A Pan-Dialectal Study of Verb Infinitive Phrase Marker in Yorùbá

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Abstract

Studies in the field of dialectology have revealed that dialects of a language invariably exhibit variation or differences at all levels of grammar. This paper describes differences in the marker of verb infinitive phrase across the dialect groups of Yorùbá . The paper randomly selects four dialect groups, selecting two dialects from each group. The paper reveals that there are three various forms of the marker across the dialect groups. It is observed that three of the dialect groups out of the four studied do not have a consistent form of the marker. Based on findings in the paper, it is argued that the gerund is posited as the source of the marker as claimed by some scholars , rather than /í/ or HTS posited by some other scholars.

Keywords: Dialectology, verb infinitive phrase, dialect groups, gerund.

1.   Introduction

Yorùbá language scholars are all agreed that Yorùbá language manifests verb infinitive phrase in its grammatical structure. The sentences below, taken from the standard dialect of the language demonstrate the realization of the phrase.

1.   (a)   Olú mọ aṣọ ọ́ fọ̀   'Olu knows how to wash cloth'
      (b)   Iṣẹ náà ṣòro ó ṣe   'The work is difficult to accomplish'
      (c)   Ọtí yìí ṣe é mu 'The wine is good'

In each of the sentences, there are two verbs; in (1a) we have **mọ̀** and **fọ̀**, in (1b) there are **ṣòro** and **ṣe**, while in (1c) there are **ṣe** and **mu**. Between the two verbs in each sentence is an infinitive phrase marker in the forms of **ọ́** in (1a)**ó** in (1b) and **é** in (1c). Thus the infinitive verb phrase in (1) are

2.   (a)   …**ọ́** fọ̀
      (b)   … **ó** ṣe
      (c)   … **é** mu

Whereas, Yorùbá language scholars are unanimous in their claims that the language manifests verb infinitive phrase, they are not unanimous on the underlying form or the source of the infinitive phrase marker. In (1) above, the marker takes the form of the vowel that precedes it.

Scholars that include Ward (1952), Bowen (1958), Crowther (1952) (1958), Awobuluyi (1970) and Abiọdun (2010, 2015) claim that the marker developed from gerund through deletion and assimilation. Other scholars like Bamgbose (1966, 1971) and Awoyale (1983) differ by claiming that the marker is /í/ underlyingly but undergoes assimilation each time it is used in the standard dialect. Abiọdun (2015) adds a new dimension when he claims that Anago, a Yorùbá dialect spoken in the Republic of Benin has an underlying form which is /kí/.

The present paper is a pan-dialectal study of the (infinitive phrase) marker in four selected dialect groups of Yorùbá .   The dialect groups are : (i) Central Yorùbá ; (ii) North-East Yorùbá; (iii) South-East Yorùbá; and (iv) North-West Yorùbá. The researchers agree that it is impossible to study all the dialects in each group, however, it is believed that a study of two dialects in each group will help us understand the shape of marker across the dialect groups, and perhaps helps in proposing an underlying form. It would further enrich our understanding of dialectal variation within the field of Yorùbá dialectology.

2.   Studies in YorùbáVerb Infinitive Phrase

Scholars have paid attention to the source of the verb infinitive verb phrase marker in Yorùbá language by looking more into the standard dialect than the regional dialects of the language. Scholars, among them Ward (1952), Bowen (1958), Awobuluyi (1970) and

Abiọdun (2010, 2015), have argued that the source of the marker should be traced to gerunds that are derived from verbs through partial reduplication, such as:

(3)   lọ   →   lílọ

        sùn   →   sísùn

        jẹ   →   jíjẹ

The main argument of the scholars remains that the surface form of the marker, as found in the standard dialect, is derived by deleting the consonant that begins the gerund and effecting vowel assimilation between the two juxtaposed vowels that result from consonant deletion. Abiọdun (2010) illustrates thus,

(4)   i.   Adé   mọ̀   **kíkà**   (effect deletion)

      ii.   Ade   mọ̀   **íkà**   (effect assimilation)

      iii.   Ade   mọ̀   **ọ́nkà**   'Ade knows how to count/read'

Further examples are contained below.

(5)   a.   Olú   mọ   aṣọ   **fífọ̀**   (effect deletion)

           Olú   mọ   aṣọ   **ífọ̀**   (effect assimilation)

           Olu   mọ   aṣọ   **ọ́ fọ̀**   'Olu knows how to wash cloth'

      b.   Iṣẹ́   náà   ṣòro   **síṣe**   (effect deletion)

           Iṣẹ́   náà   ṣòro   **í ṣe**   (effect assimilation)

           Iṣẹ́   náà   ṣòro   **ó ṣe**   'The work is difficult to do/carry out'

As already mentioned , other scholars like Bamgbose (1966, 1971) and Awoyale (1983) argue that the marker is underlyingly /í/. One apparently convincing argument put forward in Awoyale (1983) is that Benue-Congo languages like Igbo , Efik, Igala and Itsekiri have /ì/ as the infinitive verb phrase marker. He contends that since many of the languages in the family group share the feature, there is no reason to postulate gerund and go through different rules as that complicates the grammar andmakes it complex   . Awoyale (1983) affirms his position by saying that "Yorùbá , Igbo, Itsekiri, Efik and Igala are close on this and this type of distribution would seem to suggest that the HTS is no longer a Yorùbá affair, but may be older and more widespread than had hitherto been assumed."

Other scholars argue that looking at regional dialects of Yorùbá rather than other distinct languages may be more profitable in giving us a clue as to the source of the marker. Abiọdun (2010), following his research into the Èkìtì regional dialect of Yorùbá   , claims that gerund should be the prefferd form of the verb infinitive phrase marker, he says that,

> It would have proved more rewarding and convincing if evidence were sought from the dialects of Yorùbá to argue for or against the source of the infinitive phrase marker in the Yorùbá language. (p.93)

This call for a study of Yorùbá dialects for a possible and viable solution to the controversy over the source of the marker motivates the present researchers to look at the marker in different dialects across the dialect groups of the language.

3.   Data Presentation

Data is presented in the four dialect groups mentioned earlier. For each dialect group, data is presented in two dialects randomly selected within each group.

3.1   Central Yorùbá

Within this dialect group are Èkìtì , Mọ̀bà, Ifẹ̀ and Àkúrẹ́ dialects. Data is presented in Mọ̀bà and Èkìtì.

(6)   a.   **Èkìtì Dialect (Ado-Èkìtì Speech form)**

i.   Òjó   mọ   usu   **jíjẹ**   'Ojo knows how to eat yam'
       Ojo   know   yam   to eat

ii.   Ulé   re   Olú   **kíkọ́**   'Olu loves to build a house'
       House   love   Olu   to build

iii.   Okó   sòro   **ríro**   'Farm is difficult to cultivate'
       Farm   difficult   to cultivate

iv.   Ṣé   Wálé   mọ   aṣọ   **fífọ̀**?   'Does Wale know how to wash cloth'

       Does   Wale   know   cloth   to wash

v.   Okó   o   ṣòro   **ríro**   'It is not difficult to cultivatefarm'
       Farm   neg.   difficult   to cultivate

b.   **Mọ̀bà Dialect**

i.   Òjó   mọ   usu   **íjẹ**   'Ojó knows how to eat yam'
       Ojo   know   yam   to eat

ii.   Ulé   re   Olú   **í** kọ́   'Olu loves to build a house'
       Houselove   Olu   to build

iii.   Okó   sòro   **íro**   'Farm is difficult to cultivate
       Farm difficult to cultivate

iv.   Ṣé Wálé mọ aṣọ **í** fọ?   'Does Wale know how to wash cloth'

       Does Wale know cloth to wash?

v.   Oko kè sòro **í**   ro   "It is not difficult to cultivate a farm
       oke   neg   difficult to cultivate

3.2   North-East Yorùbá

In the North -East Yorùbá dialect group are Yàgbà , Owé, Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀, Ìjùmú, Bùnú and Gb ẹdẹ.
Data is presented in Yàgbà and Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀ dialects.

(7)   a.   Yàgbà Dialect (Mọ̀pà)

i.   Òjó   mọ   isu   **í**   jẹ   'Òjó knows how to eat yam'
       Ojo   know   yam   to   eat

ii.   Ilé   wu   Olú   **í**   kọ́   'Olu loves to build a house'
       House   love   Olu   to   build

iii.   Okó   sọro   **í**   ro   'Farm is difficult to cultivate
        Farm   difficult to   cultivate

iv.   Ṣé Wálémọ   asọ**í**fọ? 'Does Wale know how to wash cloth?'
        Does Wale   know   cloth   to wash?

v.   Oko   é   sòro   **í** ro   'Farm is not difficult to cultivate'
       Farm   neg difficult to cultivate

b.   Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀ Dialect

i.   Òjó o ma   isu   **ú**   jẹ   'Òjó knows how to eat yam'
       Ojo RP know yam to eat

ii.   Ilé o wu   Olú   **ú**   ka   'Olu loves to build a house'
       House love   Olu   to   build

iii.   Okó osòro   **ó**   ro   'Farm is difficult to cultivate
        Farm RP difficult to cultivate

iv.   Ṣé Wálé ma   asọ**ó**fọ?   'Does Wale know how to wash cloth?'
        Does Wale   know   cloth   to wash?

v.   Oko   é   sòro   **ó** ro   'Farm is not difficult to cultivate'
       Farm   neg difficult to cultivate

3.3   South-East Yorùbá

In this dialect group are Oǹdó , Ọ̀wọ̀, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìlàjẹ, Ìkálẹ̀ and others. Data is presented in Ọ̀wọ̀ and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects.

(8)   a.   Ọ̀wọ̀ (Ifọ́n Speech form)

i.   Olú   mà   èrún   **í**jẹ   'Olu knows how to eat yam'
        Olu   know   yam   to eat

ii.   Ulé   re   Ade   **í**   kọ   'Ade loves to build a house'
        House love   Ade   to   build

iii.   Usẹ́   sòro   **í**   se   'The work is difficult to accomplish/to'
        Work difficult to do

iv.   Ṣé   Wale   mà asọ**í** fọ̀?   'Does Wale know how to wash cloth?'
        Does Wale   know   cloth   to wash?

v.   Ade   ò ma   erún   **í** jẹ   'Ade does not know how to eat yam'
        Ade   neg know yam   to eat

b.   Ìkálẹ̀ Dialect

i.   Olú   ma   usu   **ú**jẹ   'Olu knows how to eat yam'
        Olu   know   yam   to   eat

ii.   Ulí   ghwũ Adé   **é**   kọ́   'Ade loves to build a house'
        House love   Ade   to   build

iii.   Usẹ́   sòro   **ó**se   'Work is difficult to accomplish/do'
        Work difficult to do

iv.   Sé   Wálé   ma   asọ   **ọ́** fọ̀?   'Does Wale know how to wash cloth?'
        Does Wale   know   cloth   to wash?

v.   Adé   éè   ma   usu   **ú** jẹ   'Ade does not know how to eat yam'
        Ade   neg   know   yam   to eat

3.4   North-West Yorùbá

Dialects in this group include Èkó , Àwórì, Ẹ̀gbádò, Ọ̀yọ́, Ọ̀sun, Òǹkò, Ìbọ̀lọ́, Ìgbómìnà among others. Data is presented in Ìbọ̀lọ́ and Ìgbómìnà dialects

(9)   a.   Ìbọ̀lọ́ Dialect

i.   Òjó   mọ   isu   **ú**   jẹ   'Òjó knows how to eat yam

	Ojo	know	yam	to	eat	

ii. Ilé   wu   Olú   **ú**   kọ́   'Olu loves to build a house'
    House love   Olu   to   build

iii. Okó   sòro   **ó**   ro   'Farm is difficult to cultivate'
     Farm difficult to   cultivate

iv. Ṣe   Ojo   mọ   iṣu   **ú**   jẹ   'Does Ojo know how to eat yam?
    Does   Ojo know yam to   eat

v. Oko   kò   sòro   **ó**   ro   'Farm is not difficult to cultivate'
   Farm   neg   difficult to   cultivate

b.   Igbomina Dialect
i.   Òjó   mọ   isu   **ú**   jẹ   'Òjó knows how to eat yam
      Ojo   know   yam   to   eat

ii. Ilé   wu   Olú   **ú**   kọ́   'Olu loves to build a house'
    House love   Olu   to   build

iii. Okó   sòro   **ó**   ro   'Farm is difficult to cultivate'
     Farm difficult to   cultivate

iv. Ṣé Ojo mọ àwù**ú**fọ̀   'Does Ojo know how to wash cloth?
    Does   Ojo know cloth to   wash

v. Oko   éè   sòro   **ó**   ro   'Farm is not difficult to cultivate'
   Farm   neg   difficult to   cultivate

3.   General Overview

Looking back at the pieces of data in the sub-sections under section (3) above, it is observed that the marker shows three different forms that are described below:
(10)   a.   **gerund:** as reflected in the Èkìtì dialect, e.g.
                Òjó   mọ   usu   **jíjẹ**   'Ojo knows how to eat yam'

        b.   /**í**/: as reflected in Mọ̀bà, Yàgbà and Ọ̀wọ̀ dialects
e.g.:   Mọ̀bà: Òjó mọ usu **í** jẹ
        Yàgbà: Òjó mọ isu **í** jẹ'Òjó knows how to eat yam'
        Ọ̀wọ̀ (Ifọ́n):   Òjó ma ẹrun **í** jẹ

c.   a vowel that takes the form of a preceding vowel, as in Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀, Ìkálẹ̀ and Ibọ̀lọ́,

    e.g.:   Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀:   Ọ̀jó ma isu **ú** jẹ

          Ìkálẹ̀:   Ọ̀jó mọ isu **ú** jẹ   'Ọ̀jó knows how to eat yam'

          Ìbọ̀lọ́:   Ọ̀jó mọ isu **ú** jẹ

One interesting thing noticed about the marker across the dialects is that some dialect groups do not have a consistent form of the marker . In Central Yorùbá for instance , Èkìtì dialect demonstrates **gerund**, while Mọ̀bà reflects **/í/**. In the South-East group, Ọ̀wọ̀ (Ifọn speech form) demonstrates **/í/** while Ìkálẹ̀ shows a vowel that takes the form of a preceding vowel. The same scenario is manifested in North -East where Yàgbà has **/í/** form while Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀ reflects a vowel that takes the form of the preceding vowel. It is only in the North-West that a vowel that takes the form of a preceding vowel is consistently realized.

Following from the above, that is, the three forms of the marker across the dialects, the researcher agree with scholars like Ward (1952), Awobuluyi (1970) and Abiọdun (2010, 2015) that the source of the marker is the gerund as found in Èkìtì dialect. The other forms, therefore, are the result of phonological processes. The dialects that manifest **/í/** must have undergone a process of consonant deletion as claimed by scholars mentioned above. This implies that the initial consonant of the gerund is deleted as in

(11)   Ọ̀jó   mọ   uṣu   **jíjẹ**   (effect deletion)

        Ojo   mọ   uṣu   **íjẹ**

Other dialects that manifest a vowel that takes the form of a preceding vowel must have gone through consonant deletion and vowel assimilation as shown below,

(12)   Ọ̀jó   mọ   usu   **jíjẹ**

        Ọ̀jó   mọ   usu   **í** jẹ

        Ọ̀jó   mọ   usu   **ú** jẹ

Abiọdun (2015) claims that a dialect of Yorùbá called Anago spoken in Republic of Benin has /kí/ as the infinitive phrase marker. The scholar presents data from the dialect to affirm the claim, e.g.

(13)   Adé   mọ   aṣọ   **kífọ̀**   'Adé knows how to wash cloth.'

        Ilé   wù   mí   **kíkọ́**   'I love to build a house.'

        Mátò   ṣoro   **kítì**   'Vehicle is difficult to drive.'

The question that readily comes to mind is whether the **/kí/** is also traceable to gerund. Abiọdun (2015) answers the question when he states that unlike the Yorùbá language in Nigeria that forms gerund through partial reduplication, Anago has a fixed prefix **/kí/** used in the derivation of gerund. The scholar states that,

Whereas, the standard and regional dialects of Yorùbá spoken in Nigeria employ partial reduplication and the insertion of a pre-specified **/í/** to form gerund, Anago, 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/**. (p.223).

We wish to add here that the derivation of gerund through the prefixation of **/kí/** could be the result of the contact between Anago and other languages in the Republic of Benin.

Conclusion

This paper buttressed the claims by scholars that "dialects of a language are"versions of the some basic grammar with systematic differences in grammatical structure at different levels ofgrammar" (Fromkin and Rodman 1978: 258). One interesting finding in this paper is that even when a group of dialects are said to belong to a particular dialect group, they still reflect differences, and as this paper reveals, dialects in one group share similarities with dialects in other groups. As demonstrated in this study, Mọ̀bà(that belongs to the Central Yorùbá group), Yàgbà(which belongs to the North -East Yorùbá Group) and Ọ̀wọ̀(in the South-East Yorùbá group)share a similar marker which is **/i/**. On the other hand, Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀(in the North-East Group), Ìkálẹ̀(in the South-East Group) and both Ìbọ̀lọ́ and Ìgbómìnà(in the North-West Group) share a similar marker in the form of a vowel that assimilates the vowel that precedes it . Going by our findings , only Èkìtì dialect manifests gerund . The researchers opine that further research may reveal other dialect (s) that share a form with Èkìtì dialect.

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