

More on the Source of the High Tone Syllable in the Infinitive Phrase of Yorùbá: Evidence from Ànàgó in Benin Republic

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Abstract

The issue of the source of the marker of the infinitive phrase in the Yoruba language has remained controversial. Scholars have argued that the marker is a pre-specified /í/ in line with what is proposed for some Benue-Congo languages (Awóyalé 1983), while others argued that it is derived from gerunds (Awóbulúyì 1996, 2008; Bamgbose 1974; Abíódún 2010). The present paper continues the argument that favours gerundives as the source of the marker by looking at the infinitive phrase in a Yoruba dialect, Ànàgó in the diaspora. Findings show that like the Èkiti dialect of Yoruba in Nigeria, Ànàgó presents evidence that favours gerundive as the source of the marker in Yoruba language.

Keywords: infinitive phrase, gerundive, pre-specified, diaspora.

1. Introduction

Ànàgó (or Sabé) is spoken in communities that include Àjàssé, Wònnú, Mánígrí, Sàngo, Gbéré in the Benin Republic, it is a linguistic form that shares structural and grammatical similarities with the Yoruba language spoken in Nigeria. In this

paper, Ànàgó is regarded and treated as a dialect of Yorùbá. This position is informed by the fact that regional dialects of Yoruba have distinct names such as Yorùbá Èkìtì, Yorùbá Ìjẹ̀bù, Yorùbá Ìgbómìnà, Yorùbá Ọ̀yọ̀, Yorùbá Ìkálẹ̀, etc., Yorùbá Ànàgó, therefore may be rightly regarded as another regional dialect like the ones mentioned above. Another important point in this regard is that speakers of Ànàgó understand the standard dialect of Yoruba, and the researcher had no difficulty in understanding the Ànàgó dialect, which suggests a reasonable level of mutual intelligibility, and finally, like the speakers of other regional Yorùbá dialects in Nigeria, speakers of Ànàgó trace their origin to Ilé-Ifẹ̀, and they agree that their speech form is a variety of Yorùbá, which they prefer to call Ànàgó, rather than Yorùbá. The dialect is mutually intelligible with some other dialects of Yoruba; the present writer had a fair understanding of the dialect in his interactions with the speakers of the dialect. In fact, scholars regard Ànàgó as a variety of Yorùbá spoken by a group of Yorùbá descendants in the Diaspora (Falola and Childs 2004, Oyetade 2011). The speech form as already mentioned is spoken in different communities but this paper draws data from the Igbẹ̀rẹ̀ speech form.

This paper, as earlier mentioned in the abstract, is a further contribution to the debate on the source of the High Tone Syllable (HTS) that marks the infinitive phrase in



Standard Yoruba and many other regional dialects of the language. The marker is shown in the illustrations below:

1. Standard Dialect

Ìwé sòro ó kà	‘It is difficult to learn/read’
Ọmọ dùn ún bí	‘It is easy/good to have children’
Òjọ mọ aṣọ ọ fọ	‘Ojo knows how to wash cloth’
Ilé wu Òjọ ó kọ	‘Òjọ loves to build a house’

2. Moba Dialect

Ìwé sòro í kà	‘It is difficult to learn/read’
Ọmọ dùn í bí	‘It is easy/good to have children’
Òjọ mọ aṣọ í fọ	‘Ojo knows how to wash cloth’
Ulé re Òjọ í kọ	‘Òjọ loves to build a house’

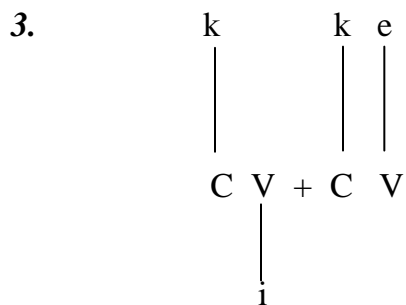
Scholars like Awóyalé (1983) hold the view that the HTS is underlyingly /í/ that takes the shape of any vowel that precedes it. Other scholars such as Bámgbóṣé (1974), Awóbùlúyì (1996, 2008) hold the view that the marker is derived from gerunds. Ànàgó, as will be shown in this paper, manifests gerunds rather than the HTS in infinitive phrase, thereby, contributing to the pieces of evidence that the HTS may conveniently be traced to gerunds.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two presents the derivation of gerunds in Ànàgó, showing clearly that the mechanism for the derivation

is different from that of the standard dialect and other regional dialects of Yorùbá spoken in Nigeria. Section three presents the structure of infinitive phrase in Ànàgó, and compares it with the structures in the standard dialect and other regional dialects of Yorùbá. Finally, section four discuss the implications of our findings to the controversy on the source of the HTS.

2. Gerunds in Ànàgó

Ànàgó, like other dialects of Yorùbá forms gerunds through nominalisation. In the standard and regional dialects of Yoruba spoken in Nigeria, gerunds are formed through partial reduplication and the introduction of a vowel /i/ between the reduplicated consonant of the root and the root, (cf. Awóbulúyì 1996, 2008, Bámgbóşé 1974, Fọlárin 1987). Marantz (1992:440) had earlier emphasised this fact when he says that the “Yorùbá forms nouns from verbs by prefixing a C-V reduplication on skeleton whose V is fixed to /i/”. His illustrations include,





Yoruba language scholars agree in the main that the prefixation of a reduplicated initial consonant of root to which /i/ is attached is the mechanism for deriving gerunds. The only area of controversy is whether the /i/ is fixed in the lexicon (pre-specified) or whether it is introduced by invoking a rule of epenthesis. Awóbulúyì (1996, 2008) and Kenstowitz (1994) hold the view that it is introduced through epenthesis in order to avoid consonant cluster in the language. The position canvassed by these scholars is demonstrated in the illustrations below.

4. sùn → ssùn → sísùn ‘sleeping’
 tà → ttà → títà ‘selling’
 gbé → ggbé → gbígbé ‘carrying/living’

Awóbulúyì (1997:91) further claims that the inserted vowel is /i/ because “.....the only anaptytic vowel in the language takes the form of the high front vowel/i/”. Abíódún (1997) argues against the claim that /i/ is introduced through epenthesis, and contends further that the high front vowel /i/ is not the only anaptytic vowel in the Yorùbá language, he shows that partial reduplication, and the introduction of a vowel which is not /i/ is also employed in the derivation of what Awóbulúyì (1978) refers to as manner nouns, but referred to as ideophones in Awóyalé (1988). The nomenclature is not relevant to the issue raised in the present paper, what is important is that /a/ is

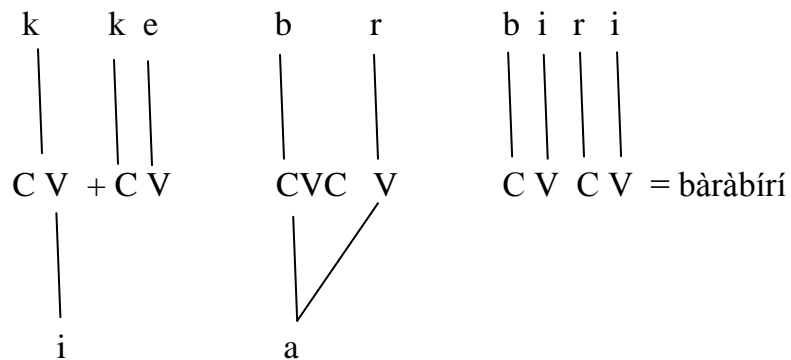
the epenthetic vowel and not /í/ in respect of manner nouns.
Consider the derivations below.

5. wéré → wrwéré → wàràwéré ‘very quickly’
 gúgú → gggúgú → gàgàgúgú ‘shapelessness’
 wówó → wwwówó → wàwàwówó ‘exhibiting strength’
 bírí → brbírí → bàràbírí ‘suddenly’
 jìgì → jgìgì → jagajìgì ‘old and rickety’

Abiódún (1997:97) then concludes that “the apparent fact, which is inherent in the traditional account of gerunds ... is that partial reduplication in the Yoruba language involves prefixing C-V reduplication skeleton to a base form. The C is invariably the initial consonant of the base, while the V is always pre-specified. The pre-specified vowel is /í/ in the case of gerundives, but /a/ in the case of (manner nouns) or ideophones”. Consider the derivations below:

6a. Gerund

(b)





Ànàgó employs a different mechanism for the derivation of gerunds. Whereas, the standard and regional dialects of Yoruba spoken in Nigeria employ partial reduplication and the introduction of a pre-specified /i/ to form gerunds, Ànàgó, a regional dialect of Yorùbá spoken in Benin Republic, does not employ reduplication. Rather, the dialect has a constant prefix which takes the form /kí/ as shown in the illustrations below.

- 7.
- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------|---|-------|------------|
| lọ | → | kí+lọ | → | kílọ | ‘going’ |
| sùn | → | kí+sùn | → | kísùn | ‘sleeping’ |
| tà | → | kí+tà | → | kítà | ‘selling’ |
| gbé | → | kí+gbé | → | kígbé | ‘living’ |
| dín | → | kí+dín | → | kídín | ‘frying’ |
| mọ | → | kí+mọ | → | kímọ | ‘drinking’ |
| sùn | → | kí+sùn | → | kísùn | ‘roasting’ |

Following from the above, the popular traditional view that Yorùbá forms gerunds through partial reduplication cannot be upheld, the fact, it appears, is that some dialects employ reduplication, and at least Ànàgó, as we have seen here, has a fixed prefix which is /kí/, and does not employ reduplication. This situation calls for the re-examination of the status of /i/, either as a pre-specified element or one that is inserted by the epenthetic rule.

The fixed form of the prefix in Ànàgó, which manifests /i/ suggests that the /i/ must have been pre-specified. Note in

this regard the presence of /í/ in the derivation that involves reduplication as reflected in (4) above, and in Ànàgó where the derivation does not reflect reduplication as in (7) above. The presence of the vowel in a prefix that is fixed in the lexicon suggests to us that the vowel is fixed. How Ànàgó comes about /kí/, and why it does not operate the same mechanism like the standard and other regional dialects of Yorùbá is another issue entirely that future research will address.

3. Gerunds and infinitive phrase in Ànàgó

Ànàgó, like the Ekiti dialect reported in Abíódún (2010) manifests gerunds in the infinitive phrase rather than the HTS found in many other dialects of Yoruba. Consider in this regard data from Ànàgó and Ekiti dialects

8. *Ànàgó dialect*

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| i) Adé ma asọ kífò | ‘Ade known how to wash cloth’ |
| Ade know cloth washing | |
| ii) Ilé wù mi kímọ | ‘I love to build a house’ |
| House love me building | |
| iii) Mátò òrọ kítì | ‘Vehicles are difficult to drive’ |
| Vehicle difficult driving | |
| iv) Işé náà dùn kíşé | ‘The work is easy to accomplish’ |
| Work the sweet doing | |
| v) Òjó ma işu kísun | ‘Ojo knows how to roast yam’ |
| Ojo know yam roasting | |



8a. Èkìtì dialect

- i) Adé mọ ąşo fifò ‘Ade knows how to wash cloth’
Ade know cloth washing
- ii) Ulé rè mi kíkò ‘I love to build a house’
house love me building
- iii) Mọtò şoro wíwà ‘vehicles are difficult to drive’
Vehicle difficult driving
- iv) Uşé náà dùn şíşe ‘the work is easy to accomplish’
Work the sweet doing
- v) Òjó mọ uşu sísun ‘Òjo knows how to roast yam’
Òjó know yam roasting

Abíódún (2010) looks at the arguments advanced in Awóyalé (1983) to support his claim and position that the infinitive phrase maker illustrated in (1) and (2) above is /i/ underlyingly, and that it only assumes the shape of any vowel that comes immediately before it through a process of vowel assimilation as in the case of $i \longrightarrow o$ in the illustration below.

- 9. iwé şoro í kà \longrightarrow iwé şoro ó kà ‘it is difficult to
learn/read’

Book difficult (INF) read

The paper in question, (Abíódún 2010), takes up the arguments presented in Awóyalé (1983), and presented apparently more convincing arguments that Awóyalé’s position

needs to be revised to the effect that the infinitive phrase maker is derived from gerunds through consonant deletion and vowel assimilation as shown below.

10. ìwé sòro kíkà → ìwé sòro Í kà → ìwé sòro ó kà
 Uşé dùn şíşe uşé dùn í şe uşé dùn ún şe

The position canvassed in the paper in question is that whereas almost all the other dialects of Yoruba delete the initial consonant of the gerundive, which creates the structure to which assimilation applies, Mòbà dialect does not operate assimilation even when the initial consonant is deleted. Èkìtì dialect, one may argue, retains the older form, meaning that consonant deletion and vowel assimilation processes have not developed in the dialect as far as infinitive phrase is concerned.

One of the arguments in Awóyalé (1983), and which is particularly very relevant to the present paper is the one that says that /i/ must be regarded as the underlying form of the infinitive phrase maker because languages like Igbo, Itsekiiri, Efik and Igala are very close on this.....” (p.93). Abiodun’s (2010) answer to this argument is that:

.....why not seek for pieces of evidence within the dialects of the language before seeking for evidence in other distinct languages?.....

It would have proved more rewarding and convincing if evidence were sought from the dialects of Yoruba to argue for or against the

source of the infinitive phrase in the Yoruba language.

This present paper maintains the argument above that the form in Èkìtì represents the older form, and interestingly as we have seen here in one Yoruba dialect in the diaspora, we found that gerundives, rather than HTS mark infinitivisation. It is not impossible that further research would reveal the manifestation of gerunds rather than the HTS in the construction of infinitive phrase in other dialects of the Yoruba language, and in some of the dialects of those languages referred to in Awóyalé (1983).

Conclusion

This paper has revealed the relevance of research into the structure of the various dialects of Yoruba both at home and in the diaspora in order to gain further insight into obscure issues in the Yoruba language. The popular belief that gerunds are formed through partial reduplication has been shown in this paper to be true only as far as some dialects of Yoruba are concerned. The paper shows that at least one dialect, Anago, has a constant prefix. Findings in this paper further show that the last has not been said on the source of the HTS in the infinitive construction in some Yoruba dialects.

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