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REVIEW ARTICLE

FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS AND HIGH TONE SYLLABLE Ó IN ÈKÌTÌ DIALECT OF YORUBA:
A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The issues in focus constructions in Yoruba language have generated lots of arguments among Yoruba scholars. Some of these scholars are of the opinion that focus constructions are noun phrases. The other scholars claim that focus constructions are derived sentences which express a complete statement. Another area of debate among Yoruba scholars is the numbers of the focus marker in the dialects of Yoruba, especially, Èkìtì dialect, and that whether the anaphoric ó is a subject resumptive pronoun or preverb. In this paper, we examine and contribute to the various arguments on these two topics.

INTRODUCTION

Many Yoruba Scholars such as; Awobuluyi (1978, 1987, 1988 and 1992), Ajiboye (2006). Akintoye (2006), Awoyale (1985), Bamgbose (1990), Owolabi (1981a, 1981b and 1983) and Yusuf (1989, 1990), have worked on focus Constructions in Yoruba Language. Yusuf (1989: 57) defines focus construction as; ‘A syntactic device whereby an NP in a sentence is made prominent by coding it sentence initially.’ What Yusuf (ibid.) is saying is that a lexical item is focused by moving such an item to the initial position of the focus sentence. Lexical items, such as nouns, verbs and adverbs, undergo focusing by moving them to the initial position of the focus constructions in Yoruba language.

The status of focus Constructions in Yoruba has generated a lot of arguments among Yoruba scholars. Awobuluyi (1978:93-113 and 1987: 48-60) is of the opinion that focus Constructions are NPs. He claims that the particle **ni** performs the same function like **ti**, and that other structures that follow particle **ni** are qualifiers of nouns. Hence, the structures of focus constructions and relative clause constructions are identical. He also claims that focus constructions are complements of the verb **ṣe** as he cited in example below

1 Kii ṣe Olú ni ó ra iṣu
NEG do Olú FOC RSP buy yam
It was not Olu that bought yam

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Awoyale (1985) supports Awobuluyi’s (1978: 93-113) claim that focus constructions are noun phrases. He is also of the opinion that focus constructions are qualifiers of nouns. Scholars like Bamgbose (1990), Owolabi (1981a, 1981b, 1983) and Yusuf (1989, 1990) have a contrary opinion. They claim that focus constructions are derived sentences which express a complete statement. Owolabi (1981b: 14-68) and Bamgbose (1990: 157-169) argue that though the structures of focus constructions and relative clause are identical, they are not the same thing. Because focus constructions cannot be expanded unlike the relative clause which requires predicate before it can be meaningful as exemplified below;

2a. Focus Construction

*Qmọ ni mo bi ti lo sí Èkó
Child FOC 1sg bear PERF go PREP Lagos
It was a child that I gave birth to has gone to Lagos

b. Relative Clause

Qmọ ti mo bí ti lo sí Èkó
Child REL 1sg bear PERF go Lagos
The child that I gave birth to has gone to Lagos.

Example 2(a) above is deviant because the focus construction **Qmọ ni mo bi** ‘it was a child that I gave birth to’ takes the predicate **ti lo sí Èkó** ‘has gone to Lagos’. We shall not delve much on the arguments of these scholars because they are not the focus of this paper. Our concern in this paper is to examine the view of Yoruba scholars, especially Olumiya (2008: 41-

51), about the focus markers in Èkìtì dialect. For instance, Olumuyiwa (ibid.) is of the opinion that focus marker has two forms; **ni** and **ko/kọ** which are subject to vowel harmony principle.

In this paper, we shall argue that the focus markers in Èkìtì dialect have three forms. They are **ni**, **li** and **ki**. We shall also argue that the anaphoric pronoun *o* is a merger of a preverb and a resumptive pronoun. We shall rely on the knowledge of the authors for our data collection being the indigenes of Èkìtì and they speak the dialect fluently. The sub-dialects of Èkìtì are grouped into three in this paper based on the manifestation of the focus markers in these sub-dialects as shown below.

3a. li, ni- Adó, Ìkéré, Òdé, Ìsẹ̀, Ìdó and Iṣàṅ

b. ni/li- Iyè, Gógo, Osùu-ún, Ọ̀tùn and Ọ̀sàn

c. ki- Òmùò, Ìpaọ̀, Òkè-Àkò, Ìrèlè and Iyemèrò

One dialect shall be selected from each group to represent other sub-dialects subsumed under the groups. The reason is that the dialects under each group are many and it is not possible to touch all of them in a paper like this. Apart from that, in spite of the variations in Èkìtì dialects, the dialects are mutually intelligible. We believe that the selected dialects, such as **Adó**, **Òmùò** and **Iyè**, will be true representatives of other dialects. This work shall be based totally on descriptive approach. This will enable us to describe our data very clearly.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section is the introductory part. We consider **ni/li** as allomorphs in the second section. This is very necessary so as to know the reason why group 'a' goes for **li** and group 'b' goes for **ni**. Section three shall consist of the issue in the subject resumptive pronoun **ó**.

Focus markers in èkìtì dialect of yoruba

Focus marker takes three forms in Èkìtì dialects as already noted in our introduction. They are **ni**, **li** and **ki**. Like the standard Yoruba, **ni** and **li** are allomorphs in the sub-dialects of Èkìtì, such as **Iyè**, **Gógo**, **Osùu-ún**, **Ọ̀tùn** and **Ọ̀sàn**. That is, they occur in complementary distribution as shown below.

4. Iyè dialect

a. Mí kọ ulé

1sg build house

I built a house

b. Ulé **ni** mi kọ

House FOC 1sg build

It was a house that I built

c. Emi lẹ kọ ulé

1sg FOC RSP build house

I was the one that built a house

5 Ulé luyì ọmọ

House FOC honour child

The house is the honour of a child

The focus marker **ni** is used when the word that comes after it starts with a consonant sound as shown in example 4(b) above or /i/ as manifested in Yoruba language and the other dialects of Yoruba that are close to Yoruba language. The particle /ni/ changes to **li** when it co-occurs with oral vowels /e/ and /u/ as demonstrated in examples 4(c) and 5 above. Our explanation above is in line with **Owolabi (1989:95)** who is of the opinion that /n/ and /l/ are allophone. That is, where /n/ occurs, /l/ cannot occur there.

Our observation is that the focus markers **ni** and **li** are selected independently as morphs in the dialects under group 'a', such as **Adó**, **Ìkéré**, **Òdé**, **Ìsẹ̀**, **Ìdó** and **Iṣàṅ**. The reason is that **li** is employed to focus only lexical items and it always co-occurs with all vowels and consonants as exemplified below.

6. Ado dialect

a. Olú bí ọmọ

Olú bear child

Olu gave birth to a child

Yoruba I Language

i. ii. iii.

b. Olú **li** bí ọmọ → Olú ni ó bí ọmọ → Olú li ó bí ọmọ

Olú FOC bear child Olu FOC RSP bear child Olu FOC bear child

It was Olú that born a child

c. Ọmọ **li** Olú bí

Child FOC Olú bear

It was a child that Olú born

d. Bìbí **li** Olú bí ọmọ

Bearing FOC Olú bear child

Giving birth was what Olú gave to a child

It is evident in the examples above that the focus marker **li** co-occurs with all the words; **bi** 'bear', **ọmọ** 'child' and **Olú**, that come after it without any trace of changing form. In example 6 (bii) above, **ó** is present but got deleted in 6(biii) and its survived tone assimilates into the adjacent vowel. These examples are not peculiar only to Èkìtì dialect, **li** also manifests in **Ègbá**, a dialect of North West Yoruba. It co-occurs with all vowels and consonants in afore-mentioned regional dialect as show below.

7. Abeokuta dialect

Èni bá rọjú forítì í, á sinmi lí ìgbèhìn.

Bá èmi nìkàn kọ m̀bá wọ̀n dá 'sà à-ńso-yìgì,

Bẹ̀ẹ̀ rẹ̀é ǹwọ̀n ǹṣe lí iyà 'ilú Ọ̀ba...

Whosoever endures it, will rest at last

I was not the only person that made an attempt to get married

That is what they do abroad... (cf Lijadu and Adeboye 1974:9)

In **Adó**, **Ìkéré**, **Òdé**, **Ìsẹ̀**, **Ìdó** and **Iṣàṅ** dialects, **ni** is employed to focus declarative sentences and it appears at the sentence final position as demonstrated below.

9 Ado dialect

a. Olú bí ọmọ

Olú born child

Olu gave birth to a child

- b. Olú bí ọmọ **ni**
Olu bear child FOC
The fact is that Olu gave birth to a child

- 10a. Şólá í jẹun
Şólá PROG eat
Şola is eating

- b. Şólá í jẹun **ni**
Şólá PROG eat FOC
The fact is that Şola is eating

If we compare examples 9(b) and 10(b) above with examples 6 (b-d), it is evident that **li** and **ni** occur in different environment. Hence, they are not allomorphs in **Adó, Ìkéré, Òdé, Ìsẹ, Ìdó and Ìşàn** dialects, but different morphs, (Crystal 2008:312). Our claim above contradicts Olumuyiwa (2008:41) who is of the opinion that focus marker in sub-dialects of Èkìtì, such as **Adó** and **Ìkéré** takes **ni** form. He says;

Gbogbo àwọn ẹ̀ka-èdè Èkìtì tí a mẹnù bà lókè
ni ó ẹ̀ àmúlò **ni** bí atókà. Wọn fi ẹ̀yí jọ Yorùbá àjùmòlò.

All the sub-dialects of Èkìtì mentioned above use the particle **ni** as their focus marker. They resemble the standard Yoruba Language with this. According to him, the particles **ni** and **li** are allomorphs in Èkìtì dialect. Our explanation above has shown that this is partially true if we consider the sub-dialects like **Iyè, Gógo, Osùu-ún, Ọ̀n and Ọ̀sàn**. But going by our explanation above, **ni** and **li** do not manifest as allomorphs in sub-dialects of Èkìtì like **Adó, Ìkéré, Òdé, Ìsẹ, Ìdó and Ìşàn**.

In the sub-dialects like **Òmùò**, and **Èka-Márùn-ún** which consists of **Ìpaọ, Òkè-Àkò, Ìrèlè, Ìtápáji and Iyemèrò**, the particle **ki** is employed as a focus marker to focus both lexical items and declarative sentences as exemplified below.

11 Òmùò dialect

Focusing of Lexical Items

- a. Olú gbé ọmọ
Olú carry child
Olú carried a child

- b. Ọmọ **ki** Olú gbé
Child FOC Olu carry
It was a child that Olú carried

- i. ii.
c. Olú **ki** ó gbé ọmọ- Olú kó gbé ọmọ
Olu FOC RSP carry child
It was Olú that carried a child

- d. Gbígbé **ki** Olú gbé ọmọ
Carrying FOC Olú carry child
It was carrying that Olu carried the child

12. Focusing of Declarative Sentences

- a. Olú gbé ọmọ
Olú carry child

Olú carried a child

- b. Olú gbé' ọmọ **ki**
Olú carry child FOC
The fact is that Olú carried a child

- 13a. Olú jẹ uşu
Olú eat yam
Olu ate yam

- b. Olú jẹ uşu **ki**
Olú eat yam FOC
The fact is that Olú ate yam

Examples 11(b-d) are different from examples 12(b) and 13(b) in the sense that the focus marker **ki** occurs at the medial position in 11(b-d) while it occurs sentence finally in 12(b) and 13(b).

3. Issues in High Tone Syllable in Yoruba Language

There a lot of arguments on the status of high tone syllable **ó** in Yoruba language and the dialects of Yoruba. **Awobuluyi (1992:32)** is of the opinion that the high tone syllable **ó** represents a combination of pronoun and preverb. He says that **ó** represents a pronoun if the meaning of 3sg pronoun is clearly present. But if the meaning is not clearly present, one is dealing with High tone syllable. He says thus; ..., within the language as a whole, some instances of **ó** will represent a combination of the pronoun and the HTS, while other instances of it represent the HTS alone. Though formally alike, those sets of instances are, in fact, semantically distinct. In particular, any given occurrence of **ó** represents the combination of the pronoun and the HTS if and if the meaning of the 3sg pronoun is clearly present. When the meaning of that pronoun is not clearly present, one is dealing with the HTS alone.

What Awobuluyi is saying is that **o** functions as a 3sg a and 3sg pronoun if it occupies a subject position like other pronouns but as a HTS when it occurs in between the subject and the verb as he rightly cites in the examples below which are extracted from **Òndó** dialect.

- 14a. Emi **ó** yún
1sg HTS go
I went

- b. Àghan **ó** yún
2sg HTS go
You went

Awobuluyi (2006: 1-14) bluntly argues that **ó** is not a pronoun but a preverb. He gives the reasons why he claims that **ó** is not a 3sg pronoun. Some of the reasons he puts up are; **Ó** does not agree with its antecedent in number in the constructions as stated below.

- 15a. Àwa ni **ó** - lọ
1PI FOC HTS go
We were the one that went

- b. Àwọn ni **ó** - lọ
3PI FOC HTS go

They were the one that went

c. Òjò àtí Olú ní ó - lẹ
 Òjò and Olú HTS go
 Ojo and Olu were the one that went

Awobuluyi (ibid.) argues that if ó is a pronoun here, it will have agreed with its antecedents in number. He also claims that ó cannot co-occur with a negative marker kò as in

16* Ó kò lẹ
 HTS NEG go
 HE did not go

Awobuluyi (ibid.) concludes that ó is not a resumptive pronoun, hence, when a subject NP is moved its position is always empty in the construction as shown in examples 15(a-c) above. Many scholars like Adesuyan (2006), Abiodun (2009) and Olumuyiwa (2008) support Awobuluyi's (ibid.) claim that ó is not a pronoun. Adesuyan (2006: 1-12) and Olumuyiwa (2008:41-51) independently claim that ó is a preverb, and it occurs in the same position where other preverbs like yóò, máa and á occur. Abiodun (2009: 1-5) views ó with a phonological approach. According to him, ó behaves differently from other pronouns in that if ó co-occurs with the interrogative markers, deletion process is the case instead of assimilation process that takes place in other pronouns as he cited below.

17a Se o lo? So lo?
 Qm HTS go Did he go?
 b. Nje o de? Njo de?
 Qm HTS come Did he return?

18a Sè o lẹ?←Só o lẹ?
 QM 2sg go Did you go?

b. Ìnjé a wá?← Ìnjá a wá?
 QM 1pl come Did we come

In examples 17 (a and b) above, ó contracts with the question markers by deletion process. But in 18 (a and b) above, the second and first person pronouns assimilate into the vowels that end the question markers. Scholars such as Oladeji (2003), Adesola (2005: 1-125) and Akanbi (2004: 98-117) have contrary opinions. Akanbi (ibid.) and Oladeji (2003) view ó as a pronoun while Adesola (ibid.) sees it as an expletive pronoun. Adesola (ibid.) and Akanbi (ibid.) share the same view. They claim that ó is employed to satisfy Extended Projection Principle requirement, (EPP) henceforth. According to them, Yoruba language does not permit a sentence without a subject, hence, such a sentence will be ungrammatical and it will violate EPP condition. If we accept Awobuluyi's (2006:1-14) claim that the position of a move subject NP is always empty in a complex construction, it shows that there is a gap unfilled in the complex construction in Yoruba language. Adesola (2005:86) says:...the reason why Yoruba uses a default pronoun ó in the subject Position is because a null operator cannot satisfy the EPP requirement. So the clitic ó is not truly a resumptive pronoun. This suggests that the occurrence of the subject expletive pronoun in the language is

another consequence of the type of movement that is used to derive wh-question and focus constructions in the language, namely, null operator movement.

Akanbi (2004: 111-113) says that ó can receive a nominative case and an agentive theta role like other NPs in a subject position. If one considers the body of arguments of Awobuluyi (1992, 2006) as regard to ó as a preverb and the arguments of Adesola (2005) and Akanbi (2004) that ó is either pronoun or expletive pronoun, it may be difficult not to agree with the positions of the afore-mentioned scholars. In this paper, we shall take a different position that will accommodate the positions of these scholars, that is, ó is a merger of a preverb and a resumptive pronoun.

A Look at ó in Adé ó gbé èù 'Adé carried a load' extracted from Òndó dialect, reveals that nothing is moved, yet ó is present. Awobuluyi's (1992) argument that ó is a preverb is sustained. We equally agree that based on EPP requirement, the position that the derived sentence must have a head is also upheld. However, we want to assume that the subject resumptive pronoun ó is used to fill the extraction site where the subject NP is moved as shown below.

19 Òndó dialect

- a. Adé ó gbé èù
 Ade HTS carry load
 Ade carried a load
- b. *Adé ó ó gbé èù í
 Ade RSP HTS carry load FOC
 Ade was the one that carried a load

In example 19(b) above, ó presents as a subject resumptive pronoun and as a preverb. Because ó as a resumptive pronoun occupies the position where NP is moved, and ó as a preverb occurs before the verb. But the construction is ungrammatical. Yoruba language does not permit two identical vowels to occur within the same construction. When two identical vowels are adjacent to each other, two things may happen; one of the vowels may be deleted on one hand, and on the other hand, the two identical vowels may be merged such that the product will possess the preverb and resumptive features as in the case of ó. If that is the case, ó may not agree in number with its antecedent. The interpretation whether ó functions as a preverb or as a subject resumptive pronoun in a construction now depends on the intuitive knowledge of the native speaker.

Another evidence to show that ó is a merger of both preverb and subject resumptive pronoun is manifested in Òmùò dialect of Yoruba where ò functions as both negator and perfective marker. In this regard, one can assume that the negative marker is ò as suggested in Awobuluyi (2008) as illustrated below.

20 Òmùò dialect

- i. ii. iii.
- a. Omọ é tí ò lẹ→ omọ ó tí ò lẹ → omọ tí lẹ (omọ kò tí lẹ)
 Child NEG PERF NEG go

The child has not gone

- i. ii. iii.
 b. Unjijẹ é tí ì tìn → unjijẹ é tí ò tìn → unjijẹ tí tìn (ohunjẹ kò tì tìn)
 Food NEG PERF NEG finish
 The food has not finished

In the examples 20(aii) and (bii) above, the segments of the negative markers **é** and **ì** are deleted while their tones are spared, that is the high tone on **é** and low tone on **ì**. The survived tones move to the adjacent syllables as exemplified in 20(aiii) and (biii). For instance, the survived high tone of **e** moves to the final vowels of the NPs **omọ** 'child' and **unjijẹ** 'food' and the survived low tone of **i** moves to the final vowel of the perfective marker **tì**. Following this explanation, we can postulate that the subject resumptive pronoun cannot agree in number with its antecedent as earlier noted. **Ó** has a dual role of preverbal element and as well as a subject resumptive pronoun. When there is no actual movement of an NP in an acceptable grammatical construction, it plays the role of a preverbal element. But if there is a visible and a compulsory movement of an NP which must definitely have an element to stand in the place of the extraction site, then a subject resumptive pronoun is the element that stands in such position.

Another point we shall address in this paper is that **ó** in between the subject and the verb is not peculiar to **Ondó**, **Ìkálẹ̀** and **Ìdànrẹ̀**, the dialects of South East Yoruba. At times **ó** is always in contract with the adjacent vowel in the above mentioned dialects as shown below.

21 Ondó dialect

- i. ii.
 a. Olú **ó** lọ → Oló lọ
 Olu HTS go Olu went
- i. ii.
 b. Èmi **ó** yún → Èmó yún
 1sg HTS go I went

In case of Èkìtì dialect, the tone of the HTS is always preserved while the vowel is deleted. The preceding vowel sound will co-occur with the survived tone. Hence, there is a tonal change whereby the inherent tone of a lexical item changes by assimilating into the survived tone of the deleted /o/. For instance, when a subject NP with an either inherent low tone or mid tone co-occurs with a verb, having deleted the vowel /o/, such an inherent low tone or mid tone will change to a high tone (Owolabi 1989: 121-124) as exemplified below.

22 Ado dialect

- i. ii. iii.
 a. Omọ **ó** lọ sí ulé → omọ ó lọ sí ulé → Omọ lọ sí ulé
 Child HTS go PREP house the child went home
- i. ii. iii.
 b. Òjò **ó** rọ lánòò → Òjò ó rọ lánòò → Òjọ rọ lánòò
 Rain HTS fall yesterday It rained yesterday

In example 22 (ai) above, the NP **omọ** 'child' has its inherent mid tone changed to a high tone as shown in 22(aiii), and the NP **òjò** 'rain' has its inherent low tone changed to high tone as indicated in 22(biii). As earlier mentioned, **Omùò** and some other sub-dialects of Èkìtì like **Ìpaò** **Ìrẹ̀le** and **Iyemẹ̀rọ̀** employ **ki** as a focus marker. When the focus marker **ki** co-occurs with the subject resumptive pronoun **ó**, there is always a deletion such that the vowel /i/ of the focus marker is deleted and there will be a contraction between the focus marker and the subject resumptive pronoun as demonstrated below.

23 Omùò dialect

- i. ii.
 a. Èi ẹ̀ se Olú **ki ó** ri → èi ẹ̀ se Olú **kó** ri
 NEG do Olu FOC RSP see NEG do Olu FOC /RSP see
 It was not Olu that saw it
- i. ii.
 b. Èi ẹ̀ se iye mi **ki ó** jẹ̀ → èi ẹ̀ se iye mi **kó** jẹ̀
 NEG do mother 1sg FOC RSP eat NEG do mother 1sg FOC/RSP eat
 It was not my mother that ate it

The above examples obey vowel harmony principle. For instance, the subject resumptive pronoun takes **ó** form in 23(aii) because the verb that comes after it ends with [-ATR] vowel. But the subject resumptive pronoun takes **ó** form in 23(bii) because the verb that comes after it ends with [+ATR] vowel. The point we are dragging here is that **kó** and **kó** are not the focus markers as Olumuyiwa (ibid.) claims rather, **ki** which contracts with the subject resumptive pronoun at the surface level.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the focus markers and the high tone syllable in Ekiti dialect of Yoruba. Our observation is that focus marker has three forms ni, li and ki in this dialect. The focus marker li functions as a morph in some sub-dialects of Ekiti whereas, it is an allomorph in other sub-dialects as already noted in the body of the paper. Apart from that, the high tone syllable **ó** plays a dual role in the dialect. It functions as a preverb when there no trace of movement in a simple construction, but as a subject resumptive pronoun at the extraction site when there is a movement of a subject NP in a complex construction.

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