many more. At the present moment, it still cannot be said that there exists a truly standard Yoruba.

We must therefore evolve a standardized variety of Yoruba. (For the distinction between a standard and a standardized variety, see Punya Sloka Ray, 'Language Standardization', in Joshua Fishman, ed., *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, The Hague, 1968).

How should we proceed? The latest report of the Committee on Yoruba Orthography (1969) and earlier efforts such as Bamgboṣe's (1966), for example, show that orthography must be based on some kind of phonological principle. The lack of agreement among the members of the Committee on Yoruba Orthography stems partly from the differing views they hold on the phonological description of the language. It is time, then, for Yoruba speaking linguists to get together and compare notes, if we are to get anywhere. Also, we must work, but not in an overbearing way, with educators, publishers, and other users of our phonological and grammatical descriptions, or of our proposal on, say, orthography based on our descriptions, in order to make a dent into the problems.

The problems of lexicology are dealt with in extenso in this volume. Clearly, both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries are potent instruments of language standardization. The use of these did not begin with the French Academy of the seventeenth century, and has not ended with it. With respect to Yoruba, a language with many vigorous varieties, inevitable a standardized variety would be greatly enriched by the introduction of items from many channels. This enrichment will undoubtedly increase as the other varieties recede in the face of the growing prestige and functional importance of the standardized variety. The way in which linguists intervene in the process of standardization, as I see we must, especially in the field of lexicology, will have to be most carefully chosen. I believe linguists should bear in mind that, with respect to Yoruba, we as lexicologists are called upon to interpret linguistically the United States' *mot e pluribus unum*.

Manuals of technical terminologies and glossaries cannot replace dictionaries; they do, however, complement them in the dissemination of information on the content of a language as it grows. Here again, I believe we are not

yet even at a modest beginning stage. What I do not see is why the task can be accomplished only if Yoruba is the medium of instruction. Surely the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction presupposes development in these areas.

### **Psycho-pedagogic Factors**

Assuming, then, that the linguists have done their job, we must now answer the questions as to how and with what results the linguists' material ought to be taught. It would also be interesting to know the psychological conditions affecting a language education or the gross educational effect of using a particular language in education.

Since we are dealing with Yoruba as a vernacular, the problem of language acquisition does not seem to loom so large. However, we would like children to be able to use their language as instrument of concept formation in a rapidly industrializing society, and to be able to handle later acquisition of knowledge in terms of the Yoruba language. In this respect, the greatest challenge facing us is that of methodology. Unfortunately, our teacher training programmes do not properly grapple with a methodology for the teaching of Yoruba, let alone that of Yoruba as a medium of instruction.

The argument has been advanced that it is psychologically unsound for the child to learn in a foreign language rather than in the vernacular (UNESCO, 1953 [a] and 1953 [b]). This claim has unfortunately never been substantiated. I have no reservations, for example, on the psychological wholesomeness of any of the participants in this conference, none of whom can be said to have acquired their education through the vernacular. Research studies on bilingualism up to the late 1950's were preoccupied with showing that a bilingual child is not only educationally handicapped, but that he is also psychologically retarded. However, recent investigations have shown that these studies are defective, and that there is no evidence suggesting that bilingualism has an adverse psychological effect, independently of the milieu in which the bilingual child grows up.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, experiments suggest that in a

monolingual environment where a second language must be taught, it is most profitable to use the foreign language as a medium of instruction, and even delay the teaching of the vernacular without the pupil suffering any appreciable disadvantages.<sup>8</sup>

It is pertinent to ask under what conditions one can expect a reasonable amount of success in a programme that delays or reduces the teaching of the vernacular in favour of a foreign language. Perhaps the most important condition noticed so far is the prevailing social attitude, and the attitude of parents toward their child's acquisition of the foreign language. There is no doubt that social and parental attitudes towards the acquisition of English are exuberantly enthusiastic in Nigeria. This then, would constitute a major hurdle for any educational programme that intends to use Yoruba as a medium of instruction.

Secondly, and this seems to amount to the same thing as the foregoing, it appears that where the acquisition of a given language is a means to a highly valued end, problems of acquisition are not serious.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence that this, too, is the case in Nigeria as a whole. Even the Yoruba speaking Nigerians would sacrifice anything to acquire English, because it is the way to academic honours – the proverbial 'Golden Fleece' to all Nigerians. And academic honours are widely cherished as *the* key to material well-being. The third condition on which depends the success of an educational programme in a second language is that all teachers, and not just language teachers, must be proficient in the language in which their subjects are taught, and must in addition be sensitive to the type of difficulties their pupils may have.

Fourthly, textbooks, especially language textbooks, must be specially written and graded for each educational level, and materials in each text book so progressively presented as to optimize learning. Finally, the school curriculum must place appropriate emphasis on the language or language in use in the school system.

The last three of these five conditions should be included in any language teaching programme and rigorously distinguished from any other set of criteria for

evaluating the success or failure of any language education.

### Conclusion

It follows then that the Western State of Nigeria, though made up of a linguistically homogenous of Yoruba speakers, should, in the context of one Nigeria and for the foreseeable future, adopt at least a bilingual educational system, where the second language must of necessity be English. The argument in this paper has been that this prospect not only does not militate against the development of the Yoruba language for the modern age, but also in no way makes it imperative that Yoruba be used as the medium of instruction in the State. No one denies that the use of a language as a medium of instruction helps to optimize its acquisition. Indeed, this is why we suggest that as long as a foreign language plays a crucial rôle, not only in our educational system but also in practically every aspect of our daily life, it should be used as a medium of instruction, especially where such use does not hinder the development of the vernacular. Since our present resources cannot support a system in which both Yoruba and English receive equal treatment, it appears reasonable to suggest an educational system with English as medium of instruction and Yoruba as a subject, and where the two languages are moreover taught by specialist teachers.

### Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper has already appeared in the October-November 1969 issue of the *Nigeria Magazine*. Though some of the arguments of the earlier paper are taken up again here, the orientation of the present discussion is essentially different. In the final analysis, the conclusions of both presentations are the same.

I have profited from the criticism and debates on my earlier paper by colleagues, notably by Dr. Adebisi Afolayan, who had been gracious enough to read the paper on my behalf during the Weekend Seminar on Yoruba Language and Literature in the first instance. Since we hold differing views on the issues involved, the responsibility for the content of the present paper, as for that of the earlier one, remains mine.

<sup>2</sup> T. A. O. Otunla, 'Myth and Structure of Authority: Forces for Faction in Yoruba political Culture' seminar papers presented in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife, Feb. 4, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> If Rwanda-Urundi is considered one political unit, then only the East Central State of Nigeria, and white Rhodesia may be as linguistically homogenous, the later slightly more homogenous than the Yoruba speaking Western State of Nigeria. When we say 'white Rhodesia' we assume that the Whiteman in Zimbabwe will either learn to live with the Black Africans, or else retreat behind its own Berlin walls, and constitute a country apart from Zimbabwe. In the event of a retreat Rhodesia would not be as bilingual as White South Africa. It would be strictly English speaking.

In this discussion, I shall refer only to the Western State, not because Lagos is not Yoruba speaking, but because of the unlikelihood of the same linguistic policy being adopted in both states, and also because it is convenient to consider only the Western State. It is conceivable to include the Yoruba speaking people of Kwara State, Lagos State, Dahomey, and Western State under a term such as 'The Yoruba speaking West Africa', which would then be geographically non-discontinuous unit. But such a unit is at present not a political unit, which is what interests us.

<sup>4</sup> *Anthropological Linguistics* II, 4, 111-135.

<sup>5</sup> Fishman's other two types are *a-modal Nations*, and *multi-modal Nations*. The latter are characterized by 'several Great Traditions seeking separate socio-political recognition'. They make type C decisions. A-modal nations, on the other hand, characterized by 'no integrating Great Tradition at the national levels', make type A decision.

<sup>6</sup> One may name at least five great traditions (from the point of view of the outsider) in Nigeria: for example, Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, etc., where the strength of the Ibo people seems to lie in the lack of such a historical crutch. But of all these, only Yoruba, at the moment, does not share at least one state with other lesser traditions and languages. In the North, for example, there are States where the Hausa-Fulani traditions co-exist.

<sup>7</sup> John Macnamara, 'The Bilingual's Linguistic Performance - A psychological Overview', *The Journal of Social Issues*, xxiii, 2, (1967) 58-77.

<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Samuels, Allan G. Reynolds; and Wallace E. Lambert, 'The Communicational Efficiency of Children Schooled in a Foreign Language' (mimeo) McGill University, Montreal, Nov. 1968; W. E. Lambert, and John Macnamara, 'some Cognitive Consequences of Following a First-Grade Curriculum in a Second Language' *Journal of Educational Psychology*, LX, 2 (1969) 86-96. W. E. Lambert, M. Just, and N. Segalowitz, 'Some Cognitive Consequences of Following the Curricular of Grades one and two in a Foreign Language' (mimeo), McGill University, 1969.

See also the report of the Special Centre in Nairobi (cited by Brian Tiffen, in Dakin, et al. 85 ff.). The following is a statement of the Centre's vernacular teaching policy.

The Nairobi course provides for the vernacular to be taught at the end of each morning. Thus the traditional use of language in infant classes is reversed. English is the medium, used for most of the time; the vernacular is a subject for one period. This is adequate for the vernacular, which is

reinforced by constant practice outside the school. . . .

The main advantages of the Nairobi system are two: fluency in English for those who will not proceed beyond primary school and a solid basis for those who are to go on for secondary and higher education.

- W. E. Lambert, R. C. Gardner, R. Olton, and K. Tunstall, 'A study of the roles of attitudes and motivation in second-language learning', McGill University, 1962, mimeograph.
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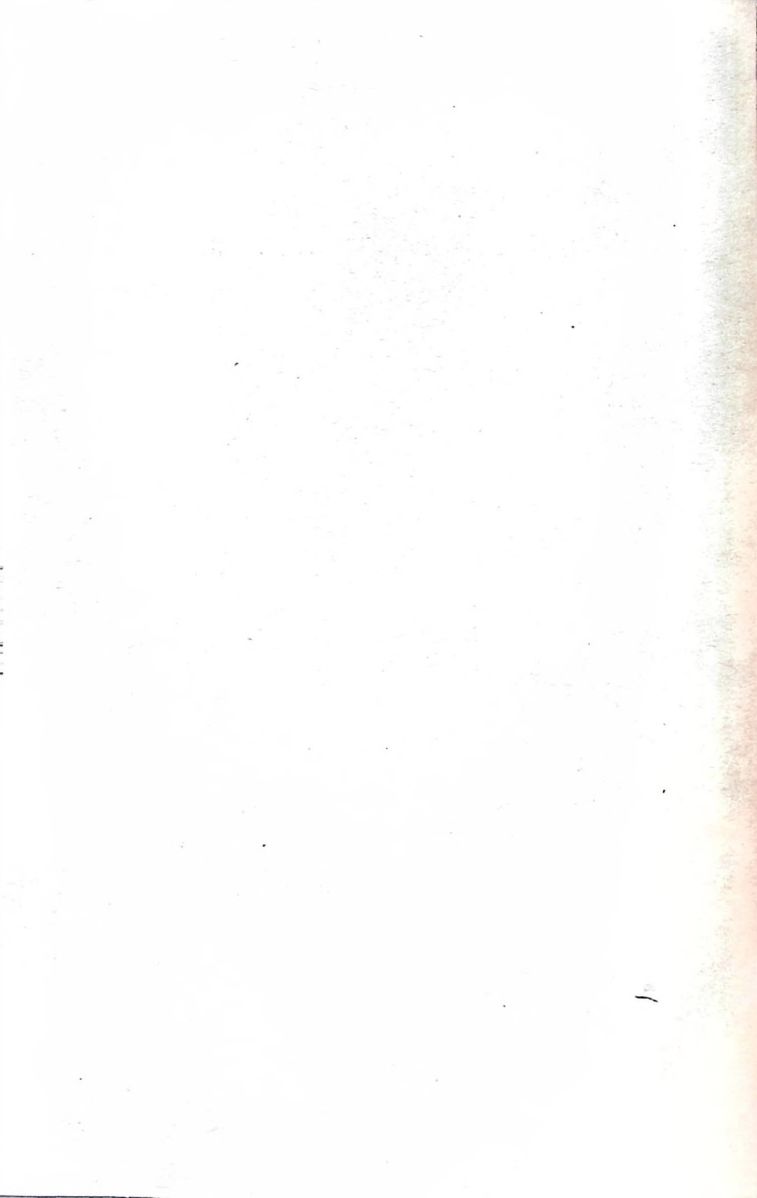
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