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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 ʃe as he cited in example below

1 Kii ʃe 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, Ìsẹ, Ìdó and Iṣàn

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

c. ki- Òmùò, Ìpaò, 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**, **Ìsẹ**, **Ìdó** and **Iṣàn**. 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 ǹsẹ̀ 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**, **Ìsẹ**, **Ìdó** and **Iṣàn** 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

The child has not gone

- i. ii. iii.
 b. Unjijẹ é tí ì tìn → unjijẹ ẹ́ 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 ọ́ lọ sí ulé → Omọ lọ sí ulé
 Child HTS go PREP house the child went home
- i. ii. iii.
 b. Òjò **ó** rò lánòò → Òjò ọ́ rò lánòò → Òjọ rò 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 **Ìpaọ** **Ìrẹ̀le** and **Iyemẹ̀rọ** 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. Èí ẹ̀ se Olú **ki ó** rí → èí ẹ̀ se Olú **kó** rí
 NEG do Olu FOC RSP see NEG do Olu FOC /RSP see
 It was not Olu that saw it
- i. ii.
 b. Èí ẹ̀ se iye mi **ki ó** jẹ́ → èí ẹ̀ se iye mi **kó** jẹ́
 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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