

## A Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Adverbs in Standard Yoruba

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### Abstract

*The adverb is one of the five commonly accepted lexical classes established in the standard Yorùbá language. Recently, controversies started to emerge on whether the adverb exists as a lexical class in the language and what items its members are. Some items classified as its members are variously classified by different scholars (Awóbùlúyì 1978, Bámgbóyè 1967, 1990, Òdètókun 1998, among others). There is no consensus yet despite the various studies. This is why we want to look deeper into the so-called class of adverbs using the morpho-syntactic approach of the minimalist theory of Radford (1999). The morpho-syntactic approach we are employing here is suggested by Radford (1999:38) as the evidence for postulating that words belong to lexical categories. We look at the morphological process of the two lexical classes over which there are no controversies, noun and verb. We find out that the adverb has no morphological process by which its members can be derived in the language like the classes of noun and verb. Syntactically, the members classified together as a class of adverb have nothing in common for them to be grouped together as a lexical class. The paper concludes that adverb is not one of the lexical classes attested in standard Yorùbá.*

**Keywords:** Morpho-Syntax, Adverb, Lexical, Categories, Analysis.

## Introduction

Adverb is one of the lexical categories established by most Yorùbá language scholars, (Bowen 1858, Delano 1958, Bámgbóyé 1967, Ògúnbôwálé 1970, Awóbùlúyì 1978, Ödětókun 1998, Yusuf 1995); all of them establish that adverb is a lexical class like noun and verb. They define the category as one that is used to modify verbs and they identify pre-verbal, post-verbal and sentence final adverbs.

One very important observation is that a number of words classified as adverbs are variously classified into some other classes, and the words so classified do not also share morpho-syntactic features as members of classes like noun and verb share. Apart from the two problems mentioned, scholars are not consistent on the criteria for categorizing the words that should be called adverbs.

The present paper examines the group of words under the lexical category called adverb as established by earlier scholars to determine the validity of their claim that such a category exists in Yorùbá. This re-examination is against the backdrop of the Minimalist Programme (MP) that says that morpho-syntactic considerations are the most relevant in the categorization of lexical items, (Radford 1999:38). This work is designed to test morph-syntactic properties of the words grouped as adverbs so as to see the empirical need or otherwise of identifying a class of adverbs in standard Yorùbá.

## Adverbs in the Yorùbá literature

The class of adverbs falls into three groups in the literature: pre-verbal adverb, post-verbal, and sentence final adverbs. Each of these groups is discussed below.

### Pre-verbal Adverbs

Preverbal adverbs are those groups of words that occur before a verb as a modifier of such verb. They include the underlined in the following examples:

- 1 (a) Adé máa lö ni ôla.  
Adé will go on morrow 'Adé will go tomorrow.'  
(b) Ayô mô- òn-mô ye bëê.  
Ayô intentionally do so 'Ayô intentionally did so.'  
(c) Mo máa kúkú sùn.  
I will rather sleep. 'I will rather sleep.'

Awóbùlúyì (1978, pp. 68-69) has about fifty items in this group as they include the ones underlined in (1) above, and a few shown in (2) below:

- (2). yòò (will) pàpà (still) báà (even if)  
òò (will) kǒ (first) gbǒdô (must)  
Â (prog marker) kǒkǒ (first) sábà (be in the habit of)
- ní (will/shall not) tètè (quickly) jě (had better)  
lè (may/might) sǐ/sìn (still) jàjà (finally)

Whereas Awóbùlúyì (1978) claims that these are adverbs, Bámgbóyé (1967) classifies them among verbal groups (tense marker/ helping verbs) in the language.

### Post-verbal Adverbs

Post- verbal adverbs on the other hand are those words that occur after verbs to modify such verbs. They fall into two groups. The first group is identified in Awóbùlúyì (1978, p.75). They include the items in (3) below:

- (3). rí (ever) sáá (in vain)  
mõ (any more) rará (at all)  
gan-an (really)

as in:

- (a). N ò mçmu rí.  
I NEG drink-wine ever 'I have never taken wine'
- (b). Ó wù mí gan-an.  
It please me much. 'It pleased me well/really'
- (c). Bàbá náà yé iyë náà sáá.  
Man the do work the vain. 'The man did the work in vain.'
- (d). N ò fë mõ.  
I not want again. 'I don't want again/ any more.'
- (e). Wõn ò lö rará.  
they not go at all. 'They did not go at all.'

The other group of adverbs identified in Bámgbóyé (1967, p. 32) includes the items in (4) below:

- (4). dárádára 'very well' díédíê 'little by little'  
péré 'only' nini 'very white'  
púpô 'very much' pátápátá 'completely'

as in:

- (a). Ó se iyú náà dáadáa  
she cook yam the well  
'She cooked the yam very well'
- (b). Ó wù mí púpô  
it pleased me well  
'It pleased me much'
- (c). Wõn Á yé iyë náà díédíê.  
they PROG do work little-little.  
'They are doing the work little by little'
- (d). Aýö funfun nini.  
cloth white very  
'A snow-white cloth'
- (e). Ödún kan péré.  
'year one only'.

Awóbùlúyì (1978) puts the items underlined in 4 (a -e) above and many other items classified as adverbs in the class of noun rather than adverb. His arguments include the fact that they can function as object of /ní/ as in the examples in (5) below:

- (5). (a) Olú dé ní kíákíá.  
Olú come quickly 'Olú came quickly'
- (b). Òjò Â şe (ní) sáá.  
Òjò PROG do in vain. 'Òjò is doing it in vain'
- (c). Wõn Â ýe iyě náà (ní) díêdíê.  
They PROG do work the little-little  
'They are doing the work steadily'

It is found out that some of these items can be focused like any other noun in the language as in the examples below:

- (d). Díêdíê ni eku Â jç awö.  
Little- little be rat PROG eat leather  
'The rat eats the leather gradually'
- (e). Dáradára ni mo wà.  
Goodly be I exist  
'I am very fine'
- (f). Púpô ni kí o bù nínú òbê náà.  
Much be WH u take of the soup  
'You should take much from the soup' etc.ne only  
'Only one ye

Some of such items can be modified by noun modifiers, as in the sentences in (6) below:

- (6). (a) Wôdùwôdù yíí kò yé mi.  
Uncoordinated this NEG understand me  
'I do not understand this unruly behaviour'
- (b). Kíákíá tí o se é rán wá lówō.  
quickly that you do it help you.  
'The fact that you did it on time has helped you.'
- (c). Wérewère yín yíí yóó kó bá a yín  
unruly your this will put you in trouble  
'Your unruly behavior will put you in trouble'

The items highlighted are modifiers to the underlined items in (6) above. Only nouns take such modifiers in the Yorùbá language, yet they are among the items classified as adverbs in the current grammar.

From the discussions in this section it appears that there is no consensus on the class of the words grouped as adverbs. One notes the following:

- The same group of words are classified into two categories, as items like **tètè** (quickly), **kúkú** (rather), **yóó** (will), etc are grouped in the class of adverbs in Awóbùlúyì (1978) but as verbs (helping verbs) in Bámgbóyè (1967)  
**kiákíá** (quickly), **jējē** (gently), **díédíé** (little by little) etc are grouped as adverbs in Bámgbóyè (1990) but as nouns in Awóbùlúyì (1978)
- There is no consistency in the criteria used for their classification by the scholars
- Many of the items grouped as adverbs have nothing in common morphologically and syntactically that could make them belong to one natural lexical class like the items classified as noun and verb in the language.

### A Morpho - syntactic Analysis

Morpho – syntactic criteria are those that put into consideration the morphology of words in a class and the syntactic behavior of such words. Radford (1999, p.38) says in respect of morpho - syntactic criteria thus:

...the bulk of evidence in support of postulating that words belong to categories is morpho-syntactic (i.e. morphological and/or syntactic) in nature. The relevant morphological evidence relates to the inflectional and derivational properties of words: inflectional properties relate to different forms of the same word (e.g. plural form of a noun like *cat* is formed by adding the plural inflection +s to form *cats*), while derivational properties relate to the processes by which a word can be used to form a different kind of word by addition of another morpheme (e.g. by adding the suffix +ness to the adjective *sad*, we can form the noun, *sadness*).

Radford is saying here that words of the same lexical class must have the same derivational process or that words derived by the same derivational process must belong to the same lexical class. In other words, a lexical class must be derivable and it must take part in derivation of members of another lexical class. In view of the above, when we examine the items (grammatical and lexical though), classified as adverbs in Yorùbá we would be able to determine what the status of the adverb is in the standard Yorùbá language. Though Yorùbá is not an inflectional language but it has derivational processes and morphemes like any other language. Nouns and verbs in Yorùbá have these and this is the reason why these two classes are productive and have innumerable number of items in the language.

Looking at the morphology of the class of words put together as adverbs, one would observe that unlike the categories of noun and verb, adverb cannot be derived through any morphological process in the Yorùbá language. The language operates mainly the morphological processes of affixation, reduplication and compounding. These are processes by which nouns are derived as in the examples below:

Prefixation. All Yorùbá vowels can be prefixed to verbs in the language to derive new nouns as in the examples in (7) below:

7. (a). dç 'hunt' : ö + dç → ödç 'hunter'  
 (b). so to bring fruit: è + so → èso 'fruit'  
 (c). ýe do ì + ýe → iyé 'deed'  
 (d). tò arrange à + tò → àtò 'arrangement'  
 (e). bí to bear ò + bí → òbí 'parent'  
 (f). bê to plead ê + bê → êbê 'plea/ petition' etc.

There are other prefixes which are not single vowels such as òÃ + VP, à + tí + VP, o + ní + N as in the examples in (8) below:

8. (a). òÃ + kôwé → òÃkôwé 'author'  
 (b). òÃ + tajà → òÃtajà 'a buyer'  
 (c). à + ti + jç → àtijç (ability to eat)  
 (d). à + ti + sùn → àtisùn (ability to sleep)  
 (e). o + ní + igi → onígi 'wood owner/seller'  
 (f). o + ní + iyú → oníyú 'yam seller/owner'

Compounding is another morphological process for deriving new nouns and verbs in Yorùbá. This is a process by which two free morphemes are brought together to derive a new word after certain phonological processes have taken place. When two nouns are involved, the output is a new noun as in the examples in (9) below:

9. (a). ewé + öbê → ewébê  
 leaf soup 'vegetable'  
 (b). aya + öba → ayaba  
 wife king → 'queen'  
 (c). ömö + odó → ömödó  
 child mortal → 'pestle'  
 (d). etí + ilé → etilé  
 ear house → 'near the house'  
 (e). etí + odò → etídò  
 ear river → 'river bank' etc

The outputs of the examples in (9) above are nouns. An uncountable number of nouns can be so derived in the Yorùbá language.

Compounding of verb +noun and verb +verb can be done to derive new verbs as in examples in (10) below:

**VB+NP**

10. (a) bó +ará → bora  
peel body 'to bleach'  
(b) dá ìmòrán → dàmòrán  
say counsel 'to counsel'  
(c) gbà + êsan → gbêsan  
take vengeance 'to revenge'  
(d) dá + àbá → dábàá  
make suggestion 'to make suggestion'  
(e) fě + òwō → fěwō  
blow hand 'to steal'  
(f) ké + igbe → kígbè/kégbè  
break noise 'to shout'  
(g) ká + apá → kápá  
fold arm 'to overcome'  
(h) kán + ojú → kánjú  
? eye 'to hurry'  
(i) dá + ɔ̄jō → dájō  
rule matter 'to judge a matter'

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**Verb + Verb**

- (a) bà+ jě → bàjě 'to spoil'  
(b) bá + sò → básò 'to talk to'  
(c) bù + kù → bùkù 'to underrate'  
(d) dá + rò → dárò 'to mourn'  
(e) fě + kù → fěkù 'to miss'  
(f) ò + mō → òmō 'to embrace'  
(g) gbà + gbō → gbàgbō 'to believe'  
(h) bē + wò → bēwò 'to visit'  
(i) bù + kún → bùkún 'to bless' etc.

This makes the class of noun and verb to be productive and so have an uncountable number of members. Thus the classes of noun and verb in Yorùbá have morphological processes and derivational morphemes peculiar to each of the classes. These two can be derived and they partake in the derivation of their members and members of each other.

When we look at the English language, the lexical classes have derivational morphemes and processes. Taking the class of adverb for example, the suffix, **-ly** is added to adjective to derive an adverb as in the examples in 12 below:

12. (a) kind + ly → kindly

- (b) quick + ly → quickly
- (c) accurate + ly → accurately
- (d) conscious + ly → consciously
- (e) entire + ly → entirely
- (f) rapid + ly → rapidly, etc.

This is not the case with the so-called class of adverb in standard Yorùbá. The items put together as a class of adverb (pre-verbal, post verbal / sentence final) have no morphological process or derivational morphemes common to them as in the class of noun, verb and even the English language examples in (12) above. Apart from this fact, many of the so-called pre-verbal adverbs are non-lexical items (basic or derived) but mere grammatical items with their meanings embedded in the sentence. Among such are: **yóó/óò, á/má a** (will, shall), **À** (progressive/ habitual action), **ti** (perfective / completed action), etc. Grammatical items are not supposed to be lumped together with lexical items as a lexical class, (Adékèyè 2015). We shall consider the syntactic evidence before we draw our conclusion.

### Syntactic analysis of Yorùbá adverbs

On the syntactic evidence for categorizing words into classes, Radford (1999, p.40) says:

The syntactic evidence for assigning words to categories essentially relates to the fact that categories of words have different distributions (i.e. occupy a different range of position within phrases or sentences).

Radford, by this, is saying that lexical items of the same class can be found in the same position in a phrase or sentence and can substitute one another as long as the semantics of the language permits. This means that words of a class cannot appear in the position where words of another class would appear in a phrase or sentence. In other words, the class of noun in a language has its position in a phrase or a sentence which cannot be occupied by a verb or any other class for that matter.

As an SVO language, there are positions designated for every lexical category in Yorùbá. Thematic positions are always occupied by noun items either as a subject or an object, for instance. In the present grammar of Yorùbá, items found in thematic positions are erroneously classified as adverbs in sentence final position but as noun in sentence initial position as found in Ödětókun (1998, p.49) as in the examples in 13 below:

13. (a) i. Mo sùn (ní) fönfön.  
I sleep deep 'I slept soundly'
- ii. Fönfön ni mo sùn.  
Soundly be I sleep 'I slept soundly'
- (b) i. Mojí À yéré (ní) wërèwèrè.  
(Personal name) be play solemnly 'Mojí is playing solemnly'
- ii. Wërèwèrè ni Mojí À sere.  
Solemnly FOCUS Mojí be play. 'In a solemn manner is Mojí playing' etc

It is movement rule that moves the nouns underlined in 11(ai) and (bi) into position of focus (sentence initial position) in 13 (aai) and (bii) as argued by Awóbùlúyì (1978). In the underlying



form, the words are found in object position, from where they can be moved to subject position when focused. This is possible because both subject and object positions are occupied by the class of noun items. Some examples are shown below:

- (14). (a). Olú yé iyè náà (ní) **kiákíá**.  
Olú do work haste  
'Olú did the work in a hurry'  
(b). **Kiákíá** ni olú yé iyè náà.  
'Hurriedly, Olú did the work'
- (15). (a) Jökë Â yéré rê (ní) **wërëwërë**.  
Jökë PRG do play quietly  
'Jökë is playing quietly'  
(b). **Wërëwërë** ni Jökë Â yéré rê.  
'Quietly, Jökë is playing'
- (16). (a) Eku jç awö (ní) **díédíé**.  
Rat eat leather little by little.  
'A rat eats up the leather gradually'  
(b) **Díédíé** ni eku jç awö.  
Little by little, rat eat leather.  
'Gradually, a rat eats the leather'
- (17). (a) À á fójú (ní) **pátápátá**.  
We become blind completely.  
'We stand firm over our decision'  
(b). **Pátápátá** ni à á fójú.  
Completely be we become blind  
'We are to stand firm over our decision'
- (18). (a) Omi náà tutu **nini**.  
Water SPEC cold really  
'The water is very cold'  
(b). **Nini** ni omi náà tutu.  
Real BE SPEC cold  
'The water is really cold'

The highlighted words are in argument position to the verb ni 'BE' in each of (b) example like any other noun which is a subject position and occur as object of the verb preceding each of them in each of (a) examples. It is only nouns that have these syntactic behaviours. A verb cannot occupy these two positions for instance except it has been nominalized and then it is no longer a verb.

The verb also has its own position in any grammatical sentence which cannot be shared by a non-verbal element or item. This is why we can have such sentence as:

- (19). (a). Adé fö ilê.  
Ade wash floor

- (b). 'Adé washed the floor'  
Ìyá gbá iyàrá.  
Mother sweep room  
'mother swept the room'
- (c). Jökë lò òjà.  
Jökë go market.  
'Jökë went to the market'
- (d). Öba kõ ààfin.  
King build palace  
'The king built a palace'

The underlined words occupy the same slot in the examples in (19) above because they are all verbs. Noun items cannot be found in this position. The result would have been nonsensical. This is why we are free to classify **fô** 'wash', **gbá** 'sweep', **lò** 'go' and **kõ** 'build' as verbs in the language. In the same vein, we can classify **Adé**, **Jökë** (personal names), **ìyá** 'mother', **öba** 'king', **ilé** 'house', **iyàrá** 'room', **òjà** 'market' and **ààfin** 'palace' as noun items in the language. The set of words we classify as noun cannot occupy the position of the verbs and vice-versa. There is no such syntactic position which can be identified for the so-called class of adverb in standard Yorùbá. This is why grammarians have members of the so-called class in different positions (pre-verbal, post-verbal and sentence-final) which are used to sub-classify it. This is so because the language does not have adverb as a lexical class.

### Conclusion

Employing morpho-syntactic analysis, we conclude that the class of adverbs is not attested as a lexical class in standard Yorùbá. The function performed by the class of adverbs in a language like English are performed by grammatical items, bound verbs, phrases and clauses in standard Yorùbá. These are rightly called modifiers by Awóbùlúyì 1978. Modifier is a functional label and not a lexical class.

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