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REVIEW ARTICLE

GRAMMATICAL IMPLICATION OF TONE ON YORÙBÁ IDIOPHONE

\*Timothy Adeyemi Akanbi

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

It is an acceptable fact that Yorùbá include in their vocabulary, expressive words, marked off from the rest of the vocabulary by similar phono-syntactic characteristics, which they call idiophones. This fact has long been recognized by the Yorùbá scholars at one time or the other, and have written extensively on it. Of particular interest to this paper is that of Newman (1968) who asserts that idiophones have some syntactic functions. Samarin (1967) also argues that idiophones should be identified primarily on the basis of syntactic behaviour rather than phono-semantic criterion. While some scholars see idiophones as adverbs (Bamgbose 1966, 1972, 1990; Awobuluyi 1975, 1978), others see them as nouns (Rowland 1970). Some even advocate a separate category for idiophones (Awoyale, 1981). However, our focus in this paper will go along the line of Newman (1968). In this paper, therefore, we examine the grammatical implication of tone on idiophones, the selectional restriction and sub-categorization restriction. The paper is discussed under four sections. While section one is purely introductory, section two discusses tone implication on idiophones. Section three looks at the selectional and sub-categorization restrictions; section four gives the summary.

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INTRODUCTION

Idiophone has been an issue that linguists in African languages have paid attention for a long time. Many of these linguists have, at one time or the other, had something to write on this phenomenon common to many of the languages of Africa. Linguists who have written on the subject of idiophone include Newman (1968), Samarin (1965), Rowlands (1970), Awoyale (1974, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1989), Bamgbose, (1990). Others include Doke (1935), and Cole (1955). Idiophone is a kind of communicative device in the Yorùbá language<sup>1</sup> in which particular words are used to describe what is referred to in such a way that the hearer/listener will clearly picture in his/her mind what is being spoken about. According to Bamgbose (1990), idiophones fall into different types, viz:

(i) Those that are known through the way they sound, e.g. gbi, fòò, kìtikìtì<sup>2</sup>.

(ii) Those whose features are described through the way they sound, e.g. gòlòtò, gèlètè, rogodo, játijàti, pálapála.

(iii) Those that cannot be known through the way they sound, e.g. sinsin, geere, fònfòn, šáká.

In terms of syllable, idiophones can be of one or more syllables.

Grammatical implication of tone on idiophones

In this section, we will discuss the selectional restriction of verbs as it relates to tone implication in the context of idiophonic words. We will argue that it is the idiophone that chooses the type of verb it co-occurs with based on the tone of such idiophonic word.

The choice of verb by idiophonic words

The tone carried by idiophone determines the type of verb that it co-occurs with. a difference in tone without a corresponding change of verb will either render the structure deviant or ungrammatical. We give example to exemplify this.

1(a) Ó pón fòò  
NP ripened very bright  
It is bright red

(b) Ó mọ foo

\*Corresponding author: Timothy Adeyemi AKANBI,  
Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Ekiti State  
University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

<sup>1</sup> All the examples in this paper are drawn from the Standard Yorùbá. We recognize that there many be variations in the way idiophones are pronounced in other dialects of Yorùbá language; issues like this is not the concern of this paper

<sup>2</sup> Idiophones are not easily translatable. Therefore, in some cases, we will leave them as they are in the English version of our data. We shall nonetheless give the meaning in English, where possible.

NP clear/neat empty It became empty	used in (a) for the (b) counterpart of the sentences make the whole structure ungrammatical.
2(a) <i>Ó n jù bàlà</i> NP PROG. move haphazardly S/he/it is moving unsteadily	8(a) <i>Ó pón fòdò</i> NP ripened very bright he/she is bright red
(b) <i>Ó n ru bala</i> NP PROG. form vigorously It is foaming vigorously	(b)* <i>Ó pón foo</i> NP clear/neat empty it became empty
3(a) <i>Ó n múra gínní</i> NP PROG. prepare slowly S/he is dressing slowly	9(a) <i>Ó n jù bàlà</i> NP PROG. move haphazardly S/he/it is moving unsteadily
(b) <i>Ó n rin gínnì</i> NP PROG. walk sluggishly S/he is walking sluggishly	(b)* <i>Ó n jù bala</i> NP PROG form vigorously It is foaming vigorously
4(a) <i>Ó dá gbáú</i> NP break suddenly It broke suddenly	10(a) <i>Ó n múra gínní</i> NP PROG. prepare slowly S/he is dressing slowly
(b) <i>Ó dún gbàù</i> NP sound noisily It sounds in a noisy manner	(b)* <i>Ó n múra gínnì</i> NP PROG. walk sluggishly S/he is walking sluggishly
5(a) <i>O dùn rìndinrìndìn</i> NP sweet badly It sweets in a bad manner	11(a) <i>Ó dá gbáú</i> NP break suddenly It broke suddenly
(b) <i>Ó rí rìndinrìndìn</i> NP look small They look very small	(b)! <i>Ó dá gbàù</i> NP sound noisily It sounds in a noisy manner
6(a) <i>Ó ta wàì</i> NP shake fearfully S/he shook fearfully	12(a) <i>O dùn rìndinrìndìn</i> NP sweet badly It sweets in a bad manner
(b) <i>Ó dá wáí</i> NP stop abruptly It (i.e. rain) stopped abruptly	(b)* <i>Ó dùn rìndinrìndìn</i> NP look small It looks very small
7(a) <i>Ó n fọn winniwinni</i> NP PROG drizzle tinny It drizzles in a tinny manner	13(a) <i>Ó ta wàì</i> NP shake fearfully S/he shook fearfully
(b) <i>Ó n rin winniwinni</i> NP PROG walk stealthily S/he/it is walking stealthily	(b)* <i>Ó ta wáí</i> NP stop abruptly It (i.e. rain) stopped abruptly

As can be observed from the data in (1-7), the verb used in each of the pairs of the sentences is different. The change of the verb is as a result of the change of tone on the idiophonic words used. It should also be observed that the idiophonic word in each pair of the sentences maintain its segmental phonemes. One can therefore conclude that it is the idiophone in each of its different occurrences that selects the verb it co-occurs with. Any attempt to retain the verb used in the (a) sentences automatically renders the construction ungrammatical. In the data below, the retention of the verbs

14(a) *Ó n fọn winniwinni*  
NP PROG drizzle tinny  
It drizzles in a tinny manner  
  
(b)\* *Ó n fọn winniwinni*  
NP PROG walk stealthily  
S/he/it is walking stealthily

Any native speaker/hearer of Yorùbá language will agree that the (b) sentences in data (8-14) above are either deviant or

ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality of the (b) sentences is simply due to the fact that the verbs used in the (a) sentences are retained for the use of the (b) counterpart; whereas, the change of tone ought to lead to the selection of the appropriate verb.

### Restriction on the choice of verb

There are some idiophonic words of which the verb that co-occurs with sentence (a) of the pair of sentences can also co-occur with their (b) counterparts. That is the verb used for the (a) sentences can also go for the (b) sentences, but not vice versa. This is saying that the verb used for the (b) sentences cannot go with the idiophone in the (a) sentences. Consider the following data.

15(a)Olú ké (igbe) tòò  
NP shout loud  
Olú shouted painfully  
(b)Olú kọ/ké táá  
NP cry seriously  
Olú cried seriously

16(a)Ade n ta pòn-ùn  
NP PROG. bounce healthily  
Ade is bouncing in a healthy manner

(b)Ó n ràn/ta bòn-ùn  
NP PROG. expand big  
It is expanding rapidly

17(a)Ó kan gbínrín  
NP sour bad  
It sours badly/It has become sour

(b)Ó ta/kan bóbó  
NP taste bad  
It tasted badly/It has become bad

18(a)Òjọ n sẹ́jú pàkò  
NP PROG. wink eye shame  
S/he is winking the eyes unconcerned

(b)Òjọ n wò/sẹ́jú pàkó  
NP look shame  
S/he is looking shamefully

As seen from the examples, it can be observed that the verb in the (a) sentences can also go for the (b) sentences. This is to say that there is no restriction in the use of the verb selected in (a) for both sentences. The idiophonic words in both the sentences can select the same verb to co-occur with. But this cannot be done for the verbs in the (b) sentences. The verbs cannot co-occur with the idiophones in the (a) sentences. Any attempt to exchange the verbs in the structures in (a) for those in (b) will render the sentences ungrammatical. This ungrammaticality is illustrated in the examples in (19-22) below.

19(a)Olú ké (igbe) tòò  
NP shout loud

Olú shouted painfully  
(b)Olú kọ/ké táá  
NP cry seriously  
Olú cried seriously  
(c)\*Olú kọ tòò  
S/he cry seriously  
S/he cried seriously

20(a)Ade n ta pòn-ùn  
NP PROG. bounce healthily  
Ade is bouncing in a healthy manner

(b)Adé n ràn/ta bòn-ùn  
NP PROG. expand big  
It is expanding rapidly

(c)\*Adé n ràn pòn-ùn  
NP PROG. expand rapidly  
It is expanding rapidly

21(a)Ó kan gbínrín  
NP sour bad  
It sours badly/It has become sour

(b)Ó ta/kan bóbó  
NP taste bad  
It tasted badly/It has become bad

(c)\*Ó ta gbínrín  
NP sour bad  
It tasted badly

22(a)Òjọ n sẹ́jú pàkò  
NP PROG. wink eye unconcern  
S/he is winking the eyes unconcerned

(b)Òjọ n wò/sẹ́jú pàkó  
NP look shame  
S/he is looking shamefully

(c)!Òjọ n wò pàkò  
NP PROG. look unconcern  
S/he is looking unconcerned

It is evident from the 'c' sentences that any attempt to use the verbs in the 'b' sentences for the 'a' sentences results in ungrammaticality. This shows that, even though the idiophones in the penultimate data are semantically almost the same, there is a restriction as to which verbs can co-occur with them.

### Semantic implication on the reduplication of idiophones

One of the ways to derive new words is through the process of reduplication. Awoyale (1989:16) defines reduplication as "a morphological process whereby a copy of a morpheme (free or bound) in either slightly altered or identical form is added to the stem in a syntagmatic relationship to produce a new word". The new word so formed may have a different meaning or it may just be in form of emphasis or reiteration. The examples presented below elucidate this our notion on this.

Reduplication can be partial or total. When a particular idiomphone is reduplicated, and the tones on each part remain the same, it always carries a meaning different from when the tone on either of the reduplicated form changes. The data below show this.

23(a) Ó rí gbàgìdì  
NP be 'gbàgìdì'  
It is big

(b) Ó<sup>3</sup> rí gbàgìdìgbàgìdì  
NP (plu) be 'gbàgìdìgbàgìdì'  
They are big

24(a) Ó rí pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀  
NP be flat  
It is flat

(b) Ó rí pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀  
NP (plu) be flat  
They are flat

25(a) Ó rí kòbìtì  
NP be huge  
It is huge

(b) Ó rí kòbìtìkòbìtì  
NP be huge  
They are big

26(a) Ó rí roboto  
NP (plu.) be spherical  
They are spherical

(b) Ó rí robotoroboto  
NP (pl) be spherical  
They are spherical

27(a) Ó rí bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀  
NP be fat  
S/he/itis fat

(b) Ó rí bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀  
NP (Pl.) be fat  
They are fat

To a native speaker/hearer of Yorùbá language, his/her understanding of the 'b' sentences in the examples (23 - 27) is that what is being referred to is certainly more than one; whereas, the 'a' sentences will be understood to mean that only one entity is being referred to. However, it needs to be pointed out that the assertion just made holds true only when the tone remains the same in all the syllables of the reduplicated<sup>4</sup> form.

<sup>3</sup> This pronoun is always very unpredictable. The unpredictability of this pronoun has been a subject of unending controversy among the Yorùbá scholars; see Awobuluyi (2001, 2006), Akanbi (2004), Oḷadeji (2004), Abiodun (2007) etc.

<sup>4</sup> There are some idiomphones that look like reduplication, e.g. jàtìjàtì 'unkempt', réderéde 'wandering', pálapála 'of abnormal behaviour' etc. The meaning of the seeming reduplication do not change because they are actually not reduplicated form since we cannot say \*òmo jàtì', or \*òbinrin réde'. For more on this type of reduplication, see Abiodun (1997).

If the tone on any of the two reduplicated part changes, then the whole reduplicated form can only refer to one and only one entity. However, there will still be a meaning change through intensity of the reduplicated form. Even though the meaning may just be in form of emphasis, it still cannot be in the form of the earlier meaning. What all this goes to show is that tone has a significant grammatical impact on Yorùbá idiomphones. We repeat the data in (23 - 27) above but with a change of tone on one part of the two reduplicated morphemes.

28(a) Ó rí gbàgbàdì  
NP be big  
It is unusually big

(b) Ó rí gbàgìdìgbàgìdì  
NP be big  
They are unusually big

29(a) Ó rí pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀  
NP be flat  
It is flat

(b) Ó rí pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀bẹ̀  
NP (Pl) be flat  
They are unusually flat

30(a) Ó rí kòbìtì  
NP be huge  
It is huge

(b) Ó rí kòbìtìkòbìtì  
NP be huge  
They are unusually big

31(a) Ó rí roboto  
NP (pl.) be spherical  
They are spherical

(b) Ó rí ròbòtòroboto  
NP (pl) be spherical  
They are unusually spherical

32(a) Ó rí bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀  
NP be fat  
S/he/itis fat

(b) Ó rí bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀bẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀tẹ̀  
NP (Pl.) be fat  
They are unusually fat

As we have earlier said, when the tone on any one of the two reduplicated forms is changed, the numerical meaning of the subject remains a unit. however, the difference will be on the emphasis which alters the original meaning a little bit.

### Choice of colour idiomphone as rule based

When colour is involved, the choice of idiomphone is rule governed. this means that any idiomphone cannot just be picked at random, else, the sentence will become ungrammatical or deviant. the data below gives credence to our assertion.

33(a) Ó dúdú kirikiri  
NP be black 'kirikiri'  
It is so black

(b) Ó funfun báláú/gbòò  
NP be white báláú  
It is immaculate white

(c) Ó pupa fòò/yòò  
NP be red 'fòò/yòò'  
It is brightly reddish

34(a) Ó sòkùnkùn biribiri<sup>5</sup>  
NP be dark 'biribiri'  
It is very dark

(b) Ó mólè kedere  
NP light 'kedere'  
It shines very bright

Sentences a - c of example (33) above show a kind of colour while those of a and b of (34) show the period of the day, i.e., either dawn or dusk. In (33), a competent speaker/hearer of Yorùbá will approve the idiophone to co-occur with the colour mentioned. It will sound awkward to say 'Ó dúdú báláú/gbòò, or 'Ó funfun kirikiri. Neither can any native speaker of Yorùbá say 'Ó sòkùnkùn kedere' or 'Ó mólè kirikiri'. All this goes to show that there are some idiosyncratic-phonosyntactic features inherent in idiophones which make them to be context sensitive.

#### Subcategorization restriction on idiophones

In the earlier version Transformational Generative Grammar, it was proposed that subjects of sentences are composed of bundles of features. These features go along the following:

[±HUMAN]  
[±ANIMATE]  
[±SINGULAR]

Right from Chomsky (1965) to the present theories of Generative Grammar, the features given above are still extant. The first two features in the above are of immediate concern to this paper. Going by this, idiophones are sub-categorized in line with the features of their subjects. This is to say that subjects that are to co-occur with idiophones are not just randomly selected, they follow particular rules in their selection. In the following sub-sections, we elucidate on this.

#### Subcategorization frame for idiophones

The choice of any subject that co-occurs with a particular idiophone is based on the idiosyncratic features inherent in such subject. In other words, certain idiophones can only co-occur with subjects with the feature [+HUMAN], while some with combine with [±HUMAN]. In the same vein, there are those that can only select subjects with the features [±ANIMATE]. We give examples.

35(a) Ó ñ še kòntákòntá  
NP PROG. do 'kòntákòntá'  
S/he is walking with pride

(b) Ó ñ še kòndúkòndú  
NP PROG. do 'kòndúkòndú'  
S/he behaving proudly

(c) Ó ñ še jàùjàù  
NP PROG. do 'jàùjàù'  
S/he is behaving disorderly

36(a) Ó ñ jà pítipítì  
NP PROG. fight 'pítipítì'  
S/he is struggling restlessly

(b) Ó sùn fònfòn  
NP sleep 'fònfòn'  
S/he sleeps/slept sounds

(c) Ó ñ mí gùlegùlé  
NP PROG. breath 'gùlegùlé'  
S/he is breathing unsteadily

37(a) Ó ñ lọ geere  
NP PROG. go 'geere'  
S/he/it is moving unhindered

(b) Ó tutù dúndún  
NP cold 'dúndún'  
S/he/it very cold

(c) Ó ñ rin sìn-in  
NP PROG. leak 'sìn-in'  
It is seriously leaking

The set of idiophones used in (35) can only co-occur with NP subject with the feature [+HUMAN]. Any other subject that is not with this feature will render the utterance deviant. It means then that these types of idiophones are subcategorized for NP subjects that are human. Substituting the pronouns in (35) with R-Expressions cannot render the sentences ungrammatical or semantically deviant. For more understanding on this, we repeat the sentences in (35) above in the form below but with lexical NPs as the subjects replacing the pronoun subjects.

38(a) Olú ñ še kòntákòntá

The idiophones in the sentences in (36) above, on the other hand can have NPs other than the feature [+HUMAN] as their subjects. In other words, the NP subjects can be of the feature [±HUMAN]. But the case of the idiophones in the sentences in (37) is different. Here, the NP subject is not necessarily to be of the feature [+HUMAN]. The subject can be of the feature [±ANIMATE].

<sup>5</sup> This part has to do with daily occurrences i.e. dawn/dusk.

## Conclusion

Even though this paper is a preliminary one, we have been able to establish certain facts which, hitherto, may not have been noticed by the earlier scholars on the issue of idiophones. These facts are that:

- (i) tone on idiophones has grammatical implication, and by extension, tone on idiophones is grammatical.
- (ii) the choice of subjects that co-occur with idiophones are rule governed.
- (iii) the co-occurrence of idiophones with their subject NPs is subject to sub-categorization restriction.

From the foregoing, we want to agree with Awoyale's (1981) submission that a different grammatical category should be created for idiophones. Lumping them together with either adverbs or nouns as some Yorùbá scholars have argued, does not show the true nature of Yorùbá idiophones. Their behaviour is totally different from that of adverbs or nouns.

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