

**OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA.**

**Inaugural Lecture Series 202**

**ISSUES IN LINGUISTICS AND  
YORUBA LANGUAGE**

**By**

**L.O. Adewole  
Professor of Linguistics**



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# Issues in Linguistics and Yorùbá Language

## Introduction

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, sir, the subject of this lecture is 'Issues in Linguistics and Yoruba Language', but, in order to have a starting point for the discussion of the subject, it will be necessary to share with you my experience as a linguist with some colleagues on this campus.

To some colleagues, a linguist has no business working in a Department of African Languages and Literatures. Just come to think of it, what should someone who has been trained either in the field of acoustic phonetics, psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, computational linguistics or biolinguistics be wasting his time teaching Yoruba! I come to this conclusion because, at least, twice, I have tried to convince a graduate from the Department of English of this University, who is also a highly placed administrative officer in this University now, why the teaching of linguistics in Africa is better placed at the Department of African Languages. To the officer, if linguistics is going to be taught in the University, it should be at the Department of English.

The officer even took me back on the memory lane. According to her, it was between 1975 and 1976 that the Department of English of this University was broken into three new Departments, namely; Literature in English, Language Arts and Linguistics and when the Linguistics Department was scrapped, the lecturers, except one, who is now in the Department of Foreign Languages, moved to the Department of English. None of them accepted to come and teach Yoruba!

One may want to say here that, after all, the officer is not a member of the academic staff and thus, the distinction between each of these disciplines may not be clear to her. But then, a seasoned professor of this University, a scientist of great repute, came to me on the day the titles of our inaugural lectures were approved by Senate to clarify the difference between linguistics and Yoruba language. To him, they were of the same nomenclature. I still remember vividly too that the first time

I went to the former Vice-Chancellor to discuss our new Linguistics programme with him, he said he thought I was in the Department of English!

I quite agree that this is the first inaugural lecture on linguistics or on language from the Department of African Languages and Literatures of this University, but, it is definitely not the first inaugural lecture on linguistics in the University. The late Professor Ekundayo, in his inaugural lecture delivered here on March 18, 1986, explained what linguistics is. According to him, 'linguistics is generally recognized as the science of languages' (Ekundayo 1986: 3).

I know that the officer who first took me up on the relevance of linguistics to Yoruba would want to cut in here to say that, 'Oh yes, somebody from the Department of English had all the rights to discuss linguistics but why should somebody teaching Yoruba or any African language poke his nose into something that does not concern him?'

I agree with this lady once again but I would like to remind her that Ekundayo (1986: 4) stated clearly in his paper that although he was concerned with theoretical linguistics, but, 'since questions of interest in linguistics must be discussed with specific human languages as data, I will exemplify my theoretical discussions with data from Yoruba language principally'. Although Professor Ekundayo began his career in this University in the Department of English, moved to the Department of Linguistics and came back later to the Department of English, only two of the thirteen articles used in his lecture were written on English. All the others were 'articles on the Yoruba language' (Ekundayo 1986: 31-32)

To further clearly distinguish linguistics as a course of study from English, at least, a colleague, sitting here this evening, read B.A., M.A. and PhD Yoruba language, M.A. linguistics and he is about to complete his M.A. degree programme in English language. It may interest you to note that all the members of staff of the Department of African Languages and Literatures, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, including those who are majoring in literature, enthusiastically, supported this colleague's proposal to go and study for an M.A. degree in linguistics after obtaining

an M.A. degree in Yoruba. To them, an M.A. degree in linguistics would help the Yoruba teaching competence of this colleague. Even those who were interested in language were very reluctant to support his application to go and study for a postgraduate degree in English because, according to them, 'a postgraduate degree in English is not of immediate relevance to the teaching of Yoruba'.

I even learnt that there was a mild drama between two professors in the Department of English of this University when the application of this colleague was being considered for admission into the M.A. degree programme in English. To one of them, he could not be admitted into the programme with a postgraduate degree in Yoruba. It was after the candidate was able to present his linguistics transcript that he was recommended for admission. From the foregoing, it is clear that while English may not be of immediate relevance to the teaching of Yoruba and vice versa, the knowledge of linguistics is of great importance to the teaching of the two languages.

I should like to mention here, though, that not all non-linguists are unappreciative of the importance of linguistics to language teaching. I say this because, there was a time the director of a unit in this University, who is a professor, invited me to come and explain how a course of E-Learning in Yoruba for foreign students could be mounted in this University. The course was meant, mainly, for Africans in the Diaspora who, I know, are more interested in the orisa. With this in mind, 50% of the outline I submitted to the director contained topics on the various Yoruba orisa! The professor rejected my submission and insisted that I should go back and prepare another course outline in which 50% of the content would be on language. Who then is a linguist?

A linguist, according to Owolabi (2006 : 5),

is someone who studies the structure and development of language(s) scientifically or systematically by observing the use of language(s), formulating statements or hypotheses

about language(s), justifying, evaluating or testing the hypotheses formulated on the bases of their adequacy, independent motivation and insightfulness, and refining such hypotheses when and where necessary.

Now, how do linguists go about their work? They go about this in one of two ways. First, they can examine a whole variety of languages and hypothesize from the data what the universal properties can be. On the other hand, they can start with a full description of a particular language in order to form or test hypotheses about language universal.

Most of the theoretical discussions of Ekundayo (1986) were based on the first method. In this lecture, I shall start my own discussion using the second method.

### **Jespersen's Tripartite of Value**

The tripartite of value of Otto Jespersen, a Danish linguist and a foremost authority on English grammar, is based upon the two logical extremes and the intermediate state lying between them. The tripartite is set out as follows (Jespersen, 1924:324-325):

Next we have to consider some terms of paramount importance to the logician as well as to the linguist, namely the two absolute extremes 'all' and 'nothing' with the intermediate 'something'. Let us call the two extremes A and C and the intermediate B. They are most naturally represented in a descending scale.

A everything, all, everybody (all girls, all the money)

B something, some, somebody (some girls, a girl, some money)

C nothing, none, nobody (no girls, no money)

Such items as “many”, “much”, “very”, “a few”, “a little”, “few”, “little” and numerals are included in B. For the negation of the A class, where the universal quantifier belongs, Jespersen (1924:326) has this to say:

Here we have the general rule that if the negative word is placed first, it discards the absolute element; and the result is the intermediate term: *Not... A = B, ...* If, on the other hand, the absolute element prevails, and the result is the contrary notion, (then) *A ... not = C*. Some of the examples he used to justify his claim are the following:

- (i.) They are not all of them fools (*not... A = B*)
- (ii.) The one (uncle) I was always going to write to and always didn't (*A...not = C*)

In (i), **all** is negated and the result is **some** which is **not... A = B** whereas in (ii), **always**, which is in the same class as **all**, is negated and the result is **nothing** which is **not...A = C**, This is because while the configuration of (i) is **not...A**, that of (ii) is **A...not**

However, sentences such as

- (iii) All that glitters is not gold
- (iv) Thank Heaven, all scholars are not like this.

abound, where  $A...not = B$  (or more correctly,  $A...not = not ... A$ ). Jespersen attributed this phenomenon to “the result of two tendencies to place the subject first and to attract the negation to the verb” (1924:327), so that the negative which should logically precede the universal (Not all that glitters...) is attracted instead to the unmarked nexal position.

Huddleston (1985:431) also states that the two interpretations available for constructions such as Jespersen's  $A... not$  where A-term is a quantifier can be “distinguished prosodically” in English. In Yoruba, both interpretations can be distinguished by focusing. Hetzron (1980:279) presents convincing arguments to show that both grammatical intonation



and focus should be regarded as part of the sentence and therefore should be given their rightful place in grammar.

## The Yoruba Quantifiers

Ekundayo (1976) recognises three types of quantifiers in Yorùbá. The three types of quantifiers he recognises are the universal quantifier, *gbogbo* “all”, the absolute quantifier, *méwàá* “ten”, *méjo* “eight”, etc., and the relative quantifier, *pípò* “many”, *dìè* “a few/few” (Ekundayo 1976: 59). The three quantifiers are described as follows:

- (1) (i) Universal - identifies whole sets without indicating exact numbers
- (ii) Absolute: - gives exact numbers of items quantified
- (iii) Relative - quantifies relative to unspecified sets.

Such quantifiers as *méjèèjì* “both”, *métèèta* “all three”, etc. are classified under the universal quantifier but we shall not be concerned with them in this lecture.

## Explaining the Yorùbá Universal Quantifier Negation within Jespersen’s Tripartite System

Having identified the Yorùbá universal quantifier, we shall now analyse its negation within the framework of Jespersen’s tripartite of value. We shall take account of the following important factors in our analysis:

- (2) (i) the properties of the quantifier
- (ii) the position of the quantifier relative to the negative verb
- (iii) the type of sentence in which the quantifier occurs i.e. whether it is focused or not.

We shall be concerned with the following sentences:

- (3) (i) Gbogbo wa ni ó lè lo sí ilé  
All we is he can go to home  
“All of us can go home”
- (ii) Gbogbo wa ni kò lè lo sí ilé  
All we is he can go to home  
“All of us are unable to go home”
- (iii) Gbogbo wa kó ni ó lè lo sí ilé  
All we not is he can go to home  
“Not all of us can go home”
- (iv) Kii se gbogbo wa ni ó lè lo sí ilé  
Not do all we is he can go to home  
“It is not all of us who can go home”
- (v) Ko sí nínú wa tí ó lè lo sí ilé  
Not exist among us who can go to home  
“None of us can go home”

(3) (i), *Gbogbo wa ni o le lo si ile (All of us can go home)* is a focus sentence, that is, it is a sentence in which the universal quantifier is focused. In the sentence, it is the focused item, *gbogbo wa* “all we” that is negated in (3) (ii) in Jespersen’s *A...not* configuration. Compare (4) with (3) (ii).

- (3) (ii) Gbogbo wa ni kò lè lo sí ilé  
All we is not can go home  
“All of us are unable to go home”
- (4) Olú ni kò lo  
Olu FOC NEG go  
“It was Olu who did not go”

The possibility of the negative verb being attracted to the verb base form in (3) (ii) is blocked by the presence of the focus marker. The only meaning available, therefore, is that of Jespersen’s *A...not = C* which is a complete denial of the universal quantifier by the negative verb. Thus, (3) (ii) means that ‘none of us can go home.’

- (3) (ii)            Gbogbo wa ni kò lè lo sí ilé  
 All we is not can go to home  
 “All of us are unable to go home”

Unlike (3) (ii), neither (3) (iii) nor (3) (iv) denies (3) (i). This is so because both are true if at least one of the people concerned goes home but, the way each of them fails to deny (3) (i) differs. It will be noted that the negative verb follows the universal quantifier in (3) (ii) and (3) (iii) and both have the configuration *A...not*. The question then is if (3) (ii) is a complete negation of (3) (i), why is (3) (iii) not?

The reason for this is that whereas (3) (ii) is the negation of (3) (i), (3) (iii) is the negation of another sentence. A close look at (3) (ii) and (3) (iii) shows that the focus marker, *ni*, occurs in different positions in the two sentences. Whereas the focus marker precedes the negative verb in (3) (ii), it follows the negative verb in (3) (iii). What this means is that whereas (3) (ii) negates (3) (i) where there is a focused universal quantifier, (3) (iii), in which the negative verb is focused, is the negation of (5).

- (5)            Gbogbo wa lè lo sí ilé  
 All we can go to home  
 “All of us can go home”

- (3) (iii) Gbogbo wa kó ni ó le lo sí ilé  
 All we not is he can go to home  
 “Not all of us can go home”

If focus is taken, following Jackendoff (1972:225-230), as denoting “the information in the sentence that is assumed by the speaker not to be shared by him and the hearer”, then, one can say that “the presupposition (i.e.)...the information in the sentence that is assumed by the speaker to be shared by him and the hearer” of sentences (3) (ii) and (3) (iii) differs. Another negation of (5) is (6). Whereas (6) allows for more than one type of interpretation, i.e. (7) and (8); (3) (iii), in which the negative verb is “specified as new, within a contrastive sentence” (Chafe 1970: 229-230), allows for only (8) as its negation.

- (6) Gbogbo wa kò lè lo sí ilé  
 All we not can go to home  
 (i) "All of us cannot go home"  
 (ii) "Not all of us can go home"
- (7) One/some/many of us can go home
- (8) Not all of us can go home

As it is the negative verb that is focused in (3) (iii) and not the universal quantifier, Jespersen's *A...not* configuration does not work well with it as it does with (3) (ii). Although the focus marker blocks verb attraction both in (3) (ii) and (3) (iii), the *A...not* configuration of (3) (iii) gives rise to only a B interpretation (one, some or many) in Jespersen's tripartite of value. This interpretation contrasts with the observation of Jespersen in English where *A...not* should normally be a C and only by verb attraction can it be interpreted as B.

As for (3) (iv), it will be noted that the negative verb precedes the universal quantifier which indicates a *not...A* interpretation in Jespersen's configuration. A *not...A* in Jespersen's configuration always results in a B except "when the negative is attached prefixally or implied" (Horn 1978: 139). As there is neither a prefixal negative nor a negative by implication in (3) (iv), it is not surprising that the only interpretation available agrees with Jespersen's *not...A = B* configuration i.e. "one/some/many of us can go home".

- (3) (iv) Kíí se gbogbo wa ni ó lè lo sí ilé  
 Not do all we is he can go to home  
 "It is not all of us who can go home"

(3) (v) is also a complete negation of (3) (i). This can be explained in terms of Jespersen's scalar value. Jespersen's scalar value accounts for the use of 'not one' for *none* and 'not one thing' for *nothing* in languages such as Yoruba. According to Jespersen (1949:81), "not four" does not mean

whatever is above or below 4 in scale but  
 what is below 4... something between 4 and

0... 'not everything' means something  
between everything and nothing.

This is not to say that a *not* followed by a numeral cannot be interpreted as more than. On this, Jespersen (1949:81) goes on to say that

When not+numeral is exceptionally to be taken as more than, the numeral has to be strongly stressed, and generally to be followed by a more exact indication: the hill is not two hundred feet high, but "three hundred".

Jespersen (1949:81) concludes that this scalar hypothesis "explains how 'not one' comes to be the natural expression in many languages for *none* and 'not one thing' for *nothing*". Ekundayo (1976:62) supports Jespersen's view when he states that

Yorùbá has no single word analogous to English *none*, *nobody*, *nothing*, *e.t.c.*, but it expresses the senses of such lexical items existentially. Thus, *nobody* is *kò sí e?nikan* (not exist person one); *nothing* is *kò sí nn?kan* (not exist thing-one) and *none* is *kò sí (ò?kan)* (not exist (one)). The Yoruba word for zero, i.e. *òfo*, does not express the sense *none* and it cannot be used in partitive constructions... Thus, there is no *òfo nínú wa* (zero of us) analogous to *kò sí nínú wa* (none of us).

To remind us once again, Jespersen (1924) has the English language in mind while proposing his tripartite of value. After applying the principle to English, other linguists can then go on to apply the same principle to other languages just as we have done for Yoruba. If it works, it can then be regarded as one of the language universals. Having shown what linguistics looks like, one can now describe how this abstract course could be taught in Yoruba.

### Using Yoruba to Teach Linguistics

Rules in linguistics are 'the linguistic behaviour of the speaker who knows his language and performs as if he is obeying certain laws allowed

by the language' (Yusuf 1997:1). Mnemonic technique is one of the ways by which rules in linguistics could be learnt and transmitted orally. Even in literate cultures, school children memorise many facts by using mnemonic rhymes such as the following:

Every name is called a NOUN.  
*As field and fountain, street and town;*  
In place of noun the PRONOUN stands,  
*As he and she can clap their hands;*  
The ADJECTIVE describes a thing,  
*As magic wand or bridal ring;*  
The VERB means action, something done –  
*To read and write, to jump and run;*  
How things are done the ADVERBS tell,  
*As quickly, slowly, badly, well;*  
The PREPOSITION shows relation,  
*As in the street or at the station;*  
CONJUNCTIONS join, in many ways,  
*Sentences, words or phrase and phrase;*  
The INTERJECTION cries out, 'Hark!  
*I need an exclamation mark'*

(Jarvie 1995:1)

Such mnemonics, couched in poetic language, are far easier to recall than mere dry words. But then, the potent tool usually used for communicating, perpetuating and developing knowledge among the Yorùbá is oral literature. About 'òwe' (proverb), which is one of the Yorùbá oral genres, for example, the following Yorùbá scholars have these to say:

Òwe 'proverb' is a short... aphorism, a condensation into a generalization of the fruits of observed facts.

They come into use as allusions to make the hearer pause and work out their bearing on the subject under discussion (Oduyoye 1971: 96)

The Yorùbá value proverbs very highly for they are considered to be the wisdom lore of the race. And because ... proverbs are considered to be traditional and originate from the observation of a national phenomena and human relation, old people are regarded as the respository of proverbs (Olátúnjí 1984:170).

Were we to measure these people [the Yorùbá] by the standard of their proverbial morality, we should come to the conclusion that they had attained no inconsiderable height in the development of social relations (Crowther 1852:30)

It is even said that *òwe lesin òrò, bórò bá sonù, òwe la fi í wá a* (proverbs are horse-footed to solve a problem, when the truth is elusive? it is proverbs that we use to discover it). What is true of proverbs is true of most of the other Yorùbá oral genres. The students understand them and they are available and can easily be used by the teacher as the base for using Yoruba to teach linguistics to students.

### *Phonology*

Phonology is taken in this lecture as the 'study of speech sounds of a given language and their functions within the sound system of that language' (Hartmann and Stork 1976:175). Thus, on sound production, Ìsòlá (1989:8) has shown that there are short poems in the language that describe points of articulation for certain sounds. The following poem describes various positions of the lips and cheeks when particular sounds are produced.

Eni tí ó pe tóró a senu tóósín	To say <b>tóró</b> (three pence), your lips protrude
Àgbà tí yóò pe sísi a fe èrìgi	To say say <b>sísi</b> (six pence), the lips must spread

Àpèwúúkè là á p'Àwááwù

To say **Àwááwù** (a name), your cheeks are blown

Àpèforisòpò legbèédógbòn

**Egbèédógbòn** (one shilling and three pence) is said as if you would knock your head against a post (Isola 1989:8).

The emphasis in the first line of this poem is on the pronunciation of the 'o' in 'tóró' (three pence) which, when pronounced, 'the lips form a round shape and the tongue is bunched back in the mouth' (Awóbùlúyì 1978: 140). It is the round shape of the lips that the poem describes as 'protrude'. In the second line, the emphasis is on the 'i' [i] of 'sísì' (six pence) which, when pronounced, 'the lips do not form a round shape and the tongue is mostly in the front part of the mouth' (Awóbùlúyì 1978:140). The shape of the lips which is not round is described in the poem as 'spread'. Lines three and four emphasise the consonants 'w' [w] in 'Àwááwù' (a name) and 'gb' [gb] in 'egbèédógbòn' (one shillings and three pence) which their production involves two points of articulation. According to Awóbùlúyì (1978:143), for [kp] and [gb], 'both lips are pressed firmly together, and the back of the tongue is simultaneously made to touch the rear of the roof of the mouth. For [w], the lips are made to form a round shape, and the back of the tongue is raised close to the rear of the roof of the mouth'.

The other consonant in the language whose production involves two points of articulation is 'p' [kp] which is not mentioned in this poem. The sound is used in the following saying, *òpòlòpò òpòlò ló wà tí kò lópòlò* (there are many frogs that have got no brains), in which the number of p's in it makes it a useful tongue-twister for children. These types of poems, which the students know very well, can be used as a starting point for the teaching of the production of Yorùbá sounds. Other tongue-twisters that can be used for the same purpose are the following where the sound on which emphasis is laid is 'gb' [gb]:



Àgbon ní gbágbon gágbon	A coconut fruit is carrying a coconut fruit and climbing a coconut palm
Òpòbo-gbóbo-bògbé	He-who-kills-a-monkey hides-it-in-the-bush
Bòò bá tètè gbóbo bògbé	If you don't quickly throw the monkey into the bush
Òbo ó gbé o bògbé	The monkey will throw you into the bush

(Ìsòlá (1989:5)

[I] is described as a sound produced when 'the front part of the tongue is made to touch that part of the roof of the mouth immediately behind the upper teeth' (Awóbùlúyì 1978:143) while [j] (i.e. 'y') is described as a sound produced 'by raising the middle part of the tongue very close to the roof of the mouth' (Awóbùlúyì 1978: 143). There is a Yorùbá proverb, known by the students, which distinguishes between these two sounds. It goes thus:

Wón ní	They say
'Akáyín, sé o ó jògèdè'	'You, whose tooth has fallen out'. Will you eat bananas?'
Ó ní	He says
'Kínhàhánhá téyètéyè'	'What have I been looking for?' (emphasis, ours)

(Oyèláran 1984:26)

The emphasis here is on 'téyètéyè' (previously/in advance/before). Normally, the word should be pronounced as 'tèlètèlè' but because the speaker has lost the front tooth, he finds it very difficult to pronounce 'l' which requires the touching of that part of the roof of the mouth immediately behind the upper teeth with the front of the tongue and thus replaces it with 'y' which does not require the use of the upper teeth. It

is also noticed in the language that children who are just growing their teeth also replace the sound ‘t’ with ‘y’ which, according to the description above, may be because the former sound requires the use of the upper teeth in its production.

To contrast oral and nasal vowels, there is one proverb which says

Orin gbogbo ni aránmú kò le gbè	A person with a nasal twang may not be able to chorus many songs
Bó bá di pánpálásigi	But when it comes to the song, ‘pánpálásigi’
A ní <u>Wòn-n-kúnwon</u>	He will chorus it ‘Wòn-n-kúnwon’

This proverb shows that Yorùbá oral tradition recognises a contrast between an oral and a nasal vowel. An oral vowel is ‘produced when air passes out through the mouth only’ while a nasal vowel is produced ‘when air passes out through both the mouth and the nose’. (Awóbùlúyì (1978:139). In the proverb above, the song, ‘pánpálásigi’ is supposed to be chorused as ‘wò-n-kúwo’ where the underlined sounds (‘o’ and ‘u’) are non-nasal vowels. But, instead of ‘wò-n-kúwo’, one with a nasal twang produces ‘wò?n-n-kún-won’ where the underlined are nasal vowels.

In teaching tones, one can use as a starting point, a Yorùbá proverb which says *àgbàlàghà mé?ta kò lè pe èkùlù tì* (three middle-aged men should not find it impossible to pronounce ‘èkùlù’ (crested/crowned duiker)) (Oyèlára 1984:26). The emphasis here is on the tones on the word, **èkùlù**. If the first person pronounces it as **ekùlù**, and the second, **ekùlù**, at least, the third person should be able to pronounce it correctly as **èkùlù**.

To show that tones contrast just as consonants and vowels do, one can introduce the following Yorùbá proverb, *àpón n̄ yan iyá, ó ní òun n̄ yan iyá* (a wifeless person chooses **suffering** but says he chooses

a **mother**). *Íyà* (suffering) and *iyá* (mother) are minimal pairs just as **mcn/man** and **pin/bin** are. The contrast between *iyà* and *iyá* are the low and high tones on the last vowel, [a]. From here, one can introduce other examples that will make the students understand the use of tones as minimal pairs.

### *Grammar*

By grammar, we mean 'a level of structural organisation which can be studied independently of PHONOLOGY and SEMANTICS, and generally divided into the branches of SYNTAX and MORPHOLOGY. In this sense, grammar is the study of the way WORDS, and their component parts, combine to form SENTENCES' (Crystal 1985: 141). In teaching grammar, we can also appeal to some of the oral genres, especially 'òwe' (proverbs), known by the students. We shall begin with the qualifiers and modifiers.

A qualifier narrows 'down the conceptual range or meanings of nouns' (Awóbùlúyì 1978:30 & 66), while a modifier restricts 'the meanings of verbs by specifying such things as the time, place, manner, condition, etc., in which the actions referred to by verbs were, or are, to be carried out' (Awóbùlúyì *ibid.*). A proverb which can be used to introduce these two terms is *isòrò iyánrò ló pa elénpe isáájú tó ní ighá wíwo ju àwo lo* (making a statement without supporting it with an adequate explanation was the cause of the death of the first Chief Elén?pe who said that a calabash was heavier than a piece of earthenware). The chief actually meant a calabash before it was cut and its seeds removed (a fresh calabash) but the people he was addressing had a calabash after it was cut and its seeds removed (a dry calabash) in mind. The latter type of calabash is definitely lighter than an earthenware while the former is not. The people then brought out a dry calabash and the argument that ensued led to the death of the chief. This short story, which the students know very well, can serve as a take off to the teaching of modifiers and qualifiers.

One can then go on to show examples such as *omi tutu* (cold water) in Yoruba where the adjective follows the noun, *cold water* in

English where it precedes the noun and *aqua frigida* (cold water) or *frigida aqua* (cold water) in Latin where it can precede or follow the noun (Tomori 1973: 1-2)

*Ìlú kì í wà kó máà lólòrì* (there is no town without a head) captures the notion ‘head’ in linguistics very well. The head or the ruler of a town is regarded as sacred. He is responsible for ensuring the safety and welfare of the people by performing state rituals. There is always a consecration ceremony at his installation. In linguistics too, the notion “head”, according to Riemsdijk and Williams (1987: 40),

is important because it embodies the insight that the head node shares some fundamental properties with the phrasal node containing it. Thus, for example, **boys** is the head in the noun phrase **the big boys** and since it is a plural noun, the whole noun phrase is a plural noun phrase.

The analysis of INFL (inflection) as the head of S (the sentence), which is regarded as IP (Inflection Phrase) like other phrasal categories such as VP and NP, is adequately captured by the term used for INFL in Yorùbá. INFL is translated into Yorùbá as ‘*áfómó*’. There is a Yorùbá proverb which says *áfómó kò légbò, gbogho igi níí bá tan* (the parasite has no root, all trees are its relation). One can use the proverb to explain that, although ‘the features [-Tense] and [+AGR], which are contained in INFL may be “localized” in the verb in the “surface” structure,... they are features of the sentence’ (Lyons 1966:218). The following riddle describes the INFL more adequately.

Olówó rerù, iwòfà tẹ̀ lé e  
Taa niwòfà tó láyà tó béè  
(The master is carrying a load  
His servant carrying nothing follows him  
Who is the servant that is so audacious)

(Babalola 1974:40)

Ordinarily, the correct answer to this riddle is 'ajá' (dog) but, in syntax, the answer could be said to be the INFL. For, the INFL, which consists of words with no lexical meaning, whose functions are solely to express grammatical relationships, is the head of the S instead of the contentative which has 'statable lexical meaning' (Crystal 2001: 139).

Also, the AGR in an INFL could be said to be the 'isín' and 'ikòrò' (tiny fish) in the following poem, without which a particular form of one word in an S cannot pick a corresponding form of another (ibid.).

O ò bá isín máwo

O ò bá ikòrò mulè

O ní bábéré e bóódò, o ó mú un

(You have not made friends with the tiny fish called isín

Nor have you entered into covenant with the tiny fish called ikòrò

Yet you say if your needle drops into the river, you will get it out.)

(Babalola 1974:37)

The proverb, *Egbé eye leye wó tò* (Birds of the same feather, flock together) can be used to introduce the students to the notion of constituency in linguistics. Constituents, here, are regarded as 'strings of one or more words that syntactically and semantically behave as a unit' (Aarts 2001: 193). He goes further to state that 'Linguists have argued that one way of finding out whether a particular sequence of words behave like a string is by trying to move it to another position in the sentence' (Aarts ibid.:194). Consider the following sentences:

(9) Kí á kó? Yorùbá dára  
To learn (learning) Yoruba is profitable

(10) Ó dára kí á kó? Yorùbá  
It is profitable to learn Yoruba

In (9), the subject of the sentence is the clause, *kí á kó? Yorùbá* (to learn Yoruba). This has been moved in (10) and the pronoun 'ó' is inserted in the position vacated by the subject clause. This is called the extraposition of the subject clause and the movement establishes the constituent status of the subject clause.

A constituent can even be moved from another constituent. Consider these two sentences:

- (11) A pe èniyàn méjì ní àti-Ìbàdàn ní ànà (A pe èniyàn méjì láti Ìbàdàn ní ànà)  
We called two people from Ibadan yesterday
- (12) A pe èniyàn méjì ní ànà ní àti-Ìbàdàn (A pe èniyàn méjì ní ànà láti Ìbàdàn)  
We called two people yesterday from Ibadan

‘Ní àti-Ìbàdàn’ (from Ibadan) in (12) has been extraposed from the Direct Object NP. We call this type of movement extraposition from NP.

The constituency of a particular sequence of words can be established by replacing it with a proform. Substitution by a proform is not only a useful test for establishing the constituency of a particular sequence of words, it is also useful for determining the categorial status of a particular sequence. Consider ‘dúdú’ (black) in the following sentence:

- (13) Dúdú wù mi  
I like black

At first sight, it may appear that we are dealing with an adjective as in *ìwé dúdú* (a black book). As a matter of fact, the issue taken up by Afolayan (1972) and Awobuluyi (1972) is that of whether words in the same class with ‘dúdú’ (black), as used in (14), should be classified as either a verb and called an adjectivisable verb or an adjective and called a predicative adjective.

- (14) Ó dúdú

It is black.

The solution to this type of argument could be found in the feature analysis of an adjective shown in (15).

(15) N = [+N, -V]

V = [+V, -N]

A = [+N, +V]

P = [-N, -V]

Where N is the noun, V, the verb, A, the adjective and P, the preposition. Here, we can see that the adjective has the features of a noun and a verb. Thus, some languages have, not only a predicative adjective, as in (16), but also an attributive adjective, as in (17). An attributive adjective occurs within a noun phrase while a predicative adjective occurs after the verb. Thus, (18) enables us to refer to the class of say, nouns and adjectives simply by writing [+N] and the class of verbs and adjectives by writing [+V].

(16) It is black

(17) She is holding a black book.

(18)

	[+N]	[-N]
[+V]	A	V
[-V]	N	P

However, there are two reasons for saying that 'dúdú' in (13) is not an adjective. One reason is that it occurs in subject position, a very common position for Noun Phrases. The second reason is that we can replace it by a pronoun as in (19).

(13) Dúdú wù mí  
I like black

(19) Ó wù mí  
— — Like it —

The same proverb, *Egbé eye leye wó tò* (Birds of the same feather flock together) can also be used to introduce other tests for constituency such as the coordination test, the insertion test, the constituent response test, the somewhere else test, the meaning test, etc.

The treatment of cyclic movement or rule ordering in which 'rules of a transformational grammar are ordered at least in that each *set of rules* in the grammar is presented in a certain order, namely, the P-rules are first, the syntactic transformational rules are second, and ... the morphophonemic rules are third' (Koutsoudas 1966: 37-38) can be introduced with the proverbs *bi igi bá wó lu igi, tòkè la kókó n gbé* (If one tree falls on another, the uppermost should be cut away first) and *òkòòkan là n yosè lébu* (if one enters the place where palm-oil is extracted, one has to bring one's legs out one by one).

On the large number of integrating theories students come across when doing any work on the structure of a language, the teacher should explain to them that *igba ònà ló já ojà* (many roads lead to the market, ie all roads lead to Rome). What all the theories do is to help integrate all the pieces of information the students pick up in different parts of the course. As long as the theories' ultimate aims are achieved, it does not matter how or by which method the work was done.

The question once again is how do we use Yoruba to teach linguistics? As we have discussed above, the approach should be from what the students know best, which are the Yorùbá oral tradition and the indigenous linguistic resources in the language. This approach will be in line with another Yorùbá proverb which says *ohun tó jo ohun la fi n wé ohun* (we liken one thing to another of its kind). From the above, it is clear that in using Yoruba to teach linguistics, although Yoruba linguists are not where they ought to be, they are definitely not where they used to be.

### **Teaching Yoruba as a Foreign Language**

The teaching of an indigenous language to non-speakers of the language can also be of interest to a linguist. According to Isola (1966: 7)



The interest in African Studies is growing rapidly, not only in Africa among Africans, but also in Europe and America among non-Africans . . . . In this paper, attention is focused on the Yoruba language, the description of which has received the attention of renowned scholars.

I have flipped through many Yoruba texts written for second language learners but none of them take note of the background of the people they claim to be writing the texts for, except perhaps, for the names. For instance, some of what one would see are:

Chukwu: Mo dide (I stood up)

Kangiwa: Mo jókòó (I sat down)

No effort is made by the author to make use of the background of these Chukwu and Kangiwa while teaching them this foreign language. Chukwu is supposed to represent the Igbo learners of Yoruba while Kangiwa represents the Hausa learners. Assuming we take the Hausa learner, the writer of the text would not take note of the fact, for example, that Hausa has inflectional markers for gender, number and plural whereas, Yoruba marks the last two only in the pronoun. Hausa is just a language in Nigeria the speakers of which we want to teach our own mother tongue. Each language has its own peculiarities and to teach speakers of another language one's own mother tongue, one must note these peculiarities. Without noticing them, one would not be teaching the students speaking these other languages one's own language.

### **Looking Beyond Nigeria**

It is no more news to say that Yoruba is being spoken beyond the boundaries of Nigeria. We have Yoruba speakers in Benin and Sierra Leone and the language is used in religious activities in Cuba and Bahia in Brazil (Abimbola 1977). We also have Yorùbá revivalists in Oyotunji Village in America (Hunt 1977). A Ph.D. student of mine wrote his thesis on Mofoli, a Yoruba dialect in Benin Republic (Fabunmi 2006) and Oyelaran (1993) has written on the influence of Yoruba on the religious activities of the African-Americans in North Carolina.

What we should note is that these users of Yoruba in the Diaspora are interested in learning the so-called real Yoruba (our own type of Yoruba in Nigeria) not only in their own country but they are also interested in coming over to Nigeria to learn the language. I know you will be surprised to hear that Yoruba is one of the minority languages in the United States of America and that the Universities where Yoruba is being studied in the United States as a foreign language are more than the Universities where Yoruba is being studied in Nigeria. Whereas there are about ten Universities in Nigeria where Yoruba is being taught as a subject, there are about sixteen Universities in the United States where students learn Yoruba. Some of these Universities are Yale University, University of Wisconsin, University of Florida and Ohio State University. The language is also being taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and the University of Birmingham, both in Britain. Since 1993, the Department of Education in the United States of America has been sending students to Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife to learn Yorùbá for eight weeks. The most recent of such students were those who left for the US on August 11, 2007.

The United States Department of Education also gave a research grant for the development of a Yoruba Living Dictionary on the internet. The address of the dictionary is [www.yoruba@georgiasouthern.edu](http://www.yoruba@georgiasouthern.edu). It is also gratifying to note that the articles in the Yorùbá wikipedia, a free encyclopaedia on Yorùbá on the internet, at [www.yo.wikipedia.org](http://www.yo.wikipedia.org), has grown to over three thousand. As the interest of these foreign students in Yoruba is growing, we should try to encourage them. One way of doing this is by writing books for second language learners that will be useful to them. To do this, we need to know where the problems of these students lie. The following are excerpts from assignments turned in by some of my foreign students learning Yoruba. Let us examine some of the problems the students have with Yoruba. The correct version of each of the sentences written by the students is put in bracket.

### *Example 1*

Mo kò korin sùgbón mo jó pupo (N kò korin sùgbón mo jó gan-an ni)

I did not sing but I danced a lot

The problem with this sentence is that instead of using the variant of the first person pronoun in the subject position, 'n' before the negatron, 'mo' was used. Note that in the English translation, 'I' has no variant. It appears in the positive and the negative sentences. The student also used the adjective, 'púpò?', instead of the adverb, 'gan-an'

### *Example 2*

Mo rántí ñ fetí sí rédíò pèlú màmá mi ní ilé rẹ ((i) Mo rántí pé mo máa n fetí sí rédíò pèlú màmá mi nínú ilé rẹ (ii) Mo rántí pé èmi àti màmá mi máa n fetí sí rédíò nínú ilé rẹ)

I remembered listening to the radio with my mother in her house.

The nominalizer, **pé** (that), has been omitted from the student's example. He also omitted the pronoun, **mo**. Note that the English translation of the student's sentence has two versions. Another version is 'I remembered that I was listening to the radio with my mother in her house'. It is this version with 'that' (pé) and 'I' (mo) that is grammatical in Yoruba. Note too that there are two corrections for the student's sentence. A bilingual Yoruba person who speaks Yoruba and English could use (i) while a monolingual Yoruba person would prefer (ii).

### *Example 3*

Mo ko létà ní ilé màmá mi ní tábili pèlú pénsùlù (Mo fi pénsùlù ko léà ní orí tábili nínú ilé màmá mi)

I wrote letters in my mother's house on the table with a pencil.

The problem with this sentence is that while the preposition 'on' can be used in English in this type of sentence, the prepositional phrase, 'ní orí' (on top of) is required in Yoruba.

#### Example 4

Mo té béèdi àti ya irun (Mo té béèdi mo si ya irun)

I make my bed and comb my hair

The ungrammaticality of example 4 stems from the fact that while English permits the joining together of two verbs with 'and', Yoruba does not join two verbs or two verb phrases together with *àti* 'and'.

#### Example 5

Mo wo bóòsì sí ojà New Haven ((i) Mo wo bóòsì lo sí ojà ní New Haven (ii) Mo wo bóòsì lo sí ojàa New Haven)

I take the bus to the market in New Haven.

The student is expected to use serial verbs in this type of sentence but because the serial verb construction is not available in English, he used only one verb in the sentence.

#### Example 6

Mo lo ilé òré mi sì seré boolu (Mo lo (sí) ilé òré mi láti lo gbá bóòlù)

I go to my friend's house to play ball

The problem with this sentence is that *sì*, the proverb, has been mistaken for the preposition *sí* 'to'. Thus, instead of translating "to play" as "láti seré" (or rather "láti gbá"), he translated it as "sì seré". Another correct version of the student's sentence is *Mo lo sí ilé òré mi mo sì gbá bóòlù*, although, the meaning of this will be different from the one with 'láti' above.

#### Example 7

Ó ni onírèlè àti òsìsè gan-an ni (Onírèlè ati òsìsè gan-an ni ó jé)

She is humble and a very hard worker

Instead of using 'jé', the candidate used 'ni' following the structure of such sentences as *Olú ni Olùkó wu* (Olú is our teacher) where *ni* is

translated as ‘is’. We should note, however, that even if we replace **ni** with **jé** in the sentence to give us *Ó jé onírèlè àti òsìsè gan-an ni*, the problem with the focus marker will still be there.

### *Example 8*

Mo seré bóòlù ní Yale àti je oúnje dárádára ní Yale (Mo gbá bóòlù ní Yale mo si je oúnje tí ó dára ní Yale)

I play ball at Yale and eat good food at Yale.

The problems here are the use of **seré** for ‘play’ instead of **gbá** and the use of **àti** ‘and’ to join two sentences together. Note also that the student used the pronoun ‘mo’ (I) once, as he used ‘I’ in English, instead of using ‘mo’ twice in the Yorùbá sentence. The use of ‘dárádára’ (good) by the student instead of ‘tí ó dára’ (that is good) made the sentence to be ambiguous as it can be translated as either ‘I play ball at Yale and eat good food at Yale’ or ‘I play ball at Yale and eat plenty of food at Yale’.

### *Example 9*

Àwá fé òjògbón wa Yorùbá (Àwá fé òjògbón Yorùbá wa/A fèràn òjògbón Yorùbá wa)

We like our Yoruba professor

The pronoun qualifier that should occur after ‘Yorùbá’ has been placed before it. This, definitely, is not a case of language interference because, in the English sentence, ‘Yorùbá’ qualifies ‘professor’. It should be noted also that although ‘fé’ and ‘fèràn’ have almost the same meaning, a native speaker will prefer the use of ‘fèràn’ to ‘fé’ in this sentence.

### *Example 10*

N kò fé jé adájó. Wón sisé púpò (N kò fé jé adájó, won máa n sisé púpò/N kò fé se isé adájó, wón máa n sise púpò)

I do not want to be a judge. They work a lot.

The habitual marker, **máa n** or **n**, which is obligatory in the second sentence in Example 10, has been left out.

This type of error analysis which should precede the writing of any textbook for a second language learner is not often done.

What I have touched upon here is a challenge for each of us. A textbook for non-speakers of a language should be organised along the lines of a linguistic grammar of speech. In doing this, however, one should not lose sight of the pedagogic implications of such a linguistic description.

## Conclusion

I would like to conclude this lecture, in line with Mithun and Chafe (1979: 32-33), with the following Mohawk song:

People,  
Listen to what our ancestors are saying,  
People,  
We are still continuously hearing our ancestors' voices,  
People,  
Our ancestors are saying, 'Use your language again.'

This Mohawk song becomes important when we read what Egbaman (2006) says. According to him:

It's all down to colonial mentality is what I will say. If African languages die out, do Africans think they'll be respected in the world when they can only speak English. Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, German, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, etc? They'll be in for a big and unpleasant surprise in future.

When Ngugi started writing in Kikuyu, many scholars laughed it off as a joke. 'How does a scholar of Ngugi's repute expect us to read his work in Kikuyu?', they asked. Ngugi had demonstrated by word and by deed that he was willing to go to great lengths to keep African languages alive. For him, using foreign languages in literature was a mark of neo-colonisation' (<http://www.estanda.rd.net>). Thus, as this University is for

learning and culture and as I am sure that we really want to focus on solving community problems and want the gown and the town to interact more. there is definitely no short cut than to make greater use of our languages.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, sir, thank you and God bless.

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