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NPI-Licensing: The case of *N-kankan* in Yoruba

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Abstract
This paper examines the distribution and licensing conditions of the N-kankan type of Negative Polarity Item (NPI) in Yoruba within the framework of Strawson-Downward Entailment (von Fintel 1999, 2001). While prior accounts (e.g., Adebayo 2018, Ajiboye 2024) have examined the morphosyntactic and semantic analyses of Yoruba NPIs, their semantic licensing conditions with reference to Strawson-Downward Entailment remain underexplored. We argue that the N-kankan NPI displays a licensing pattern not reducible to classic Downward Entailing (DE) environments, as evidenced by its acceptability in the scope of focus constructions, adversative predicates, and antecedents of conditionals. These contexts are known in the literature as challenges for Ladusaw's (1979) DE-based theory of NPI licensing. This work shows that Yoruba focus-marked constructions can license NPIs independently of overt negation or DE operators and that adversative predicates and superlatives require a contextual ordering of alternatives to support Strawson-valid inferences. Thus, this paper shows that the distribution and licensing conditions of the N-kankan NPIs in Yoruba support a Strawson-DE framework as an empirically adequate model for capturing the cross-linguistic distributions and licensing conditions of NPIs.

Keywords: Strawson-Downward Entailment, adversative predicates, De-Operators, cross-linguistics distribution, focused-marked construction

1.0 Introduction

The distribution of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) is of great interest to researchers interested in formal linguistics (e.g. Klima, 1964; Ladusaw, 1979; Linebarger, 1987; Zwarts, 1995; Giannakidou, 1997; von Fintel, 1999, 2001). Within this tradition, NPIs have been argued to be sensitive to specific semantic environments, most notably is the downward entailing (DE) contexts, which argues that the licensing of NPIs, like *any*, *ever*, or *at all,* depends on the monotonicity properties of their linguistic environments (Ladusaw, 1979; Zwarts, 1995). However, cross-linguistic studies have revealed environments that are problematic to this generalization. This has led to the modifications of the theories of NPI to include nonveridicality (Zwarts, 1998; Giannakidou, 1997) and Strawson downward entailment (von Fintel, 1999, 2001).

The semantics of NPI is, however, little studied in Yoruba (Niger-Congo). Koch (2005) presents one of the few semantic investigations by proposing a unified account of English *any* and the Yoruba *N-kí-N* construction. He argues that *N-kí-N* in Yoruba, like *any* in English, supports three interpretations, i.e., Negative Polarity, Free Choice, and the so-called "Not Just" reading. He also demonstrates that the Free Choice use in Yoruba requires an overt

modal, unlike English where it can be licensed generically through covert operators like GEN. Koch further argues that the universal force of the generic "free choice" *any* in English comes from the combination of covert GEN and x (i.e GEN + x = x) but the free choice any in Yoruba is argued to be licensed by an explicit modality as seen in 1a, and the absence of an overt modal will either result in a "bad NP" reading or in ungrammaticality as seen in 1b. For clarity, by "bad NP", Koch refers to a separate interpretation that words of N-ki-N pattern have in Yoruba when they don't have the "any" interpretation. In this sense, the words modify the reduplicated noun with the adjective "bad", resulting in the name "badNP" as in (1b) below.

(1a). *Adé lè ṣe iṣẹ́kíṣẹ́*
Ade MOD do any-job.
"Ade can do any job."

(1b) . *Adé ṣe iṣẹ́kíṣẹ́ fún mi*
Ade do bad-job for me
"Ade did a bad job for me."

Similarly, Ajiboye (2024) examines the syntax and semantics of NPIs of *N-K-N* and *N*-kankan types in Yoruba. He asserts that these NPIs occur in affective contexts such as negation, modal auxiliaries, yes/no question, restrictive relative ti clauses, ju comparatives and imperative clauses. He further claims that while the two NPI types derive their interpretation from the environment of a negation and affective contexts, the NPI of N-kankan type can have both indefinite and free choice interpretation, and also occurs in negation, conditional, and yes/no question.

Adebayo (2018) studies the morphosyntactic composition of Yoruba NPIs within Collins and Postal's (2014) framework. He identifies two productive morphological strategies in Yoruba for forming the *any-NP* type of NPI: *N-k-N* and *N-kankan*. Stating that Yoruba forms NPI either by the *N-k-N* or *N-kankan* pattern as in 2a&b below:

(2a). *Wálé kò rí ẹnikẹ́ni*
Wale NEG see anybody
"Wale did not see anybody."

(2b). *Wale kò rí ẹnìkankan*
Wale NEG see anybody
"Wale did not see anybody."

None of these studies investigates the semantics of NPIs in Yoruba within the framework of Strawson-Downward Entailment. Therefore, the present work turns to the *N-kankan* type of NPI by providing a formal account using the framework of Strawson-Downward Entailment (von Fintel 1999, 2001), which refines Ladusaw's (1979) DE theory by incorporating presuppositional context and pragmatic felicity conditions. The focus is on environments traditionally considered problematic for classic DE approaches: the scope of *only*, complements of adversative predicates, superlatives, and antecedents of conditionals. These environments have been discussed extensively in the literature on English and other languages (e.g., Linebarger 1987; Atlas 1993; Horn 1996; Giannakidou 1997) but remain untested in the context of Yoruba NPIs.

This work proceeds by giving a general introduction to the extant works on the study of NPI in Yoruba and the general overview of works on the distribution and licensing of NPIs

within the tradition of downward entailing environment in section 1. In section 2, we give a brief overview of Ladusaw (1979) and state the problematic environments to this framework by introducing von Fintel's (1999, 2001) Strawson- Downward Entailment and how this rescues Ladusaw's DE. We proceed in section 3 by giving an account of the semantics of *Kan* in Yoruba, looking at various readings and distributions of this morpheme in Yoruba as it also appears in other environments other than NPIs, such as indefinite construction, as an existential quantifier, as a homophone to the numeral *kan "one",* and as a fragment of the *Nkankan* type of NPI. Section 4 examines the licensing environments of *N-kankan NPI,* most specifically, the licensing environments that are problematic to Ladusaw's DE as contained in von Fintel (1999).

2.0 An overview of Ladusaw (1979) and von Fintel (1999, 2001)

The phenomenon of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) has been an important topic in semantics, particularly concerning the environments that license their occurrence. Ladusaw (1979) and von Fintel (1999, 2001) have significantly shaped our understanding of NPI licensing by introducing and refining the concepts of Downward Entailment (DE) and Strawson Downward Entailment (SDE), respectively. This section reviews Ladusaw's (1979) and von Fintel (1999, 2001) .

To account for the licensing environments of NPIs, Ladusaw (1979) proposed that NPIs are licensed in environments characterized by Downward Entailment (DE). An operator or context is in downward entailing if it allows inference from sets to their subsets; that is, from a general statement to a more specific one. For example, the statement *Nobody saw a bird* entails *Nobody saw a sparrow*, because sparrows are a subset of birds. This property of DE provided a unified explanation for various NPI licensing environments, including negation, conditional antecedents, and restrictive clauses of universal quantifiers. However, subsequent works identified environments where NPIs appear despite the absence of DE properties. Such problematic environments include the scope of "only," adversative predicates, superlatives, and certain conditional constructions.

2.1 Downward Entailingness (DE)

In the definition used by von Fintel (1999): A function f of type $<\sigma,\tau>$ is downward entailing (DE) iff for all x, y of type σ such that $x => y. f(y) => f(x)$.

In simple term, the expression "a function *f* of type $<\sigma,\tau>$ is downward entailing" means that we are looking at a kind of linguistic environment where you can replace a more general or broader idea (x) with a more specific or narrower one (y), and the overall meaning still holds or even becomes stronger. The notation "$x => y$" means that *x* includes or implies *y*. For example, "ate fruit" includes "ate apples," so "ate fruit => ate apples." The function *f* represents a part of a sentence, like a question or a negative phrase, that takes in a meaning (x or y) and gives back a truth value (true or false). According to the definition, *f* is downward entailing if, whenever *x* implies *y*, then applying *f* to *y* (the narrower idea) will imply applying *f* to *x* (the broader one).

In (3a) below, the NPIs *ever and any* are licensed by *only* in an environment that is clearly not downward entailing. This is clearer in 3b, where *any* is replaced with vegetable to test for the direction of entailment and in 3c where vegetable (a set) is replaced with kale (a subset) and the conclusion shows that an entailment does not hold in that environment,

showing that the environment where *ever* and *any* appear in 3a does not have a downward entailing property as predicted by Ladusaw's DE.

(3a) Only Johnever ate any kale for breakfast
(3b) Only Johnate vegetables for breakfast.
- (3c) ⇒Only Johnate kale for breakfast.

This and many related problems inspired von Fintel (1999) to refine entailment in NPI licensing to account for the problematic environments while protecting the basic idea that NPIs are licensed in downward entailing environments. Thus, building on Ladusaw's DE approach, von Fintel (1999) introduced the concept of Strawson Downward Entailment (SDE) as a modification to account for the environments that are problematic to DE. Fintel's refinement incorporates the role of presuppositions in entailment relations such that an operator is SDE if, when its presuppositions are satisfied, it behaves as a DE operator. For instance, the focus-sensitive operator "only" presupposes the truth of its complement. In the sentence "Only John ate anything," the presupposition is that John ate something, and within this context, "only" creates an SDE environment that licenses the NPI "anything." von Fintel's SDE framework thus accounts for NPI licensing in environments that are not strictly DE but become DE when their presuppositions are taken into account such as conditionals and superlatives.

Building upon his 1999 work, von Fintel (2001) explored the implications of SDE in the context of counterfactual conditionals. He argued that the licensing of NPIs in the antecedents of counterfactuals can be explained by considering the presuppositional nature of these constructions. Specifically, counterfactuals presuppose the falsity of their antecedents; when this presupposition is satisfied, the antecedent creates an SDE context that can license NPIs. This refinement further illustrates the applicability of the SDE framework in accounting for NPI licensing across diverse linguistic environments. The modified version of the downward entailment as presented by von Fintel is highlighted below:

2.2 Strawson Downward-Entailingness

A function f of type <σ, τ> is Strawson-DE iff for all x, y of type σ such that x ⇒ y and f (x) is defined: f(y) ⇒ f(x).

The idea in Strawson downward entailment is similar to the regular downward entailment, but with a clause: it only applies when the sentence or expression in question actually makes sense, that is, when it's *defined*. The notation "*f* of type <σ, τ>" means that *f* is a function (like a sentence or phrase) that takes some kind of meaning (*σ*) and gives back a truth value (*τ*). The symbol "*x* ⇒ *y*" means that *x* logically implies *y*. For example, "person who owns a dog" implies "person." According to this definition, *f* is Strawson-DE if, whenever *x* implies *y* and *f(x)* is defined (i.e., the sentence or phrase using *x* makes sense), then using the more specific *y* in place of *x* still preserves the meaning or implication: *f(y)* implies *f(x)*. This accounts for cases where certain background assumptions, like the existence or uniqueness of a referent, must be satisfied before a sentence is meaningful. This way, Strawson-DE captures downward entailment in contexts where presuppositions must first be met for a sentence to be interpretable.

von Fintel gave a comprehensive account to prove that Strawson downward entailment can account for the environments that are problematic to the original DE. An overview of Fintel's approach to each of the problematic environments is given below:

2.3 Only

Von Fintel's conceptualization of entailment with the defined presupposition of the conclusion allows us to account for contexts where "only" licenses NPIs, to account for the example presented in 5, we only need to assume that in a world where it is true that only John ate vegetable for breakfast, it is also strictly true that only he ate kale. Therefore, to figure out whether *only John* is downward entailing in the new sense, we need to check the validity of the following inference schema: Since we assume that *only John is P* will be defined *iff John is P* is true, we can spell out the schema as follows:

(4) P ⇒ Q
John is P
Only John is Q

.'. Only John is P

(5) Kale is a vegetable.
Additional premise: John ate kale for breakfast.
Only John ever ate any vegetables for breakfast.

.'. Only John ever ate any kale for breakfast.

2.4 Adversatives attitude predicates

Some predicates known as adversative predicates, like regret, be surprised, be amazed and be sorry, license NPI in their complement clauses. In addition to the problem of intervening predicate found in *only* above, adversative predicates throw more complication as they originally presuppose the truth of their complements. This simply means that in 6 below, Sandy knows for fact that Robbin bought a car. It will then be difficult to claim that Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robin bought a Honda civic even if we assume that there is an interfering presupposition where Sandy indeed knows in fact that Robin bought a Honda civic, it still doesn't guarantee that from *Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robins bought a car*, we can infer *that Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robin bought a Honda civic*. Von Fintel resolves this complication with an assumption that: The story that goes with it may be that Sandy really didn't want Robin to have a car, but among the cars Robin could have gotten, Sandy by far prefers the Honda Civic.

(6). Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robin bought any car.
Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robin bought a car.
Sandy is sorry/regrets that Robin bought a Honda Civic.

To address the complications posed by adversative predicates such as *be sorry* or *regret*, Von Fintel (1999) draws on insights from Kadmon and Landman (1993), who propose an analysis that connects the semantics of attitude verbs like *glad* and *sorry* to the modal verb *want*. Under their proposal, *glad that p* can be interpreted as roughly equivalent to *want that p*, while *sorry that p* corresponds to *want that not-p*. Given this, *want* is an upward-entailing operator, then *glad* inherits that upward entailment, while *sorry* becomes downward entailing—making it a potential licensor of NPIs.

Von Fintel further develops this analysis by invoking modal semantics, specifically the notion that *want* selects an ordering source: a set of propositions that reflect an agent's preferences across possible worlds. Within this framework, a world *w* is ranked as more

desirable than another world *w'* if all the propositions in the ordering source that are true in *w'*are also true in *w*, but not necessarily vice versa.

Applied to the case of adversative predicates, this means that the truth of an attitude report like "Sandy is sorry that Robin bought any car" presupposes a preference order in which worlds where Robin did not buy a car are ranked higher by Sandy than those in which he did. Suppose Sandy considers a world where Robin bought a Honda Civic to be worse than a world in which he bought no car at all, or at least a different kind of car. In that case, it follows that the more specific proposition, "Sandy is sorry that Robin bought a Honda Civic," is entailed within the broader preference structure. In this way, Von Fintel accounts for the NPI-licensing capacity of adversative predicates through the lens of modal semantics and ordered preference structures rather than through classical downward entailment alone.

2.5 Antecedents of conditionals

NPIs occur in the antecedent of conditionals. This environment is also not clearly a DE environment, in fact, Von Fintel acknowledges that this environment is considered nonmonotonic in modern philosophical literature because of the arguments that they don't validate strengthened antecedent as in 7. Von Fintel, however, argues that the strengthened antecedent can be Strawason – DE under the assumption that counterfactual sentences carry a presupposition about the context and if the modal horizon can be modified to be widen enough to be compatible with the strengthened antecedent. This idea is pursued more extensively by Von Fintel (2001), in which he argues that counterfactual sentences presuppose that certain conditions exist and that the examples that are supposed to show the invalidity of strengthening the antecedent involve context shifts.

(7 a). If I strike the match, it **will** light.

(7 b.) If I dip this match into the water and strike it, it **will** light.

2.6 Superlatives

The scope of superlative is another problematic environment for the theory of downward entailment licensing. The scope of superlatives licenses NPIs at least in English for "*ever"* , as seen in 8, even though this is not a straightforward, downward-entailing environment.

(8). Emma is the tallest girl to ever win the dance contest.

In 8, the NPI *ever* appears within a relative clause modifying the noun girl, itself embedded within the scope of the superlative clause *tallest.* To test for downward entailment in this context, consider the entailment: if Emma is the tallest girl to ever win the contest, it does not follow that she is the tallest teenage girl to ever win it. The inference fail because Emma could have won as an adult, thereby being taller than any teenager winner. The relative clause "to ever win the dance contest" restricts the domain of comparison to winners, but the presence of superlative blocks entailment from broader to narrower subsets within that domain. The consequence of this is that even though *ever* is licensed, this environment does not directly satisfy the requirements of the traditional DE accounts of NPI.

This can however be resolved by Strawson-DE because it does not require an inference to be valid in every case, but only in situations where the relevant parts of the sentence are meaningful, that is, where any presupposition are satisfied. In 8, the phrase *the tallest girl* presupposes that there exists a unique girl who is the tallest among the winners. Strawson-DE would argue for test within the contexts where this presupposition is already true. That is, what allows the NPI *ever* to be licensed in 8 is the satisfaction of an existing presupposition about the uniqueness of the tallest girl.

3. The Semantics and Distribution of *Kan* in Yorùbá

It is necessary to discuss the semantics of *Kan* in Yoruba, in addition to the fact that it is the form reduplicated in the *N-kankan* NPIs, it also occurs in other interesting environments such as in indefinite construction, as an existential quantifier, as a homophone to the numeral *kan "one",* and sometimes as a fragment of the *Nkankan* type of NPI.

3.1 *kan* as a specificity indefinite

Yoruba makes use of the specificity marker *kan* (Ajiboye, 2005) to construct indefinites as in the example in (9) and (10) below.

(9) *Ọmọ kan wá*
Child specific come
"A certain child came."

(10) *Mo rí Ọmọ kan*
1sg saw child specific
"I saw a certain child."

Adebayo (2018) observes that while this usage might look like we are dealing with something like the indefinite article "a/an" in English, this indefinite in Yoruba always connotes specificity, and it will rather not appear, for instance, in contexts where the English indefinite articles "a/an" wouldn't refer to any specific individual or item, as in 9. When *kan* is added in 10, the specificity denotation is introduced.

(11). *Olórin ni Daniel*
singer FOC Daniel
"Daniel is a singer"

(13). *Olórin kan ni Daniel*
singer specific FOC Daniel
"Daniel is a certain singer"

Interestingly, the *kan* form can also be used as a fragment of the *N-kankan* NPI, in this case, it wouldn't appear as the full form *kankan,* see (13). Just like the original *kankan* form, *kan* is licensed by a negation in (13), and an attempt to use it in the same sense without a negation in (14) derives the specific counterpart instead. This occurrence in a negative licensing environment reveals that this is indeed a fragment of the *N-kankan* NPI.

(13). *Aláwo kan ò jẹ́ ṣe irú ẹ̀*
priest any NEG ever do such it
"Any traditionalist will not ever do such"

(14) *Aláwo kan lè ṣe irú ẹ̀*
priest specific MOD do such it
"A specific priest can do such"

3.2 *Kan as a strict existential quantifier*

The specificity quality of *kan* is more obvious when it occurs with a plural marker *àwon* in a plural noun phrase. In addition to its specificity denotation in this case, it is also

interpreted as an existential quantifier, taking out some specific individuals from a larger set as demonstrated below:

(15). *Àwọn ọba kan wá*
Pl. king specific come
"Some certain kings came"

In this sense, *kan* is an existential quantifier which picks out a subset (kings that come) out of the larger set (kings). It has this interpretation in the context of a plural noun, maintaining its specificity quality and simultaneously functioning as an existential quantifier.

Another interesting thing to note is that *kan* is homophonous to the numeral "one" in Yoruba (see Adebayo 2018). This is demonstrated in the example in 16 below. As a response to the question, *how many children came?* (16) is felicitous as a perfect response.

(16). *Ọmọ kan wá*
Child one come
One child came.

The specific *kan* can also co-occur with numerals including the numeral *kan "one"* as in (17).

(17). *Mo kọ́ ilé kan sí Ìṣẹ́yìn*
I build house one in Ìṣẹ́yìn
"I built one certain house in Iṣẹ́yìn"

The examples in (18) taken from Adebayo (2018:12) also illustrates this co-occurrence possibility:

(18)a. *Mo ra ìwé kan kan lọ́wọ́ wọn.*
1SG buy book one specific in.hand 3PL
'I bought one certain book from them.'

b. *Mo ra ìwé méjì kan lọ́wọ́ wọn.*
1SG buy book two specific in.hand 3PL
'I bought two certain books from them.'

c. *Mo ra ìwé mẹ́ta kan lọ́wọ́ wọn.*
1SG buy book three specific in hand 3PL
'I bought three certain books from them.'

Notice that the specific *kan* though homophonous to the numeral *kan* occurs as the last item in the noun phrase, coming just after the numeral items in (17) and (18).

3.3 *Kan as a Fragment of an NPI*

In Yoruba, *kan* also appears alongside a noun as a shortened form of the reduplicated *N-kankan.* The NPI fragment N-*kan* although has a very limited distribution compared to its full *N-kankan* form, can also be licensed by negation as in (19), in the antecedent of conditionals as seen in (20), in polar questions as seen in (21). However, the NPI fragment *kan* cannot occur in the scope of only as in (22), as a complement of adversative verbs such as *surprise* as in (23). The example in 23), though not felicitous for 'any' NPI reading, is felicitous for reading '*kan*' as a specificity marker or numeral.

(19). *Aláwo kan ò jẹ́ ṣe irú ẹ̀*
priest any NEG ever do such it
"Any traditionalist will not ever do such"

(20). Bí ọmọ kan bá fi seré, jẹ́ kí n mọ̀
If child NPI.fragment if use play let me know
"Let me know if any child toys with it."

(21). Ǹjẹ́ ọjà kan wà nítòsí?
QM market NPI.fragment exist around
Is there any market around?

(22). *#Òjó nìkan ni ó ti jẹ ìṣu kan*
Ojo only FOC HTS PFT eat yam any""
"It is only Ojo that has ever eaten any yam."

(23). *Ó yà Òjó lẹ́nu pé Wálé ra ọkọ̀ kan*
HTS surprise Ojo in-mouth that Wale buy car any
"#It surprised Ojo that Wale bought any car"
"It surprised Ojo that Wale bought a specific car"
"It surprised Ojo that Wale bought a single car"

4.0 The Distribution of *N-kankan* in Yoruba.

The *N-kankan* type of NPI is so-called because it involves a Noun followed by *Kankan.* There is different proposals to the internal composition of this NPI-type, While Ajiboye (2024) treats *kakan* as an indivisible lexical item, Adebayo (2018) argues that *kankan* is a reduplicated form of the reduplication of the specificity item *kan.* However, what matters to this work is that there is an agreement that the semantics of *kankan* is associated with an existential quantifier (∃). This demonstrates its semantic relatedness to *kan which* has been described as a marker of specificity (i.e. as a specific indefinite marker) see Ajiboye (2005; 2024).

Adebayo (2018) indeed acknowledges that the *N-kankan* NPI is not popular in the literature. This further reflects the significance of pursuing the semantics of *N-kankan* NPIs. This NPI type survives in the scope of negation, and Fauconnier-Ladusaw's theory of a Downward Entailing Environment works perfectly well in that case since negation itself reverses entailment; it is naturally a downward entailing environment. We will, therefore, proceed to examine the distribution of NPI *N-kankan* in the environments that are problematic to Fauconnier-Ladusaw's DE by following von Fintel (1999). These environments include Only licensor, adversative verbs, superlatives, and antecedent of conditionals.

4.1 Only licensor

The scope of *Only* is one of the problematic NPI licensing environments that motivate von Fintel's Strawson downward entailment, as discussed earlier in this work. Interestingly, the *N-kankan* NPI just like the English *any* and *ever,* also occurs in the presence of *nikan "only"* in Yoruba. However, unlike in English, *N-kankan* NPIs are not licensed by *nikan "only"* in Yoruba; they are rather licensed by a focus marker *ni,* which consistently appears whenever the NPIs are used in context with *nikan "only".* An attempt to do away with the focus marker and construct an expression like what is attained in English yields an infelicitous expression, as seen in 24 below. In 25, the focus item is introduced alongside

"only", and the expression becomes felicitous. We further demonstrated in 26 that *N-kankan* NPI could occur without *nikan "only"* or a negation to demonstrate that the actual licensor is the focus marker and not 'only'.

(24). *#Òjó nìkan ti ra ọkọ̀ kankan rí*
Ojo only Perf. buy car any before
"Only Ojo has ever bought any car."

(25). *Òjó nìkan ni ó tìì ra ọ̀kọ̀ kankan rí*
Ojo only FOC HTS PFT buy car any before
"It is only Ojo that has ever bought any car"

(26) *Ọ̀sẹ̀ tó lọ ni mo ti lọ ibìkankan gbẹ̀yìn*
Week that go FOC 1sg PFT go anywhere last
"It was last week that I last went anywhere."

Thus, while both English and Yoruba allow NPIs to occur in sentences involving *only* licensors, the mechanism through which licensing occurs reveals a fundamental structural difference between the two languages. In English, *only* directly licenses NPIs such as *any* or *ever* when it scopes over the relevant constituent, as in "Only Ojo has ever bought any car" or "Only Ojo has ever eaten any cake." Here, the licensing is explained by von Fintel's (1999) notion of Strawson-Downward Entailment, which accounts for the presuppositional nature of *only*-phrases. In contrast, Yoruba does not permit *nikan* ('only') to license NPIs on its own. Instead, NPI licensing in Yoruba requires the co-occurrence of a focus particle *ni* as evident in 25, i.e., in the sentence *Ojó nikan ni ó tìì ra ọkọ̀ kankan rí* ('It is only Ojo that has ever bought any car'), showing that the focus marker *ni* is crucial for the grammaticality and licensing of the NPI *N-kankan* even with the presence of *nikan* 'only'. Without *ni*, the sentence becomes infelicitous despite the presence of *nikan*. This contrast underscores a key cross-linguistic difference between Yoruba and English. That is, while English relies on semantic presupposition and scope for *only* to license NPIs, Yoruba encodes focus structurally, requiring an overt syntactic marker to trigger licensing.

Interestingly, the scope of focus constructions is clearly not a downward-entailing environment, yet Yoruba permits NPI licensing in such contexts. Downward entailment refers to environments where inferences from a set to its subset hold (e.g., from "animal" to "dog"), a property typically required for NPI licensing under classical accounts such as Ladusaw (1979). However, focus constructions, which merely give prominence to a constituent for pragmatic or contrastive purposes, do not inherently reverse entailment direction. For instance, consider the sentence in 27: *Ọ́sẹ̀ tó lọ ni mo ti jáde lọ ibìkankan gbẹ̀yìn* ('It was last week that I last went anywhere'). Here, the focus particle *ni* marks *Ósè tó lọ* ('the week that passed') as the contrastive focus. The presence of *ibìkankan* ('anywhere'), a classic NPI, within the sentence is fully grammatical despite the fact that focus constructions do not create entailments from general to specific sets. That is, the sentence does not entail that "It was a specific weekday that I went somewhere," nor can one infer a narrower proposition that would satisfy DE conditions, e.g., "It was on Monday that I last went anywhere".

This shows that in Yoruba, the licensing of NPIs within focus constructions cannot be attributed to classical downward entailment. Instead, it supports the broader claim advanced by von Fintel (1999) that a presupposition-sensitive framework like Strawson Downward

Entailment better captures such environments. Yoruba thus offers crucial typological evidence that focus, while not DE, can still serve as a licensor of NPIs through alternative licensing mechanisms grounded in structure and presupposition rather than monotonicity. Thus, strawson downward entailment would account for the licensing of NPI in the scope of focusing by introducing an additional middle-ground presupposition as demonstrated in 28 for the expression in 27. By presupposing that *Ojo, in fact, bought a new car*, we can reliably claim that "It is only Ojo that bought any car", Strawson entails ", It is only Ojo that bought a new car", as schematized in 28.

(28). Presupposition ⇒ Òjó ra ọkọ̀ tuntun "ojo bought a new car"
Òjó nìkan ni ó tíì ra ọkọ̀ Kankan rí "It is only Ojo that has ever bought any car"

Òjó nìkan ni ó tíì ra ọkọ̀ tuntun kankan "It is only Ojo that has ever bought any new car"

In 28 above, Òjó nìkan ni ó tíì ra ọkọ̀ kankan ('It is only Ojo that has ever bought any car'), the NPI ọkọ̀-kankan is licensed even though both the focus marker "ni" and only licensor "nìkan " do not support inference from broader sets to subsets and are therefore not a classical DE operator. The key to the licensing lies in the presupposition that Ojo did, in fact, buy a car. Once this presupposition is accepted (i.e., Òjó ra ọkò tuntun 'Òjó bought a new car'), it becomes possible to Strawson-entail a more specific statement like Òjó nìkan ni ó tíì ra ọkọ̀ tuntun kankan ('It is only Ojo that has ever bought any new car'). Although this entailment would not hold under classical DE logic, it is valid under Strawson entailment because the inference is truth-preserving relative to the presupposed context. Thus, Yoruba focus constructions exemplify how NPI licensing can be derived from presuppositional inferences rather than monotonic entailment.

4.2 N-kankan NPI in the Complement of Adversative Verbs

Adversative predicates such as *regret*, *be surprised*, or *be sorry* pose a well-known challenge for classical theories of NPI licensing. These predicates are not downward entailing in the traditional sense because they presuppose the truth of their complements. Nevertheless, NPIs within their complement clauses are often felicitous. This demonstrates that something other than classical downward entailment must be at work. This section explores how this phenomenon plays out in Yoruba, specifically with the N-*kankan* NPI.

The *N-kankan* NPI occurs in the complement of the adversative verbs as evident in 29a, where the NPI ọkọ̀-*kankan* ('any car') occurs in the embedded clause under the adversative predicate *yà lénu* ('surprised'). From a classical DE perspective, this is problematic: the sentence presupposes that Wale did buy a car, and such environments do not typically support entailments from more general to more specific propositions. That is, "*Wale bought any car* in" 29a does not entail *Wale bought a Honda* in 29b, which is a subset relation required for DE.

(29)a. *Ó yà Òjó lẹ́nu pé Wálé ra ọkọ̀ Kankan*
"It surprised Ojo that Wale bought any car"

(29)b. *Ó ya Òjó lẹ́nu pé Wálé ra Honda.*
"It surprised Ojo that Wale bought a Honda."

However, under Strawson-Downward Entailment, this structure is interpreted differently. The presupposition here is the same as in 29a, that Wale did buy a car. Now, assuming a context in which Ojo did not expect Wale to buy a car at all, or at least not a specific kind of car. We can say that Ojo is surprised about a more specific event (*buying a Honda*), and this is licensed by the broader presupposition that he bought a car. In this case, the inference from (29a) to (29b) becomes valid in a Strawson sense: the truth of the more specific clause is conditionally entailed, given that the presuppositions of the broader clause are satisfied.

This aligns with Kadmon and Landman's (1993) view that adversative verbs encode preference structures over possible worlds. In this framework, *being surprised that p* can be understood as a mismatch between expected and actual worlds. So, if Ojo expected Wale to buy no car or a different kind of car but instead Wale bought a Honda, then *Ojo is surprised that Wale bought any car* Strawson-entails *Ojo is surprised that Wale bought a Honda*, given that the latter is more specific and the presuppositional background supports the entailment. The inference is formalize in 30.

(30). ~~*Ojo did not expect Wale to buy a Honda*~~ Implicit contextual perspective.
Wale bought a Honda Presupposition from the conclusion.
Ojo is surprised that Wale bought any car. Premise
∴ *Ojo is surprised that Wale bought Honda*.

This logic shows that the NPI *ọkọ̀-kankan* is licensed not because the adversative verb creates a DE environment but because the inference from the embedded clause is truth-preserving under the presupposed context. Thus, Yoruba supports the broader claim in strawson's DE that NPI licensing must account for presupposition-sensitive environments like adversatives.

4.3 NPIs in the Restrictor of Comparative-Superlative Morpheme

Superlative and comparative constructions have long presented challenges for classical Downward Entailment (DE) theories of NPI licensing. While some comparative constructions do align with DE environments and can license NPIs, superlative environments often do not, yet NPIs are still found within them in many languages. In this section, I examine how Yoruba treats NPIs in both comparative and superlative constructions.

In Yoruba, comparative and superlative adjectives are marked with the same item, the free morpheme *jù* (more, most) followed by the particle "lọ" (than). NPIs are felicitous in the restrictor of this item in what is clearly a comparative predicative in 34.

(31). *Òjó l-ówó jù ẹnì-kankan nínú wọn lọ.*
"Ojo has more money than anyone among them." Lit: *"Ojo is richer than any of them."*

In this comparative construction, the NPI *ẹnì-kankan* ('anyone') is licensed naturally. This is expected because comparatives are generally downward, entailing in their complement positions. The downward entailment property of the complement position of comparatives is illustrated in 32.

(32)a. *Ènìyàn gbọ́n jù* ***ẹranko*** *lọ.*
"Humans are wiser than animals."
b. ⇒ *Ènìyàn gbọ́n jù* ***ajá*** *lọ*

"Humans are wiser than dogs."

This example illustrates that the complement of comparatives in Yoruba is naturally DE. That is, from "Ojo is richer than any animal," it naturally follows that "Ojo is richer than any dog" (since dog is a subset of animal).

Similarly, Yoruba licenses the N-*kankan* NPIs in relative clause-modified superlative constructions as in 31.

(33). *Òjó ni akẹ́kọ̀ tó ga jù tó tíì jẹ ẹ̀bùn-kankan rí.*
"Ojo is the tallest student to have ever won any gift."

The licensing of *kankan* here can be explained through the Strawson Downward Entailment: the sentence presupposes that there is a set of students who have won gifts, and Ojo is the tallest among them. Once this presupposition is accepted, the environment supports inferences from "won a gift" to "won a specific gift" (e.g., a book, a bicycle), thereby creating a Strawson-DE context that licenses *kankan*.

4.4 *N-kankan* NPI in the antecedent of conditionals

The NPI *N-kankan* is licensed in the antecedent of conditionals, as seen in 34, where the NPI *omo-kankan* ('any child') is licensed in the antecedent of an if-clause.

(34)a. *Bí ọmọ-kankan bá ṣeré débẹ̀, mà á mọ̀*
"If any child played with it, I will know.

(34)b. *Bí ọmọ-kankan bá ṣeré débẹ̀ lẹ́yìn mi, mà á mọ*
"If any child played with it in my absence, I will know.

This provides evidence that conditionals in Yoruba serve as productive licensing environments for NPIs. For instance, in *Bí ọmọ-kankan bá ṣeré débẹ̀, màá mọ̀* ('If any child plays with it, I will know') and *Bí ọmọ-kankan bá ṣeré débẹ̀ lẹ́yìn mi, màá mọ̀* ('If any child plays with it in my absence, I will know'), the NPI is licensed within a hypothetical context introduced by the conditional particle *bí*. Under SDE, conditional antecedents are analyzed in terms of their presupposed modal base, i.e., a set of possible worlds in which a certain condition might hold. Given this presupposition, the antecedent clause licenses NPIs because it supports entailments from more general conditions (e.g., any child playing) to more specific ones (e.g., a particular child playing) if the presupposition is satisfied.

The addition of adverbial modifiers like *lẹ́yìn mi* ('in my absence') in 34b does not disrupt this inference pattern but rather constrains the modal base further and shows that 34a entails 34b. Thus, these examples illustrate how NPI licensing in conditional antecedents is best explained not solely by monotonicity but by a presupposition-sensitive model like the Strawson Downward Entailment approach.

5. Conclusion

This work examined the semantics and licensing conditions of the *N-kankan* type of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in Yoruba within the framework of Strawson-Downward Entailment (von Fintel 1999, 2001). This study has shown that Yoruba NPIs are licensed not only in the canonical downward entailing contexts but also in environments that challenge the standard DE framework. These include focus constructions, adversative predicates, superlatives, and conditional antecedents. In such contexts, the data demonstrate that the

traditional Fauconnier-Ladusaw account (1979) is insufficient, as these environments are not strictly downward entailing in the classical sense. This work has shown that von Fintel's notion of Strawson-Downward Entailment provides a more robust explanation for the licensing of *N-kankan* in these environments by taking presuppositional content and context sensitivity into account. The key to the analysis in this work is (i) examining the semantics and distribution of the specificity determiner *kan* (ii) examining the licensing of the *N-kankan* in the environments that are problematic to the downward entailment theory (iii) adopting von Fintel's Strawson Downward Entailment to account for the licensing of *N-kankan* in the problematic environments.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELICS OF VOWEL HARMONY IN ÌGBÓMÌNÀ AND MỌ̀BÀ DIALECTS OF YORÙBÁ

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Abstract
Ìgbómìnà and Mọ̀bà dialects are both dialects of Yorùbá language, both dialects show relics of the vowel harmony system posited for proto-Yorùbá. This study Investigates and describes the relics in the two dialects, revealing that whereas the two dialects show relics of vowel harmony feature, they differ in what remains as relics in them. Data on Ìgbómìnà dialect was sourced from Òmù-Àrán and Ọ̀ra communities, while data on Mọ̀bà dialect was sourced from Ọ̀tùn-Èkìtì and Igógo-Èkìtì. The study is descriptive in orientation, pieces of data are presented, analyzed and discussed to reflect similarities and differences in the relics of vowel harmony in the two dialects. The study reveals that even when the two dialects have the same number of vowels, they differ in the relics they manifest. The study reveals that whereas one dialect shows relics in the operation of nouns that have VCV structure only, the other shows relics not only in nouns that have a VCV structure, but also across morpheme in some grammatical constructions. The study contributes to knowledge in the field of dialectology by revealing a major difference in the manifestation of relics of vowel harmony system in Yorùbá dialects.

Key words: dialects, vowel harmony, relics of vowel harmony, dialectology, proto-Yorùbá

Introduction

Proto-Yorùbá is reported in the literature to have operated a full vowel harmony system with a ten-vowel system that falls into two harmonic sets (Adetugbo 1967, Capo 1982, Abíọdun and Sànúsí 2001). Vowel harmony is a phonological feature in human language whereby vowels fall into two harmonic sets based on shared phonetic features; vowels that share similar feature(s) usually co-occur to the exclusion of vowels that lack the feature(s). Scholars reveal that a number of African languages that include Ewe and Akan (Clements 1974, 1976), Ogori (Chumbow 1982), Ebira (Ihionu 1985) Igede (Abíódún 1991) operate a complete vowel harmony. Vowels in these languages fall into two harmonic sets on the basis of the position of tongue root. Vowels produced with advance tongue root fall into one harmonic set, while those that are produced with retracted tongue root fall into another harmonic set.

Yorùbá language scholars are unanimous in their claim that the oldest form of Yorùbá language operated a full vowel harmony system (Adétùgbò 1967, Akínkúgbe 1976, Oyèláran 1973). The oldest form is posited to have operated full vowel harmony systems, whereby vowels fall into two harmonic sets with no overlap. In present-day Yoruba, there are two types of vowel harmony constraint: full/complete and partial harmonic system. Whereas dialects in the Yoruba Central Dialect group operate a complete vowel harmony system, all the other dialects operate a partial vowel harmony system (Bámgbóse 1976, Fresco 1976, Capo 1982, Abíódún and Sànúsí 1999). One very important observation that is relevant to

this study is that while those dialects that operate a complete vowel harmony system operate a nine-vowel system in their present-day vowel system, those hat operate a partial vowel harmony system operate a seven-vowel system.

The present study focuses on two Yorùbá dialects that operate a seven-vowel system, but displays different forms of harmonic constraints that represent relics of the oldest form of the harmonic system that operated in the proto-form. The two dialects display relics of the system in different ways. As will be shown in study, vowel co-occurrence restriction is limited to [e/o] not co-occurring with [ẹ/ọ] in VCV structures (vowel-consonant-vowel) with no evidence of harmony across morpheme in Ìgbómìnà dialect. However Mọ̀bà dialect also forbids [e/o] from co-occurring with [ẹ/ọ], but also operates harmony across morpheme in some grammatical constructions. The implication of this is that relics of vowel harmony constraints are much more elaborate in Mọ̀bà dialect than in Ìgbómìnà dialect.

2.0 Ìgbómìnà and Mọ̀bà dialects

Ìgbómínà dialect belongs to the North-East Yorùbá dialect group along with other dialects that include Ọ̀yọ́, Ọ̀ṣun, Ìbọ̀lọ́, Àwórì, Ẹ̀gbádò (Awobuluyi 1998, Adeniyi 2005). The dialect is spoken in some parts of Ọ̀sun State and some parts of Kwara State. Communities that speak the dialect in Ọ̀sun State include Ìlá-Ọ̀ràngún, Òkè-Ìlá, Ọ̀ra. Communities that speak the dialect in Kwara State are many, they include Òmù-Àrán, Ìpetu, Àrándùn, Ẹ̀sìẹ́, Àjàsẹ́, Òmùpo, Ìsánlú-Ìsin, Roré, and many others. The researcher notes that more communities speak Ìgbómìnà dialect in Kwara State than in Ọ̀sun State. Ìgbómìnà dialect operates a seven-vowel system, viz: (i, e, o, ọ, i, a, ẹ). The vowels have free occurrence in the sense that they can occur in word-initial, word-medial and word-final positions, however, vowel [u] does not occur in word-initial position in this dialect, it only occurs in word-medial and word-final positions. A form of co-occurrence restriction is observed in the occurrence of [e/o] and [ẹ/ọ]. This study observes that in a vowel-consonant-vowel (VCV) structure, vowels [e/o] do not co-occur with vowels [ẹ/ọ]. This will be elaborated upon in section 4.1 below.

Mọ̀bà dialect belongs to the Central Yorùbá dialect group along with Àkúrẹ́, Èkìtì, Ifẹ̀ and Ìjẹ̀ṣà. The dialect is spoken in some parts of Èkìtì State and some parts of Kwara State. It is the local Yorùbá dialect spoken in Mọ̀bà Local Government Area of Èkìtì State. Communities in the Local Government Area include Ọ̀tùn-Èktì, Igógo-Èkìtì, Àaye-Ọjà, Erínmòpé-Èkìtì, Òsún-Èkìtì, Ọ̀sàn-Èkìtì, Urà-Èkìtì and Ùró-Ekiti. In Kwara State, the dialect is the local Yorùbá dialect in Òkè-Ẹ̀rọ́ Local Government Area. Communities in the Local Government Area include Ìlofà, Ìmọdẹ, Kájọ̀là, Èkàn, Ayédùn, Odò-Ọ̀wá and Ìlálẹ̀. Mọ̀bà dialect also operates a seven-vowel system, the vowels are also similar to those in Igbomina, they are [i u e o ẹ ọ a]. The vowels have free occurrence; they are free to occur in word-initial, word-medial and word-final positions. Unlike the case in Ìgbómìnà where [u] is restricted from occurring in word-initial position, Mọ̀bà dialect permits the vowel to occur in word-initial position as shown in the examples below:

(1)	usu	'yam'	ùjà	‘fight/misunderstanding/quarrrel’
	ulé	'house'	ugbó	‘bush/forest’
	ùyà	'suffering/poverty	ùkòkò	‘pot’
	urọ́	'lies'	ùdí	‘buttocks’
	ùgbà	'time'	ùdodo	‘navel’

As in the case found in Ìgbómìnà, vowels [e/o] are restricted from co-occurring with vowels [ẹ/ọ] in a VCV construction. However, unlike the case in Ìgbómìnà dialect, Mọ̀bà dialect displays relics of harmony across morpheme. This will be elaborated upon in section 4.2.

3.0 Research Method

All the Ìgbómìnà communities and Mọ̀bà communities are the population for this study. Ìgbómìnà dialect is homogenous except for a few differences in vocabulary and grammatical structure from one community to the other. The differences are so minor that only a careful and painstaking observer can notice them. This study relied on the Ìgbómìnà speech form spoken in Òmù-Àrán in Kwara State and Ọra in Ọ̀sun State. Mọ̀bà dialect is also homogenous, but one observes minor differences from one community to the other. The differences do not hinder mutual intelligibility. For the purpose of this study, the researcher relied on the speech form in Ọ̀tùn-Èkìtì and Igogo-Ekiti, both in Èkìtì State. The researcher selected five language helpers from each of the four communities visited for data collection, viz Òmù-Àrán and Ọ̀ra for Ìgbómìnà data, and Ọ̀tùn-Ekiti and Igogo-Ekiti for Mọ̀bà data. The informants are above sixty years of age, and they have lived in their respective communities all their lives. They speak their respective dialects fluently, without the influence of standard Yorùbá or any other speech form. The researchers designed a questionnaire that is directly relevant to vowel harmony system. This is necessary to ensure a purposive data base that satisfies the focus of the research. Pieces of data are presented and analyzed in the study. Findings are discussed to reflect the evidence of relics of vowel harmony in the two dialects, and also to show that the two dialects are different in their manifestation of the relics of the harmonic system

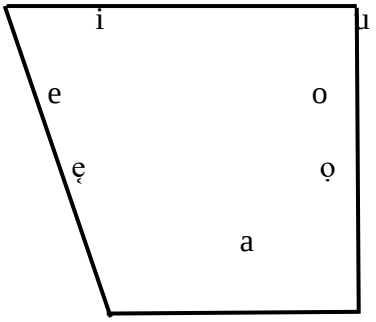
4.0 Relics of Vowel Harmony in Ìgbómìnà and Mọ̀bà dialects

This section presents a detail explanation of relics of the harmony constraint in each of the dialects under focus. Sub-section 4.1 focuses on the relics of vowel harmony in Ìgbómìnà dialect, while sub-section 4.2 focuses on Mọ̀bà dialect

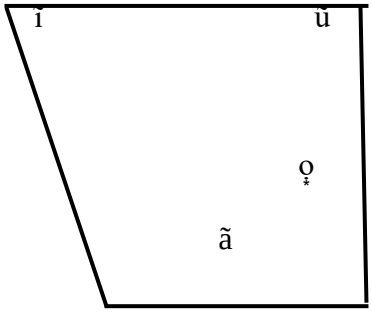
4.1 Relics of Vowel Harmony in Ìgbómìnà dialect

Igbomina dialect operates a seven-vowel system. There are seven oral vowels and their four nasalized counterparts. The vowels are presented below.

(2)a. Oral Vowels

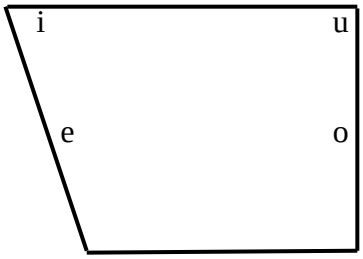


2b Nasalized Vowels

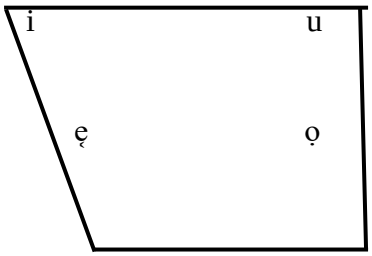


Both oral and nasal vowels follow the same pattern in the vowel co-occurrence restriction. The nasal counterparts of the oral vowels obey the same restriction in relation to vowel harmony constraint. The vowels in the dialect fall into two harmonic sets that accommodate overlapping vowels. The vowel harmony constraint is partial such that only limited vowels are restricted from co-occurring. The two harmonic sets based on tongue root position are presented below.

(3) a. Set (I) [+ATR]



3b. Set (II) [-ATR]



a a

The vowel charts above show that [i u a] are neutral because they appear in the two harmonic sets, the only vowels that suggest a sort of co-occurrence restriction are [e,o] which occur in Set I only, and [ẹ, ọ] which occur in Set II only. [i u a] are however free to co-occur with [e, o] and with [ẹ ọ]. The items illustrated below confirm the co-occurrence restriction demonstrated in the tables above.

(4). Set I. Set II

ejò	'snake'	ẹja	'fish'
erí	'head'	ọ̀rẹ́	'friend'
oṣù	'month'	ẹjọ́	'case/sheet'
òkú	'corpse'	ìtẹ́	'bed sheet'
ate	'hat'	irọ́	'lies'
àgbo	'herb'	abẹ	'pen knife'
ilé	'house'	àjọ	'thrift; assemble'
ijó	'dance'	ẹ̀kú.	'masquerade cloth'
eku	'rat'	ọdṹ	'year/festival
aku	'bead	ẹfũ	'chalk'
ajé	'wealth	ọtí	'wine'
aró	'dye'	ìjà	'fight/quarrel'

The items in (4) above confirm the harmonic sets in (3a, b) above. One notes that in the items (in 4) [e, o] do not co-occur with [ẹ, ọ]. That [e, o] do not co-occur with [ẹ, ọ] is a signal that the dialect once participated in the vowel harmony constraint in the oldest form of the language. The constraint that disallows the occurrence is interpreted as evidence of relics of complete vowel harmony constraint that operated in the proto-form of the language. The items provided in (4) above are all VCV structures. One may ask about items that have VCVCV or a larger structure than VCV. The study shows that [e, o] are permitted to co-occur with [ẹ, ọ] in structures larger than VCV. The examples provided below confirm this.

(5)
ewúrẹ́	'goat'
odídẹrẹ́	'parrot'
orúkọ	'name'
èkùrọ́	'palm kernel'
èèbẹ	'peel (n)
èèwọ̀	'taboo'
òòrẹ̀	'porcupine'
òótọ́	'truth'
ooro	'morning'

The examples in (5) reveal that [e, o] and [ẹ, ọ] co-occur in the dialect. Different scholars that include Pulleyblani (1996) and Oyebade (2008) argue that the items in (5) show that (i, u) are opaque in the Yorùbá language. The vowels to their left in the examples cannot see through them, meaning that [e o] do not actually harmonize with [ẹ ọ] in those examples in (5) above. The opaque vowels block the harmony. One very important point about the relics of vowel harmony in the dialect is that evidence of harmony across morpheme is apparently lost in the dialect. It is observed that pronouns, and tense/aspects do not show allomorphic variation as found in most languages that operate a vowel harmony system. Such languages include Ewe and Akan (Clements 1974, 1976), Ogori (Chumbow 1982), Ebira (Ihionu 1985), Ìgèdè (Abíódún 1989).

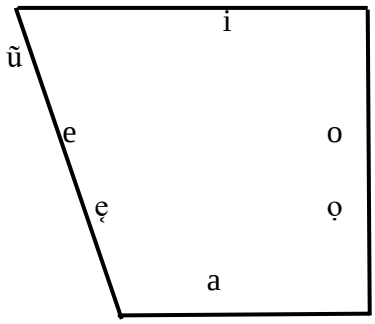
From the foregoing in this sub-section, it is revealed that Ìgbómìnà dialect shows relics of vowel harmony because (e,o) fail to harmonize with (ẹ,ọ) in the dialect. Even in

structures where the vowels co-occur, as in [ewúré] 'goat', [orúkọ] 'name', harmony is blocked by the opacity of the vowels that occur between the non-harmonic vowels.

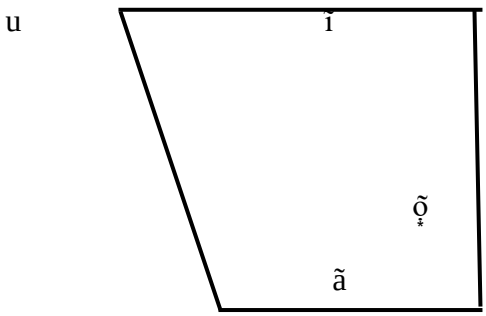
4.2 Relics of Vowel Harmony in Mọ̀bà Dialect

Like the Igbomina dialect, Mọ̀bà dialect also operates a seven-vowel system; seven oral vowels and four nasalized vowels. These vowels are shown below

(6). Oral Vowels

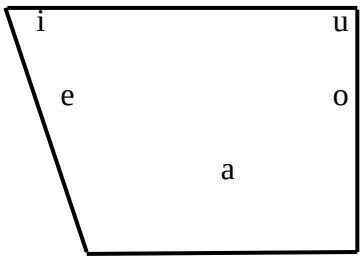


Nasalized Vowels

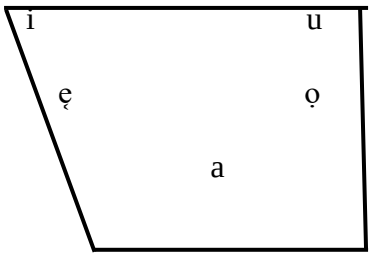


It is observed that whereas all the other dialects in the Central Yorùbá Group (Àkúré, Èkìtì, Ìfè, and Ìjèṣà) operate a nine-vowel system, Mọ̀bà operates a seven-vowel system, and it is the only dialect in the group that operates a seven-vowel system rather than the nine-vowel system that other dialects in the group operate. The seven vowels are grouped into two harmonic sets just like what we saw in the case of Ìgbómìnà dialect. The two sets are:

(7) Set I



Set II



As was observed in the case of Igbomina, vowels [e o] and vowels [e o] do not co-occur in a VCV structure. As the charts in (7) reveals, [i u a] are neutral, they interact and co-occur with the vowels that are mutually exclusive of one another, that is, [e, o] as against [e, o]. The items presented in (8), below reflect the [e o] versus [e o] co-occurrence restriction.

(8)

Set I		Set II	
èso	'fruit'	ọ̀kẹ́	'big bag'
aró	'dye'	ẹ̀wọ	'work'
eó	'money'	ùrẹ	'cricket'
ùdí	'buttocks'	ụ̀kọ́	'cough'
ùdè	'boundage'	ẹ̀ù	'cloth'
oyè	'chieftaincy'	ùọ̀	'fish hook'
èdì	'charm'	abẹ	'pen knife'
òru	'nightꜜ'	ìtọ	'urine'
ùkó	'basket'	ilẹ́	'ground'
ùré	'blessing'	ẹgbī	'dirty; insult'
àgbè	'boundary'	ẹja	'fish'
asĩ	'poisonous rat'	ọjà	'market'
ùjà	'fight, quarrel'	ũwọ	'lies'
ĩyā́	'pounded yam'	ũrĩ	'iron'

okũ 'rope' ĩkã 'termite'

The items reveal a co-occurrence restriction of [e, o] and [ẹ, ọ] as predicted by the harmonic sets (set I and set II). These vowels [e o] and [ẹ ọ] do not co-occur in VCV structure. As we saw in Ìgbómìnà dialect, these set of vowels co-occur in grammatical structures that are larger than VCV, for instance they co-occur in VCVCV structure as demonstrated below.

(9) orúkọ 'name' èìɣọ̀ 'taboo'
òìrẹ̀ 'porcupine' èbìbẹ 'yam peel'
eúrẹ́ 'goat' obibọ 'type of snake'
èkùrọ́ 'palm kernel' òtìtà 'kitchen stool'
òsùká 'head pald' òrùjọ́ 'day'

The explanation given in respect of items in (5) in respect of Igbómínà applies here. The opacity of [i] and [u] blocks harmony of [e o] and [ẹ ọ].

4.3 Harmony Across Morpheme

Affix harmony refers to cases where vowels of a morpheme are sensitive to the tongue root position of vowels of morphemes before or after them in a grammatical construction. The researchers are constrained from referring to this phenomenon as affix harmony because the morphemes in question do no display any form of affixation. In Mọ̀bà dialect, it is observed that first person singular pronoun, third person singular pronoun, future tense/aspect and negative marker [**kè/kẹ̀**] display harmonic constraint because they normally agree with the advance versus retracted tongue root position of the verbs that occur immediately after them. The illustrations below testify to this.

(10) **1st Person Singular Pronoun (mé/mẹ́)**

(a) i. **mé** ro ọ̀ràn ọ̀hún o 'I thought about the matter'
I think issue the out.

ii. **mé** gbé usu lé uná 'I am cooking yam'
I put yam on fire

iii. **mé** tu ilẹ́ òhún tan 'I completed weeding the farm'
I weed ground the finish

iv. **mé** ti ẹ̀kù 'I closed/shut the door'
I close door

(b) i. **mẹ́** gbọ ario ọ̀hún 'I heard the noise'
I hear noise the

ii. **mẹ́** jẹ usu titun lanàá 'I ate new yam yesterday'
I eat yam new in yesterday'

iii. **mẹ** ta ọjọ ni ọ̀jà. 'I made good sales in the market'
I sell plenty in market"

(11) 3rd Person Singular Pronoun (e/ẹ)

(a) i. **é** kó eó kò mi 'He/she gave me money'
he/she gather money give me

ii. **é** se usu jẹ lóko 'He cooked yam and ate in the farm'

he/she cook yam eat in farm

iii. **é** bí ọmọ ko arúgbó 'She gave birth to a child for an old man'
she birth child give old person

iv. **é** lu ọmọ mi 'He/she beat my child'
he/she beat child my

(b) i. **ẹ́** ra oíjẹ́ kò mí 'He bought food for me'
he/she buy food give me.

ii. **ẹ́** lọ erè ṣe àkàrà 'He grinded bean to fry àkàrà'
he/she grind bean do àkàrà

iii. **ẹ́** fẹ́ ìyàó titun. 'He married a new wife'
he/she marry wife new

(12) Negative marker (kè/kẹ̀)

(a) i. Olú **kè** rí mi 'Olu did not see me'
Olu **Neg** see me

ii. Ojú **kè** dùn mi 'I have no problem with my sight'
eye **Neg** trouble me

iii. Àríyọ̀ **kè** jó ire 'Ariyo did not dance well'
Ariyo **Neg** dance good

iv. Mọ́tò **kè** gbe ghá 'The vehicle did not come with it'
Vehicle **Neg** carry come

(b) i. Òjò **kẹ̀** mọ mi 'Ojo does not know me.'
Ojo **Neg** know me

ii. Ọba **kẹ̀** gbọ ọ̀ràn ọhun 'The king did not hear of the .case.'
King **Neg** hear case that

iii. Ọjà **kẹ̀** ta lonìí 'Sales is poor today.'
Sales **Neg** sell in today

(14) **Tense/Aspect (éè/ẹ́ẹ̀)**

(a) i. Òjó **éè** ri ẹran rà lọ́jà 'Ojo will get meat in the market.'
Òjó **Fut**. Sse meat buy in market

ii. Olú **éè** gbé oíjẹ́ kò mí 'Ojo will give me food.'
Olú **Fut**.carry money give me

iii. Òjó **éè** ro efo ko oga 'Ojo will prepare vegetable soup for the master.'
Òjó **Fut**.prepare vegetable give master

iv.	Adé **éè** lu ọmọ ọ̀hún Adé **Fut** beat child the.	‘Olu will beat the child.’
(b) i.	Òjó **ẹ́ẹ̀** ra aṣo titun Òjó **Fut**. buy cloth new	Ojo will buy a new cloth.’
ii.	Olú **ẹ́ẹ̀** fo aṣo òhún Olú **Fut**. wash cloth the	‘Olu will wash the cloth.’
iii.	Adé **ẹ́ẹ̀** jẹ oíjẹ lúlé Adé **Fut**.eat food in house	‘Ade will eat in the house.’

A careful look at the 1st and 3rd singular subject pronouns, and the negative marker illustrated in (10-14) above points to an operation of harmony across morpheme controlled by tongue root position. The pronouns and the negative marker show allomorphic variation as shown below:

(13)	1st Person Subject Pronoun	**mé/mẹ́**
	3rd Person Subject Pronoun.	**é/ẹ́**
	Negative Marker.	**kè/kẹ̀**
	Tense/aspect	**éé/ẹ́ẹ̀**

The observation is that the vowels of the elements agree with the [±ATR] of the vowels of the verb that follows them immediately, e.g.

(14)	Mé rí i	'I saw it'
	Mẹ́ gbọ́	'I heard'
	Kè jó	'He did not dance'
	Kẹ̀ tà	'It didn't sell'

5.0 Discussion

The focus of this paper from the onset is a comparison of evidence of relics of vowel harmony constraint in two dialects of Yorùbá: Ìgbómìnà and Mọ̀bà. The discussion so far in the study reveals that whereas there are a number of similarities, there are also a number of differences. The similarities and differences are highlighted below:

Similarities:

i. the two dialects operate a seven-vowel system;
ii. the dialects show relics of vowel harmony constraint;
iii. at the level of words, harmony constraint is manifested in VCV structures in the two dialects;
iv. in the two dialects, [e o] that are [+ATR] vowels do not co-occur with [e o] which are [-ATR] vowels;
v. vowels [i u] are opaque in the two dialects, they block harmony between [+ATR] and [-ATR].

Differences:

The major difference in the relics of vowel harmony constraint in the two dialects relates to harmony across morpheme. Mọ̀bà dialect operates variation in the realization of 1st and 3rd singular subject pronouns and one of the negative markers in the dialect. This is evident in the pieces of data in (10-14) above, Ìgbòmìnà dialect does not operate variation in the realization of the 1st and 3rd and in the realization of negative markers. The data from Ìgbómìnà dialect shown below confirm this:

(15) 1st Person Singular Pronoun in Igbomina (mo)

a.i. Mo rí owó gbà níbẹ 'I collected money there.'
I see money collect in place

ii. Mo gbé ọmọ jòkó 'I placed the child in a sitting'
I carry child sit

b i. Mo rọ epo hun Òjó 'I pour oil for Ojo'
I pour oil give Ojo

ii Mo gbá ilè ti óòórò yi 'I swept the floor this morning'
I sweep floor in morning this

iii. Mo bẹ ọmọ nísé 'I sent the child on errand'
I beg child work

(16) 3rd Person Singular pronoun in Igbomina (ó)

c i.. Ó rí mi 'He saw me'
He/she see me

ii. Ó gbé ọmọ ghá ibẹ 'He brought a child there'
He/she carry child come place

d i. Ó gbọ yìí mo wí 'He heard what I said'
He/she hear this I say

ii. Ó dẹ tàkúté dè e 'He/she placed a snare for him'
He/she plant snare wait him/her

17. Negative Marker

e. i Olu è jo dáadáa 'Olu did not dance well'
Olu Neg dance good

ii. Àbẹ́ní è gbé àga ɣá 'Abeni did not bring a chair'
Abeni Neg carry chair come

f i. Olú è gbọ́ ohun yẹ́ẹ̀ wí. 'Olu did not listen to you/hear you
Olu Neg hear thing you say

ii. Ade è jọ kàwú rẹ 'Ade did not remember his father'
Ade Neg resemble father his

iii. Mi è gba ọ̀rọ̀ rẹ. 'I did not accept/take his explanation'
I Neg accept word his

From the data in (15-17) above, the 1st person singular subject pronoun is consistently [mo], the 3rd person singular subject pronoun is [ó], and the negative marker is [è]. This means that irrespective of [ATR] feature of vowel of the verb, the pronouns and the negative marker

remain constant in form. The research further checked the form of other pronouns in subject and object positions, the other negative markers, and tense/aspect markers, they do not reveal any form of variation. The implication of this is that Ìgbómìnà dialect does not show relics of harmony across morpheme.

6.0 A Paradox

The position described above in relation to the 1st person singular pronoun [**me/mẹ̀**] in Mọ̀bá dialect is true only when one encounters elderly language native speakers of Mọ̀bà dialect who have lived all their lives in Mọ̀bá land, and who do not speak the standard of Yoruba or English language. By implication such elderly persons do not have western education, and have not traveled out of Mọ̀bà land. When such elderly persons speak, they reflect morphological variation [**me/mẹ̀**] in their speech form.

The study reveals that younger native speakers who speak the standard dialect, and who are educated, and have travelled out of Mọ̀bà land do not show morphological variation in their speech. Consistently, this group of speakers uses [**mi**]. The illustrations below show the difference between the speech of the younger speakers and elderly speakers.

(17)	**Younger Speakers**	**Elderly Speakers**	
a.	Mìí gbọ́	Mèẹ́ gbọ́	I heard.
	Mìí gbà	Mẹ̀ẹ́ gbà	I accepted.
	Mìí bẹ́ ibi	Mẹ̀ẹ́ bẹ́ igi	I cut a tree.
b.	Mìí rí ọ	Mèé ri ọ	I saw you.
	Mìí gbé igi	Mèé gbé igi	I carried the stick/wood.
	Mìí jó dáadáa	Mèé jó dáadáa	I danced well.
	Mìí ru ẹrù	Mèé ru ẹrù	I carried a load.

7.0 Conclusion

This study brings a new understanding into the operation of vowel harmony constraint in the dialects of Yorùbá. It has always been held that Central Yorùbá Dialect group operates a full (or almost full) vowel harmony system, and studies by Òlúmùyìwá (1996), on Àkùré dialect; Abíódún and Sànúsí (2001) on Ekiti, Ikere and Ifaki; and Ìkòtún (2015) on Ijẹ̀sa all point to a complete vowel harmony or near-complete harmony system in Central Yoruba. However this study reveals that Mọ̀bà, a dialect in the dialect group does not operate a complete or near-complete harmony system. Rather, the dialect operates a seven-vowel system and displays relics of the near-complete vowel harmony system that operates in the dialect group of the dialect group. The study further reveals that a dialect of Yorùbá that operates a seven-vowel system operates relics of harmony across morpheme. This has never been reported in the literature in relation to Yorùbá language. The general assumption has always been that standard Yorùbá and other regional dialects of the language that operate a seven-vowel system do not show relics of harmony across morpheme.

Finally, the study contributes to existing knowledge in the field of Yorùbá dialectology. The study reveals similarities and differences in the realization of relics of vowel harmony in two dialects of Yorùbá that operate a seven-vowel system. It is widely reported in the literature that proto-Yorùbá went through a number of changes in the historical development of Yorùbá language, the changes are however not regular across dialects as the issue of relics of vowel harmony constraint reveals in this study. The proto-Yoruba has undergone vowel merger and this is reflected in the nine-vowel system in some dialects versus seven-vowel system in some other dialects of the language; the vowel harmony system has also always gone from complete to complete (Adétùgbò (1967) and to

partial as reflected in Standard Yorùbá. This study reveals that at least one dialect with seven-vowel still retains evidence of harmony across morpheme.

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Abstract

This study investigates the phenomenon of consonant deletion in Mọ̀bà dialect and the standard dialect of Yorùbá language. Data for the study were sourced from four Mọ̀bà dialect communities, namely Ọ̀tùn-Èkìtì, Igogo-Ekiti, Osun-Èkìtì in Èkìtì State and Ìlọfà in Kwara State. The researcher is a speaker of Mọ̀bà dialect, and speaks Osun variety fluently. Speakers of the standard variety were also employed as language helpers. The researcher also speaks the standard dialect fluently. The study is descriptive, the researcher presents data and explains as appropriate. Findings in the study reveal that Mọ̀bà dialect does not operate a robust consonant deletion as found in the standard dialect. The study makes contribution to Yoruba dialectology by revealing variation in the operation of consonant deletion in Yorùbá.

Key words: Consonant deletion, Mọ̀bà dialect, Standard dialect, dialectology, Dialect variation.

1.0 Introduction

Mọ̀bà is one of the dialects of Yorùbá, it belongs to the Central Yorùbá group, one of the major Yorùbá dialect groups. This study is a descriptive comparative study of consonant deletion in the Mọ̀bà regional dialect and the standard dialect of Yorùbá language. Consonant deletion is one phonological process that is found in the two dialects however, the operation of the process differs across the two dialects.

Consonant deletion is a phonological phenomenon found in most languages of the world. It marks a situation where a consonant is omitted and not pronounced in normal speech. This means that a consonant that is underlyingly found in a word is not pronounced when such is combined with other morphemes/word. O'Grady and Archibald (2000:102) give the following examples from English language.

(1) bad # boy → baboy (d is silent)
task # man → tasman (k is silent)

In Yorùbá language, various Yorùbá language scholars that include Oyelaran (1976), Akinlabi 1995), Yusuff (2005) agree that consonant deletion operates in the language. Yusuff (2005):

(2) orúkọ → oókọ 'name' (r is silent)
agogo → aago 'clock' (g is silent)
òwúrọ̀ → òórọ̀ 'morning' (w is silent)

One notes that there is assimilation following the deletion of the consonant in each item, this, however is not the focus of this study. While scholars have demonstrated widely that consonant deletion operates in the standard dialect of Yorùbá, much has not been said about the process in Mọ̀bà dialect, and no comparative work on the process has been out in connection with the two dialects.

The present study investigates and compares the phenomenon of consonant deletion in Mọ̀bà and the standard dialect of Yorùbá language. The study is divided into seven sections. Section one is the introduction where I explain the focus of the study, section two describes Mọ̀bà dialect and where it is spoken. Section three state the motivation and methodology for the study. Section four writes on related works. Section five focuses on data presentation and data analysis. Section six is a presentation of discussion of the findings, while section seven concludes the study.

2.0 Mọ̀bà Dialect

Mọ̀bà dialect is spoken by groups of communities in Mọ̀bà Local Government Area of Èkìtì State and two local government areas of Kwara State, which are Òkè Ẹ̀rọ́ and Ekiti Kwara Local Government Areas. This was confirmed in Ajíbóyè (1999) and Atúramú (2024). Bámiṣilẹ̀ (1986) reported that the variety of speech in these areas fall under Èkìtì dialect, while Ajíbóyè (1991) further revealed that the variety constitutes a distinct dialect which is highly mutually intelligible with Èkìtì dialect. Mọ̀bà is located within two states of Yorùbá speaking nation, namely Èkìtì State and Kwara State. Ajíbóyè and Pulleyblank (2000) reported that Mọ̀bà dialect is spoken by about 200,000 people in Òkè Ẹ̀rọ́ Local Government Area of Kwara State and in Mọ̀bà Local Government Area of Èkìtì State. The towns and villages in Èkìtì State where Mọ̀bà dialect is spoken are Ọ̀tùn-Èkìtì, Igógo-Èkìtì, Osùn-ún Èkìtì, Ìró-Èkìtì, Irà-Èkìtì, Ẹ̀pẹ̀-Èkìtì, Ọ̀sàn-Èkìtì, Ìsáòyè-Èkìtì, Ìràṛẹ́-Èkìtì, Erínmòpé-Èkìtì, Àayè-Ọjà Èkìtì, Ikòsú- Èkìtì and Ìkùn-Èkìtì. In Kwara State, it is spoken in Ẹ̀kàn, Ìlọfà, Odò-Ọwá, Ìlálẹ̀, Ìmọde, Kájọlà, Ayédùn, Ẹ̀rìnmòpé and Egòsì. In all, there are twenty two (22) communities that speak Mọ̀bà dialect across the two local government areas in Kwara and Èkìtì States.

Mọ̀bà, a dialect of Yorùbá shows a lot of similarities with standard Yorùbá. This might be as a result of the fact that Mọ̀bà dialect takes its source from the language. For instance:

(3)	Yorùbá	Mọ̀bà	Gloss
	àdá	àdá	cutlass
	ọkọ́	ọkọ́	hoe
	ojú	ojú	eye
	ọbè	ọbẹ̀	soup
	ọkùnrin	ọkùnrin	male
	omi	omi	water
	gbé	gbé	carry
	etí	etí	ear

obì	obì	kolanut
ọ̀lẹ	ọ̀lẹ	laziness

Linguistics scholars such as Ajíbóyè and Pulleyblank (2000), Ajíbóyè (1991), Ajíbóyè (1999), Abíọ́dún and Ajíbóyè (2007), Bámisilẹ̀ (1986) have treated most of the phonological processes in Mọ̀bà dialect without recourse to the consonant deletion which exist between the dialect and the standard dialect. Mọ̀bà dialect is the lingua franca among Mọ̀bà speakers in unofficial domains. Such domains include home, market, playing ground, farm, among others. Apart from Mọ̀bà dialect, other languages such as English and Standard Yorùbá are used in formal settings like government offices and worship places like churches and mosques.

3.0. Motivation and Methodology

Dialectology is a field that studies variations in the dialects of a language. The field has received attention from a number of scholars that include Trudgill (1999), Mcgregor (2009) and several others. It is revealed in studies on dialectology that dialects of language invariably display variation in vocabulary and grammar. In some cases, segments found in one dialect may not be found in other dialects. For instance, [ts] found in Onko dialect of Yorùbá is not found in standard dialect and many other regional dialects of the language.

At times some phonological and syntactic rules found in a dialect are not found in other dialects, or are realized differently in other dialects of the same language. Olúmúyìwá (2009), reports that vowel assimilation which is very common and found in different grammatical structures in the standard dialect is not common and pronounced in Mọ̀bà dialect. Dialectology helps to explain language and linguistic variations, and historical changes in human language. Adetugbo (1967) and Abiodun, Akintoye and Adeoye (2021) offer illustrating examples on how studies in dialectology help to clarify phonological changes in Yorùbá language from a historical perspective.

Data for the study were sourced from four Mọ̀bà dialect communities namely Ọ̀tùn-Èkìtì, Osun-Èkìtì, Igógo-Èkìtì and Ìlọ́fà. The researcher interacted with language helpers to collect data through the use of self-prepared questionnaire specifically designed to address consonant deletion. It was easy for me as the researcher to interact with the language helpers because I am a native speaker of Mọ̀bà dialect from Osun-Èkìtì. On the standard dialect, I collected data from speakers of Yorùbá language in Ekiti State University who are from Ìbàdàn and Ọ̀yọ́ Towns. The language helpers speak the standard Yorùbá very fluently. I recorded the piece of data collected for easy access and easy preservation.

4.0 Consonant Deletion

Deletion is a phonological process whereby a segment present in the underlying representation gets lost at the surface level. Oyèbádé (2008) defines deletion as a process which involves the loss of a segment under some languages. He noted that sometimes the condition for consonant deletion may be that the language prefers that final syllables should be open. If a closed syllable occurs in final position, the process of consonant deletion is introduced to obliterate the arresting consonant and hence to open the syllable. For instance:

(4) a. **Yorùbá:**

dára	dáa	'be good'
jọ̀wọ́	jọ̀ọ́	'please'
àkàrà	àkàà	'bean nuggets'

b. **English:**

desk top	-	des(k) top
hard disk	-	har(d) disk
first time	-	firs(t) time
want to	-	wan(t) to

From the (4b) examples above, it can be observed that only the last consonant in the first morpheme can be deleted across the boundary in English language.

4.1 Consonant Deletion in Standard Yorùbá

Various scholars have affirmed in their different works that consonant deletion operates in Yoruba standard dialect. Several examples are provided by the scholars, however a detail systematic analysis of the operation has not been provided. Akinlabí (1995) provides ample data that illustrate r-deletion in the standard dialect. The present study also finds that r-deletion is robust in Ìbàdàn and Ọ̀yọ́ dialects of Yorùbá. Akinlabí (1995) contains the examples below among others:

(5) a.

ẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ́	→	ẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ́	'cheeks'
orúkọ	→	oókọ	'name'
àkàrà	→	àkàà	'bean cake'
èkùrọ́	→	èkùó	'palm-kernel'
àbàrá	→	àbàá	'slap'
gbẹ̀gìrì	→	gbẹ̀gìì	'type of bean soup'
àdúrà	→	àdúà	'prayer'
dúró	→	dúó	'wait/stand'
àkùrọ̀	→	àkùọ̀	'fadama'
àkèré	→	àkèé	'jumping/flying frog'

	àpárá	→	àpáá	'rudeness'
	tìrẹ	→	tìẹ	'yours'
	agbára	→	agbáa	'strength'
b.	òtítọ́	→	òótó	'truth'
	èdúdú	→	èédú	'charcoal'
	àrìrò	→	ààrò	'traditional stove'
	ọ̀kánkán	→	ọ̀ókán	'straight forward'
	egúngún	→	eegun	'bone'
	eṣinṣin	→	eeṣin	'house fly'
	ọ̀gangan	→	ọ̀ọgan	'a particular point'
	àtìtàn	→	ààtàn	'refuse heap/dump'
	odídẹ	→	oóde	'type of a bird'
	èrírí	→	èéri	'dirt'
	òkùnkùn	→	òòkún	'darkness'
c.	Owólabí	→	oólabí	'a Yoruba name'
	Ọpẹ́yẹmí	→	ọpẹ́ẹmí	'a Yoruba name'
	Adéyẹmí	→	adéemí	'a Yoruba name'
	Ọláyẹmí	→	olaemi	'a Yoruba name'
	láyéláyé	→	láéláé	'forever/everlasting'
	Láyíwọlá	→	láíwọlá	'a Yoruba name'
	Kòfowóróọlá	→	kòfoóróọlá	'a Yoruba name'
d.	kò	→	ò	(Negative marker)

Looking at the piece of data in (5a), one observes that /r/ is consistently deleted either as the first consonant as in /ẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ́→ẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ́/ 'cheeks' or as the second consonant as in /àdúrà → àdúà/. In (5b), the first consonant in each lexical item is constantly deleted. It is important to note that the items in (5b) are derived through a process of partial reduplication and prefixation as shown below:

tọ́	→	ò	+	tító	→	òtítọ́	'truth'
Right/correct		pref.		reduplication			

Abíọ́dún (1999), argues that while it is correct to claim that the items in (5b) and others like them are derived through partial reduplication, it is difficult to account for some of such item as being so derived because the apparent roots do not show any semantic relationship with the derived item. For instance, the apparent root /ro/ in /ariro/ has no semantic relationship with /ariro/.

rò	→	a	+	riro	→	àrìrò
?		pref.		reduplication		

Another important observation is that whenever the first consonant is deleted, a process of vowel assimilation follows, e.g.

òtítọ́	→	oito	→	ooto
egungun	→	eungun	→	eegun

Yoruba language scholars have extremely documented these processes of deletion followed by assimilation in various academic works.

Data in (5c) demonstrate the deletion of /w, y/ particularly in names, there are other items that are also non-names, e.g

(6)

Owólabí	→	oolabi
báyìí	→	baii
èyí	→	ei
láyéláyé	→	laelae

One observes deletion in the items, it is however difficult to determine the motivation for the deletion because there are items where /w/ and /y/ are not deleted as in:

(7)

ayé	→	*ae
oyè	→	*oe
òyì	→	*oi
èwo	→	*eo
àwa	→	*aa
òwò	→	*oo

It is therefore difficult to categorically point to a pattern of deletion.

4.2 Consonant Deletion in Mọ̀bà

Consonant deletion is also reported in Mọ̀bà dialect by Bámisilẹ̀ (1986) and Ajíbóyè (1991). However, the scholars mention the operation, citing few examples without presenting a detail operation of the process in the dialect. For easy access for comparison, the set of data used in the case of Ìgbómìnà shall be used for Mọ̀bà.

/w/ deletion

Mọ̀bà dialect has a history of /w/ deletion as reported in Abíọ́dún, Akíntóyè and Adéoyè (2021). The scholars claim that in a large number of lexical items, where /w/ is attested in the standard dialect, /w/ is deleted in such items in the historical development of Mọ̀bà dialect. The items below, taken from the work of the scholars attest to this.

(8) a

Standard Dialect		Mọ̀bà Dialect	
ọwọ́	→	ọ́ọ́	'hand/arm'
owó	→	eó	'money'
ìràwọ̀	→	ìràọ̀	'stars'
ìdánwò	→	ìdánò	'examination'

	ariwo	→	ario	noise’
	ìwọ́ra	→	ùọ́ra	greediness
	awọ́	→	aọ́	‘leather’
	àwọ̀n	→	àọ̀n	‘net’
	ìkawọ́	→	ùkaọ́	‘within reach’

b	òtítọ́	→	òító	‘truth’
	èdúdú	→	èídú	‘charcoal’
	àrìrò	→	àìrò	‘traditional stove’
	egungun	→	eigun	‘bone’
	eṣinṣin	→	eiṣi	‘house fly’
	àtìtàn	→	àìtàn	‘refuse dump/heap’
	èríírí	→	èírí	‘dirt’
	òkùkùn	→	òìkùn	‘darkness’
	egbígbọn	→	eígọ̀on	
	erírú	→	eírú	‘ashes’
	ebíbá	→	eíbá	
	ayíyán	→	aíyán	‘cockroach’
	èbúbú	→	èíbú	‘curse’
	ekpìkpo	→	eikpo	‘peels’
c.	kè | kẹ̀	→	kè | kẹ̀	(no deletion)
d.	Ọpẹ́yẹmí	→	Ọpéyẹmí	‘name of a person’
	Ọláyẹmí	→	Oláyẹmí	‘name of a person’
	láyéláyé	→	láyéláyé	‘everlasting’

From the data presented, (8a) shows that historically, consonant deletion occurred in Mọ̀bà dialect, this is the deletion of bilabial approximant |w| in words. Data in (8b) reveals a synchronic deletion which the researcher finds to be optional in the dialect. Note that both the underlying forms and the derived forms are acceptable in normal speech.

(9)	otito	→	oito | otito
	egbigbon	→	eigbon | egbigbon
	ebiba	→	eiba | ebiba
	eriri	→	eiri | eriri

Apart from deletion being obligatory in the dialect, there is no assimilation after deletion. In the dialect, |òítọ́| does not change to |òótọ́|. The speakers understand the form |òótọ́| and use it only when speaking the standard Yorùbá, using it when speaking Mọ̀bà dialect is tantamount to code-mixing Mọ̀bà and standard dialect.

5.0 Data Presentation

In this section, data collected from language helpers from both the standard dialect and Moba dialect are presented and analysed with particular reference to consonant deletion.

Data for the Study

Standard Yorùbá	Mọ̀bá Dialect	Gloss
ɔwɔ́	ɔɔ́	hand
òwe	òe	proverb
ewúrɛ́	eúrɛ́	she goat
epo	epo	oil
ɛ̀dɔ̀	ɛ̀dɔ̀	lung
ɛdʒɛ	ɛdʒɛ	blood
bayi	bai	now
dára	dáa	good
ahá	aá	tumbler
owú	oú	jealous
òwú	òú	thread
méjì	èjì	two
awɔ	aɔ	skin
wá	á	come
owó	eó	money
ìwɔ̀	ùɔ̀	(fish) hook
ìwo	ìo	horn
ka owó	ka eó	count money
ògógóró	òógóró	hot wine
ɛyɪ̃	ɛɪ̃	egg
ìdā̋wò	ìdā̋ò	examination
wɔlé	ɔlé	enter (house)
ayé	ayé	world
ɔbɛ̀	ɔbɛ̀	soup
Igógo	Ióògo	Name of a town in Moba
òdodo	òodo	true
otítɔ́	òítɔ́	truth
obúkɔ	oúkɔ	he-goat
òwúrɔ̀	òúrò/òórọ̀	morning
agogo	aogo	bell
egungun	eigun	bone
ɔ̀kā̋kā̋	ɔ̀ā̋kā̋	straight forward
wúkɔ́	úkɔ́	to cough
òʃùpá	òʃùpá	moon
ìràwɔ̀	ìràɔ	star
ìyàwó	ìyàó	wife
olùbèwò	olùbèò	inspector
ìkà	ìkà	wickedness
ìwé	ìwé	book
ìbɔ̃	ìbɔ̃	gun
rí owó	réo	see money
ɛ̀wù	ɛ̀ù	gown
wɔ́	ɔ́	not straight
ahā̋	aā̋	tongue
àwɔ̰̀	àɔ̰̀	net
ɛ̀wɔ̰̀	ɛ̀ɔ̰̀	prison
awo	aó	(kind of a bird)
olè	olè	thief

òye	òye	knowledge
mɛ́ta	ɛ̀ta	three
eéwo	oíó	tumor
ɔwɔ̀	ɔɔ̀	broom
awo	ao	cult
ìràwé	ìràé	dry leave
ɔ̀lɛ	ɔ̀lɛ	laziness

6.0 Discussion

A careful look at the pieces of data presented show that consonant deletion operated in the two dialects. However, the operation is not in the same direction. The discussion presented below account for similarities and differences in the two dialects.

6.1 /r/ - deletion.

r-deletion is a common phenomenon in the standard dialect and many items permit it. One interesting observation is that a large number of words does not permit the deletion of

(10) |r| as noticed in the examples below (See Abiodun in progress)

àríyá	→	*àíyá | *ȁáyá
arúgbó	→	*aúgbó | *aágbó
ìràwọ̀	→	*ìàwọ̀ | *ààwọ̀
ìrèké	→	*ìèké | *ȅèké
ìnira	→	*ìnia | *ìnaa
orísun	→	*oísun | *oósun

Whereas a large number of items permit the deletion, it is not possible to say categorically what motivates the operation of the process in the standard dialect. On the other hand however, Mọ̀bà dialect does not permit r-deletion in all the lexical items where |r| is deleted in the standard dialect; |r| is retained in Mọ̀bà dialect, e.g:

(11)

		Standard Dialect	Mọ̀bà Dialect
agbára	→	agbáa	agbára
àkàrà	→	àkàà	àkàrà
ẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ́	→	ẹ̀ẹ̀kẹ́	ìrẹ̀kẹ́
orúkọ	→	oókọ	orúkọ
èkùrọ́	→	èkùọ́	èkùrọ́

The explanation above reveals a major difference in phonological structure of the two dialects.

6.2 w-deletion

As already asserted by Abíọ́dún, Akíntóyè and Adéoyè (2021), w-deletion is an historical process that affected a large number of lexical items in Mọ̀bà dialect and other central Yorùbá dialects, namely Èkìtì, Ìjẹ̀sà and Àkúrẹ́ dialects of Yorùbá. The historical deletion of |w|

reflected in items illustrated in (8a) does not occur in standard Yorùbá. This is a major difference in the historical development of the two dialects. Mọ̀bà dialect developed a process of w-deletion in its history, a process not developed in the standard dialect.

6.3 Consonant Deletion in Reduplicated Items

Data presented in (5b) under standard dialect, and data in (8b) under Mọ̀bà dialect testify to consonant deletion on the two dialects. It is revealed that a reduplicated consonant is deleted in a nominal element as shown below:

tọ́ → títọ́ → ò + títọ́ → òtítọ́ → òítọ́ → òótọ́

Root Redup and insertion Pref. Redup. Nom. Del. Assimil.

The two dialects operate consonant deletion. However, the dialects are different in that after the deletion, the output does not undergo further process in Mọ̀bà dialect as shows below

(12) òtítọ́ → òítọ́
egbígbọn → eígbọn
erírú → eírú

In the standard dialect however, the derived forms undergo a further process of assimilation as show below:

(13) òtítọ́ → òítọ́ → òótọ́
egbígbọn → eígbọn → eégbọn
erírú → eírú → eérú

Another major different is that the consonant deletion is obligatory in the standard dialect but not obligatory in Mọ̀bà dialect. The form that undergoes deletion and the underlying form that does not undergo deletion are grammatical and acceptable in normal speech, e.g.

(14) a. Ojo mọ́ọn í sọ òítọ́
Ojo Aspect hab say truth
Ojo is known for speaking the truth

b. Ojo mọ̀ón í sọ òtítọ́
Ojo Asp hab say truth
Ojo is known for speaking the truth.

The forms in (14a and b) are not common in the standard dialect.

6.4 Negative Marker

Negative marker |kò| is widely used in the standard dialect. It is one out of the many negative markers in Yorùbá. In Mọ̀bà dialect, however, the negative marker has two forms |kè ~ kẹ̀|

due to the vowel harmony feature in the dialect. It is important to note that the voiceless velar plosive |k| is common to the two forms in the two dialects. It is observed in this research that |k| is optionally deleted in the standard dialect as witnessed in:

Adé kò mọ̀ ‘Ade did not know’

Adé ò mọ̀ ‘Ade did not know’

The deletion of the consonant in normal speech is optional. In Mọ̀bà dialect however, the consonant cannot be deleted or else an ungrammatical form would result. In grammatical utterance the form |kè ~ kẹ̀| is invariably used depending on the feature [+ ATR] of the vowel of the verb.

Adé kè rí i ‘Ade did not see it’

Adé kẹ̀ mọ̀ ‘Ade did not know’

6.5 Deletion of [w | y]

It has been pointed out in (7) that there are some lexical items where /w/ and /y/ are not deleted in both standard and Mọ̀bà dialects. However, w-deletion is a common phenomenon in Mọ̀bà dialect when it appears intervocanically as indicated in the examples in (15a) below:

	Standard Dialect		Mọ̀bà Dialect	Gloss
(15) a.	owó	→	eó	‘money’
	ọwọ́	→	ọ́ọ́	‘hand’
	díwọ́	→	díọ́	‘busy’
	wọ̀n	→	ọ̀n	‘to measure’
	wá	→	á	‘come’
	rówó	→	réó	‘see money’
	ẹ̀wọ̀n	→	ẹ̀ọ̀n	‘chain’
	òwú	→	òú	‘thread’
	ìwo	→	ìo	‘horn’
b.	láyéláyé	→	láéláé	‘forever’/’everlasting’
	ayiyan	→	aiyan	‘cockroach’
	ẹyin	→	ẹin	‘egg’
	báyìí	→	báìí	‘now’
	Ọláyíwọlá	→	ọláíwọlá	‘name of a person’
	Adéyẹmí	→	adéẹmí	‘name of a person’
	eyi	→	ei	‘this one’

From the data presented in (15b) above, y-deletion is attested in Mọ̀bà dialect as can be seen in the examples generated. The pieces of data in (7) and (10) reveal that /w/, /y/ and /r/ are not deleted in both standard and Mọ̀bà dialects; showing their similarities. However, data

collected and presented in (8a and b), (9), and (15a and b) show occurrence of consonant deletion in Mọ̀bà dialect.

7.0 Conclusion

Dialects of a language show differences and similarities in their grammar and in the pronunciation of the words. In this paper, similarities and differences have been identified between the standard Yorùbá and Mọ̀bà dialect. It has been revealed that there are some words that maintain the same pronunciation in both the standard dialect and Mọ̀bà dialect, while in some words there are manifestations of consonant deletion in Mọ̀bà dialect. It is also established that /w/ is the most common consonant that gets deleted intervocanically in Mọ̀bà dialect of Yorùbá language and that Mọ̀bà dialect does operate a robust consonant deletion as found in the standard dialect.

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