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IJOTL-TL (2023, May), 8(2): 61-71. DOI 10.30957/ijotl.v8i2.730.

A Comparative Analysis of Síkó and Nínlá as Occurring in Ifè Dialect and Their Variants, Nkó and Nlá in Standard Yorùbá Language

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Abstract

This study focuses on the descriptive modeling of Chomskyan linguistic analysis on **síkó** and **nínlá** as occurring in the Ife dialect of Yoruba language in variance with **ńkó** and **nlá** in the standard Yoruba. We argue that the basic form of **ń** in **ńlá** and **ńkó** is **ín** which is still traceable through **síkó** or **sínkó** and **nínlá** in Ifè dialect of Yorùbá language. We present the basic phonetic features of **ín** as in vowel, high, syllabic, nasal, and front. The loss of vowel, front, and high features produces the orthographical representation of **n** in **ńlá** and **ńkó** in the standard Yoruba. Our findings, therefore, serve as a solution to one of the fundamental issues in the grammar of Yoruba language which intuitively does not allow consonant clusters in syllabic formation. The language does not endorse a high tone to be the first syllable of a word with VCV sequence.

Keywords: *feature stability, syllabicity, grammaticalization, extension phrasal interaction, decategorization*

1. Introduction

Many works of Linguistic relevance have been conscientiously done on Ifè dialect of Yorùbá in the South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. (see Adéwólé 1996, 2011, 2014, 2018a, 2018b, Adékúnlé 1997, 2005, 2018a and 2018b, and many others). However, none of these aforesaid works on Ifè dialect tries to expatiate on the linguistic relevance of **síkó** which serves as an interrogative marker or **nínlá** which is an adjective in the dialect. Yusuf (1999) hints that adjectives in Yorùbá language are consonant initial, disyllabic, or multisyllabic, except **ńlá**. That is, **ńlá** violates the phonological linguistic characterization of adjectives in Yorùbá language. Also, **ńkó** as an interrogative market defiles an important basic phonological rule in Yorùbá language which does not allow the high tone to be the first syllable of any word with VCV sequence. It can only be feasible among the loan words in the language. Considering the afforested linguistic distinctive defilement peculiarities, we use this paper to delve into tracing the basic form of **ńlá** and **ńkó** as well compare

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them with their syntactic variance: **síkó/sínkó** and **nínlá** in Ifè dialect of Yorùbá language.

Asides, many notable Yorùbá scholars have retired their efforts to look into the basic formation of consonant syllabicity in Yorùbá Language in the recent past. The works of Courtenay (1969) Awóbùlúyì (1998) Owólabí (1989) and Bámgbósé (1990) briefly expressed their propositions on this lingering linguistic issue. It was Oyèláràn (1983 and 1987) and Adéwólé (2018a) that uses theoretical appraisal to establish their proposition on the basic form of the consonant syllabicity in Yorùbá Language. Oyèláràn's (1987) summarily traces the basic form of consonant syllabicity in the language to 'CV' sequence:

Adéwólé (2018a: 58 -59) cites the below examples from Oyèláràn (1983: 5) which claim that the underlined syllabic nasals in A are derived from the vowels underlined in B as in:

- i. A: Ìgbà ń mo yègò
 B: Ìgbà tí mo yègò
 Time which I lift mask "when I carry the mask"
- ii. A: ilé ń kọ
 B: ilé síkó
 Home be "How is home?"
- iii. A: Bí ònpa ò pa
 B: Bí òpipa ò pa
 What (Foc) harrower will harrow "if the harrower fails to plow"
- iv. A: kí ni ònkọ ó kọ?
 B: kí ni òkikọ ó kọ?
 What (foc) harrower will harrow?
 "What will the harrow?"
- v. A: Àjínde
 B: Àjídide
 "Resurrection"

He explained further that the examples in 'As' are derived from 'Bs' segmentally summarized as;

	1		2		3
i.	ń mo	<	í mo	<	tímo
ii.	ń kọ	<	í kọ	<	síkó
iii.	ònpa	<	òipa	<	òpipa
iv.	ònkọ	<	òikọ	<	òkikọ
v.	ńde	<	ide	<	dide

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That is, the first or intervocalic consonant is deleted in ‘1’, as appears in ‘2’; the vowel that follows the deleted consonant metamorphosis to a syllabic consonant in ‘3’. Based on Oyèláràn’s (1983) assumption, (Adéwolé 2018a: 59 – 63) advances postulations on how variants of progressive markers occur in Ifè and Èkìtì dialects of Yorùbá as in;

- i. Mo mí bọ - Ifè
- ii. Mè e lo – Èkìtì
- iii. Mò n bọ – Standard Yorùbá

Although Adéwolé (2018a: 62) mentioned Ìjẹ̀bù dialect he does not use any example from Ìjẹ̀bù dialect. Ìjẹ̀bù dialect uses ‘m’ or ‘un’ as a progressive marker. For example:

- i. Mòrn / ún wa (I am coming)
- ii. Wém / ún gbó (Are you listening?)
- iii. Emù / ùn lọ ọ (I will not go)

One could be inferred from the latest examples from Ìjẹ̀bù that contraction usually occurs between the pronoun in the subject position and the progressive marker. Adékúnlé (2001) explains that the basic form of nasal syllabic consonants must be traced back to high back nasal vowel **un** as occurring in Kétu (Anglophone) in Nigeria. Adékúnlé (2003: 107) argues that the presence of nasality feature as one of the inherent phonological features of the orthographic representation of the syllabic consonants in Yorùbá Language testifies to the presence of nasality feature in the basic form.

Furthermore, Adékúnlé (2018a: 72 - 75) explains that data collected from some Yorùbá dialects such as Ònkò, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ọ̀yọ́ (Ibadan) and Kétù (Anglophone) affirm the possibility of tracing the basic form of consonant syllabicity in Yorùbá Language to high nasal vowels, **un** or **in** as occurring in the aforesaid dialects of Yorùbá Language. This paper tends to re-emphasize our proposition on this latest position which incidentally is reflected in the use of **síkó** or **nínlá** in Ifè dialect as syntactic variances of **ńkó** and **ńlá** in the Standard Yorùbá. The first major clarification we wish to expand upon in this paper is the difference between **sínkó** and **síkó**. Ifè dialect uses **síkó** not **sínkó**.

2. ‘Sínkó’ and ‘Síkó’

One of the distinctive features of the Ifè dialect as claimed in (Adékúnlé, 2018b) is the occurrence of vowel denasalization after/s/ and /f/ in lexical comparative variance between the Ifè dialect and the Standard Yorùbá. This process occurs in the following examples:

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Ife Dialect	Standard Yorùbá	Gloss
i. ìsikú	ìsìnkú	burial ceremony
ii. esi	ẹsin	horse
iii. esisi	ẹsinsin	flies
iv. ẹfífí/ẹéfí	ẹfínfín/ẹéfín	smoke
v. fí kòkó	fín kòkó	spray cocoa tree with chemical for preservation

These aforestated lexical items occur in the below sentences in the Ife dialect:

- I Mèè ní í lọ re ibi ìsikú ẹyẹ rẹ (I will not attend the burial ceremony of his/her mother).
- ii. Bàbá rìgha / ria ní esi meji (Our father has two horses).
- iii. Esi ti pòjù níwájú ilé rìghan / rian (Flies are too much in front of their house).
- iv. A bèrẹ fífí Ìghan kòkó rìgha láàná (we started spraying our cocoa trees yesterday).
- v. Ẹéfí ti pòjù níbẹ (There was a tick smoke there).

Premise on the latest examples, Ifè dialect uses I after /s/ or /f/ while the Standard Yorùbá puts in after /s/ or /f/. Having established these phonological feet, we believe síkó in Ifè has its variant sìnkó in the basic formation in Standard Yorùbá. Based on this notable assumption, we shall be using sìnkó henceforth in this paper for clarification. However, we shall try to expand upon the theoretical base for this paper.

3. Literature Review

Our explanations in this study subsume under the linguistic characterization of two Linguistic theories Grammaticalization and Auto segmental theories. We use the two theories to make some linguistic clarifications that are very consequential for our submissions as well as to drive home our propositions.

3.1 Grammaticalization Theory

Haspelmath (1999: 1046) hints that for grammaticalization theory, it is an important assumption that change leading to the genesis of grammatical materials in natural languages is not random but takes place along certain paths. These paths are cross-linguistically replicable and exhibit a specific directionality... (The emphasis in italic is mine)

The paths can only be traced deeply from various linguistic hierarchies in historic perspectives. That is, one may need to defy into basic linguistic hierarchies such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantic clarifications to explain some puzzlings in linguistic analysis.

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Traugott (2012: 22) explains that “the theoretical status of grammaticalization processes of language change have been traditionally identified in historical linguistics.” She explained that this assertion was argued for by Joseph (2001). Traugott (2012: 20 – 21) therefore informed that:

Grammaticalization theory aims at providing explanations for similarities and differences of lexical and phrasal constituent structures in distinct languages in the world.

She submits that:

Grammaticalization theory is concerned with regularities in language use as they can be observed in spoken and written linguistics discourse on the one hand and in language change on the other.

About the latest assumption, Traugott (2012: 23) tries to inform that Language change serves as the basis for grammaticalization theory. Also, more importantly, Bernd and Heiko (2012: 401) claim that:

Grammaticalization theory is a theory to the extent that it offers an explanatory account of how and why grammatical categories arose and develop, and why they are structured the way they are.

Bernd and Heiko (2012: 401 – 423) present four major parameters that account for the process of grammaticalization of lexical items or categories:

- (1) Extension i.e. the rise of new grammatical meanings when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts (context-induced reinterpretation).
- (2) Desemanticization (or semantic Bleaching), i.e., loss (or generalization) in meaning content.
- (3) Decategorialization, i.e. loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms.
- (4) Erosion (phonetic reduction) i.e.; loss in phonetic substance.

These aforesaid four parameters serve as the basis of our analysis of how **sínkó** and **nínlá** grammaticalized into **ńkó** and **ńlá** as occurring in the standard version of Yoruba Language.

3.2 Auto-segmental Theory

The beauty of Auto-segmental phonological theory is the ability of its adherent to separate the segmental and supra-segmental tiers. This assertion emanates from the claims by the protagonists of this theory that each phonetic feature that makes up the production of a segment is independent to behave distinctively. It is no gainsaying that the Auto-segmental theory has its basis in Chomskyan Generative and Transformational theories but the theory discusses the phonetic realizations of the distinctive features of the phonemes more than the earlier theories

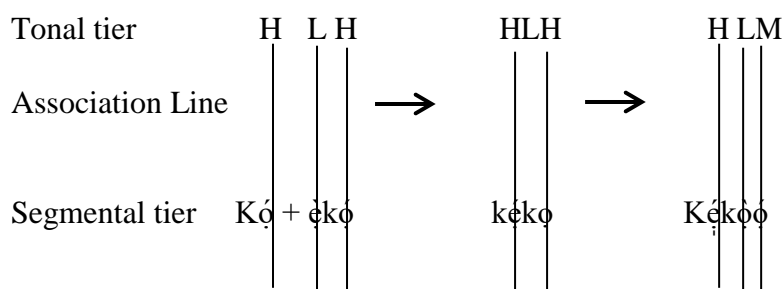
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on phonological changes.

The protagonists of Autosegmental theory such as Goldsmith (1976) and Pulleyblank (1988: 235 - 237) hint that a lot of evidence abounds in languages in the world that some phonetic distinctive features may suffer deletion while some other remaining phonetic distinctive features remain impervious to the deletion. Also, a tone of a phoneme may be deleted while the phoneme remains. (see Pulleyblank, 1986).

In that wise, the phoneme has to inherit another neighboring tone leftward or rightward. The neighboring tone, as claimed by Goldsmith (1976) will be docked on the toneless phoneme through the Association Line. The Association line joins the tonal tier with the segmental tier. For example, in Yorùbá Language, the below example captures the proposition.



(see Oyebade 1998: 35)

Note that the middle sequence tone (low tone), inherits another phoneme different from its basic phonetic phoneme.

Also, the theory accounts for the changing of /l/ to /n/ in morpho-phonological interactions as in *oní + owó* → *olówó* (owner of money). Considering the phonetic features of the duo phonemes /l/ and /n/ as in

/l/ + oral + alveolar + voiced + sonorant + consonant	and	/n/ + nasal + alveolar + voiced + sonorant + consonant
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The following examples attest to the changes between /l/ and /n/ intervocalically in the morpho-phonological phrasal interaction:

Oní + owó	→	olówó	(owner of money)
Oní + asọ	→	alásọ	(owner of clothes)
Oní + èṣẹ	→	ẹlẹṣẹ	(sinner)

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Oní + ọwó → ọlówó (owner of land)
Oní + ewé → eléwé (owner of leave)

We, therefore, adopt Auto-segmental analysis to explain how **sínkó** and **nínlá** in Ife dialect are grammaticalized into **ńkó** and **nlá** as occurring in the standard Yoruba Language.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. How “sínkó” and “nínlá” changes to “ńkó” and “nlá”

To ease our discussion, we shall try to analyze them one after the other as in **sínkó** and **ńkó**.

4.1.1. Sínkó and ńkó

One major syntactic inference we need to mention is that **sínkó** and its variance **ńkó** are both adjectives in Ifè dialect and standard Yoruba respectively. Also, we should be cognizant that only **nlá** does not have consonant initial among basic adjectives in standard Yoruba as reflected in Bámgbóşé's (1990: 123) examples. Bámgbóşé (1990 : 123) lists the examples of basic adjectives as : kékeré, nlá', dúdú, rere, pupa, púpò, funfun, díè, gbogbo.

Sínkó' which remains the variance of **síkó** in the Ife dialect does not violate the phone-syntactic rule identified above. Two major linguistic processes account for the changing of **sínkó** to **ńkó**. They are:

- i. deletion of the first phoneme **s**.
- ii. 'in' grammaticalized into **ń** in **ńkó**.

The first process does not need verbose discussion. The second process 'ii' would be expanded upon in our next discussion.

4.1.1.1. Grammaticalization of 'in' to 'ń' as occurring in 'nlá' in Standard Yorùbá

Among the four major parameters viz: Extension, Desemantization, Decategorization, and Erosion as proposed by Bernd and Heiko (2012) for grammaticalization of lexical items, the three, Extension, Decategorization, and Erosion are very relevant to this paper. To start with, let's consider the phonetic features of 'in'.

a. The Phonetic Features of 'in'

We deliberately suspend discussion on the basic high tone of this "in" in the lexicon in this study. This decision aligns with the claims of the adherents of the Auto-segmental theory that the tonal tier operates distinctively independent of the segmental tier. The phonetic features of **in** are:

- + Vowel
- + Syllabic
- + Nasal

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- + High
- + Front

Among the aforelisted five phonetic features of **it**; if three features – vowel, high, and front phonetic features were permuted, it will be led to the Decategorization of ‘in’ and eventually led to the Extension. The occurrence of Decategorisation and Extension will automatically lead to Erosion i.e. Loss in phonetic substance.

Assuming that **in** the lost part of its phonetic features – vowel, high and front in the diachronic phonological overview of Yoruba language, the remaining basic phonetic features – syllabic and nasal must be orthographically represented. The orthographic representation for nasal and nasality in Yoruba language is /n/. This is reflected in the orthography of nasal vowels as in:

Phonetic	orthography
/ĩ/	‘in’
/ĕ/	‘en’
/ã/	‘an’
/ũ/	‘un’
/õ/	‘on’

Therefore, /n/ is the orthographic representation of phonetic nasal features in Yorùbá language.

Also, the basic orthographic representation of syllabicity feature in Yorùbá language is tone. That is why the number of tones on any word, phrase, or sentence must correspond with the number of syllables in the word, phrase, or sentence. Premise on these native language speaker intuitions, the syllabic nasal consonant ‘n’ as in **ńkó**, which serves as the variance of **sínkó** emerges as a form of grammaticalization process in the surface realization of syntactic construction in Yorùbá Language. Therefore, we disagree with Bámgbóṣé’s (1990: 123) sub-division of **nlá** as one of the underived and basic adjectives in the Yorùbá Language.

Furthermore, the aforestated analysis has expanded the Decategorisation influences of Bernd and Heiko (2012) beyond “loss in morphosyntactic properties to include loss of phonological properties. **Changing of “nínlá” in Ifè Dialect to “nlá” as occurring in Standard Yorùbá.** Reiteratively, the changing of **nínlá** in Ifè dialect to **nlá** in the Standard Yorùbá as an adjective takes the same linguistic processes as **sínkó** in Ifè dialect to **nkó** in the standard Yorùbá.

- i. Delete the first syllable **ní**.
- ii. **in** grammaticalization to **n**.

In other to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same processes already identified in this paper, we deem it fit to say that our previous explanations capture our discussions in the second sub-divisions.

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5. Conclusion

Following suggestions from notable scholars such as Hein and Reh (1984:86), Oyèláràn (1976) Bámgbósé (1986) and Awóbùlúyì (1998) among others on the importance of a systematic comparison of dialects for the reconstruction of some vaguely established position in the grammar of standard Yorùbá, this study tends to trace the basic morpho-phonological studies of **ńkó** and **ńlá** as words that seemingly violate some linguistic peculiarities of Yorùbá language in the syntactic occurrences. To the best of our knowledge, no previous literature have attempted to look into the lexical anomalies of the two words. Based on the usage of **síkó** and **nínlá**, Ifè dialect serves as the variance of **ńkó** and **ńlá** in Standard Yorùbá. The study clarifies some linguistic puzzlings which incidentally account for **sínkó** and **nínlá** as underlying forms of **nkó** and **nlá** in Standard Yorùbá.

The study tries to inform through linguistic clarifications on the transformational processes, in line with the grammaticalization theoretical model of Bernd and Heiko (2012) to establish our position. Auto-segmental phonological analysis was adopted to present a clear picture of our position which makes the work novel in the literature of Yoruba studies.

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