ON "THE SUBJECT CONCORD PREFIX" IN YORUBA

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1. Introduction[1]

Except in a few easily specifiable contexts to be discussed later, a
v-type high-tone syllable having the same quality as the last vowel of
the immediately preceding item always occurs between the subject NP and
the remainder of a Yoruba sentence. Determining the precise form and
function of the syllable (henceforth HTS) has long been a problem in Yo-
ruba grammer. Various proposals for solving the problem have been put
forward over the years both by indigenous and by foreign scholars of the
language, namely, Rowlands [1954], Awobuluyi [1964], Bamgbose [1966],
Fresco [1970], Oyelaran [1970], and Stahlke [1974]. The present paper
critically examines those proposals, and shows that Awobuluyi [1964],
which interprets the HTS as a tense marker, is the closest yet to the so
far elusive ideal solution to the problem.

The occurrence of the HTS can be exemplified by simple sentences such
as the following:[2]

(1)   Ọla á lọ
       Ọla HTS go
       'Ọla went'

(2)   Baba á lọ
       father HTS go
       'Father went.'

(3)   Wọn ọ́n lọ
       they HTS go
       'They went.'

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[2]Examples are cited in traditional Yoruba orthography, which is almost
completely phonemic, and in which the letters p, ṣ, ẹ, ọ, represent /kp,
š, ɛ, ɔ/, ´ and ` represent high tone and low tone respectively (mid tone

(4) Ọ̀rọ̀ ọ́ wà

    word HTS exist

    'We have/had some matters to discuss.'

(5) Ọ̀gẹ̀dẹ̀ ẹ́ wọ́n

    banana/plantain HTS be-expensive

    'Bananas/plantains are/were expensive.'

(6) Alùpùpù ú wọ́n

    motorcycle HTS be-expensive

    'Motorcycles are/were expensive.'

(7) Ayọ̀ ọ́ lọ

    Ayọ HTS go

    'Ayọ went.'

(8) Dayọ̀ ọ́ lọ

    Dayọ HTS go

    'Dayọ went.'

(9) Báyọ̀ ọ́ lọ

    Bayọ HTS go

    'Bayọ went.'

The final syllable of the subject NP in all these examples except the last three is replaceable by the HTS. The rule effecting that replacement can be formulated informally as in

(10)
$$\left[\begin{array}{c} T \\ \ldots\ CV_1 \# \end{array} \right]_{NP} - \# \ \acute{v}_1 \ \# \ \rightarrow \ \left[\ldots\ C\acute{V}_1 \# \right]_{NP}$$

          1   2   1

    where T is any tone (i.e., high, mid, or low),

    and 1   #...(C)VC̀V # or #... C̀VC̀V #.

This rule applies obligatorily in the case of subject NP final syllables with high tone,[3] and optionally in all other cases. The rule thus explains why the following sentence

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(11) Délé Ìǫ

    Dele HTS go

    'Dele went.'

is normally heard only in the form given here, while (1 - 6) for their part can also be heard as

(12) Ọ̀lá Ìǫ

    'Ọla went.'

(13) Babá Ìǫ

    'Father went.'

(14) Wǫ́n Ìǫ

    'They went.'

(15) Ọ̀rǫ́ wà

    'We have/had things to talk about.'

(16) Ọ̀gèdę́ wǫ́n

    'Bananas/plantains are/were expensive.'

(17) Alùpùpú wǫ́n

    'Motorcycles are/were expensive.'

2. <u>The HTS as the Pronoun ó</u>

    The first attempted solution to the HTS problem, namely, Rowlands [1954:385-6], suggests that the element is in fact the same thing as the third person singular subject "pronoun" ó. But if this were actually the case, it should be possible to have

(18) *Ọ̀la ó Ìǫ

    Ọla HTS go

    'Ọla went.'

(19) *Baba ó Ìǫ

    father HTS go

    'Father went.'

alongside (1 - 2). However, to the best of the writer's present knowledge, (18 - 19) are definitely deviant and unacceptable.[4] Hence, the solution

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[4]Cf. Oyelaran [1970:129]. Ajolore [1973] says that expressions like (18 - 19) occur in child language, which of course is far from claiming

makes an incorrect prediction about the language.

The solution also leads one to expect that the HTS would behave morphophonemically like the vowel /o/, as it in fact does not do. Thus, there are only two rules of vowel assimilation across a word boundary in the language, namely

(20) $-V_1 \# V_2- \rightarrow -V_1 \# V_1-$
  when V_2 is /I/, and # is a word boundary

(21) $-V_1 \# V_2- \rightarrow -V_2 \# V_2-$
  when V_2 is any one of /a, ẹ, ọ, o, e/, and # is a word boundary.[5]

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that it occurs in standard adult Yoruba speech.

Rowlands' view might seem at first sight to be borne out by pairs of utterances like the following:

a(i) Kí Dàda ó lọ   a(ii) Kí Dàda á lọ
      compl. Dada pronom. go   compl. Dada HTS go
      'That Dada should go.'   'That Dada should go.'
b(i) Orin àádóòje ó lé máàrún   b(ii) Orin àádóòje é lé máàrún
      song 130 pronom. be-excess five   song 130 HTS be-excess five
      'Hymn 135.'   'Hymn 135.'

In fact, they offer no support for the view. For one thing, the members of each pair are not variants: those marked (i) are more emphatic than those marked (ii). In addition, (ai), but not (aii), also occurs with the same meaning as

c(i) Kí Dàda kí ó lọ

which would seem to have come by pronominalization from

c(ii) Kí Dàda kí Dàda á lọ
      compl. Dada compl. Dada HTS go

The same utterance (ai) also occurs, again with the same meaning, as

c(iii) Kí Dado ó lọ

by rule (21).

It is clear that the vowels involved in (ciii) and (aii) cannot be the same, as there is otherwise no case of the same vowel assimilating both progressively and regressively in precisely the same environment in the language.

Apart from being more emphatic than (bii), as already indicated, (bi) is further differentiated from (bii) by the fact that a brief pause is possible immediately before the pronominalization in it, but not before the HTS in (bii).

[5]For these two rules, see Awobuluyi [1964:71-2], and cf. Bamgboṣe [1966:160].

With its phonemic shape as /ó/, the HTS would definitely not be able to undergo either of these two rules, because the condition for the application of the first is not satisfied and, given /ó/ as an input, the second would only produce phonetically deviant outputs like (22):

(22) *Babo ó lọ

Under these circumstances, it is clear that there is no principled way to account for the morphophonemic behavior of the HTS under the assumption that the element itself is the same thing as the third person singular subject pronoun, which is phonemically /ó/.[6]

Finally, the solution is incomplete, as it says nothing about the function that the HTS performs in Yoruba sentence structure.

3. The HTS as Subject-Predicate Junction Marker

Bamgboṣe [1966:33-4], like Rowlands, attempts only a partial solution of the HTS problem. For while he has some things to say about the element's function, he is silent on what its precise form is. He indicates that the HTS is a subject-predicator junction marker. However, since it is far from self-evident that this is indeed the case, it would have been helpful for readers to be told why it is necessary for the subject-predicator junction to be marked.

This consideration apart, even by Bamgboṣe's own account, the subject-predicator junction marker does not occur in every subject-predicator structure in the language. This being the case, it is difficult to see how the element could really be a subject-predicator junction marker when it can actually be absent from precisely where it must occur by definition.

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[6]Rule (20) has no exceptions at all. This is also true for rule (21), because all those expressions which appear to violate it actually represent cases in which its operation was suspended for semantic reasons. Thus, to cite just one example, the pattern of assimilation observable in
a. a óò lọ → a áà lọ 'We shall go.'
b. ẹ óò lọ → ẹ ẹ́ẹ̀ lọ 'You (pl.) will go.'
needs to take precisely that form to prevent the following otherwise un-avoidable mergers from occurring:
c. o óò lọ → o óò lọ 'You (sing.) will go.'
d. a óò lọ ≠ o óò lọ 'We shall go.'
e. ẹ óò lọ ≠ o óò lọ 'You (pl.) will go.'

mo 'I', o 'you' and ó 'he, she, it', all containing the vowel /o/,
to be a morphological puzzle which can only be solved if the HTS is as-
sumed to be phonemically /ó/. But, by assigning the HTS the phonemic
shape of /ó/, he inadvertently guarantees that his proposal will run into
precisely the same morphophonemic problem with noun subject NP's as
Rowlands' proposal does. Moreover, the proposal also runs into serious
trouble with "pronoun" subject NP's, the only type of subject NP's that
Fresco actually considers.

 Thus, his phrase structure and transformational rules (p. 65) combined
would, for example, produce

(25) Èmi ó ti lǫ
   I HTS already go

Two alternative terminal outputs are possible from this intermediate
string, viz.

(26) Èmi í ti lǫ
   I HTS already go
   'I have already gone.'

(27) Èmí ti lǫ
   I-HTS already go
   'I have already gone.'

Fresco unfortunately gives no indication as to how these two possible
terminal outputs would actually be derived from (25). But, left to the
only applicable independently motivated rule of vowel assimilation across
a word boundary in the language, namely, rule (21), the intermediate
string (25) would actually yield the phonetically deviant sentence

(28) *Èmo ó ti lǫ

rather than the intended well-formed (26). Similarly, by rule (10), the
only applicable independently motivated contraction rule in the language
involving the HTS and the final syllable of a subject NP ending on a mid
tone (whether the former is a noun or a "pronoun" as in (3)), the string
in (25) would yield the phonetically ill-formed

(29) *Èmó ti lǫ

Bamgboṣe adds (p. 34) that the subject-predicator junction marker is essential for contrasting different structures in those cases where "formal item exponents" are otherwise identical. E.g.

(23) Nominal group   Clause
      Aṣọ tuntun   Aṣọ́ tuntun (< Aṣọ ọ́ tuntun)
      cloth new   cloth new   HTS
      'A new cloth'   'The cloth is new.'

But he himself cites (ibid) the example of

(24) Nominal group   Clause
      Ilé tuntun   Ilé tuntun (< Ilé é tuntun)
      house new   house new   HTS
      'A new house'   'The house is new.'

where the subject-predicator junction marker, although present, affords no way at all of formally differentiating the formal item exponents involved. As it turns out, the items in (24) are actually differentiated by their functions. The same can be said for the items in (23) and all others like them. Thus, all such structures are invariably differentiated by their functions, but not by the subject-predicator junction marker. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that the latter is not the element that actually contrasts those structures.

Contrasts like those in (23 - 24) are, in the writer's opinion, completely spurious: the elements involved never occur in identical overall environments and even if they occasionally did, by Bamgboṣe's own admission, it would be totally incongruous for an item of such a high frequency of occurrence as the HTS to be of structural relevance only on such rare occasions.

4. The HTS as "Subject Marker"

Oyelaran [1970:135] and Fresco [1970:65] consider the HTS to be a meaningless "subject marker," and therefore propose to introduce it into underlying structures by a transformation. Oyelaran represents it as $\acute{v}$, and Fresco as /ó/.

Fresco considers the fact that the three singular personal "pronouns"

rather than the intended output (27).

Now to consider an actual derivation, Fresco proposes to derive the surface structure sentence

(30)   Mo lọ

'I went.'

from

(31)   Mi ó lọ

I HTS go

by means of two P-rules. The first such rule (p. 66) would assimilate the vowel of the subject NP mi to that of the HTS, and (31) becomes

(32)   Mo ó lọ

The second rule (p. 67) would then delete the HTS from (32) to yield (30).

Fresco's first P-rule is actually the same as rule (21) above. His second rule, however, does not exist in the Yoruba language and ought therefore to be disallowed. The rule claims that the HTS can be dropped under contraction with a preceding subject NP, whereas the data in (1 - 9, 11 - 17) above clearly show that the HTS is never dropped. The rule claims furthermore that when mid tone and high tone are involved in contraction, it is the former that is retained. In fact, it is the latter that is invariably retained in Yoruba.[7]

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[7]On this, see Awobuluyi [1964:67], Bamgboṣe [1966:161-2], Rowlands [1969:32], and Oyelaran [1970:81-2]; cf. rule (10), above.
    Bamgboṣe [1966:161] records examples like the following
(i)   Ó rí i → Ó ri
       he see it 'He found it.'

in which mid tone rather than high tone is retained under contraction. This aberrant behavior, as it turns out, is semantically motivated. For had high tone been retained in (i), as expected, the resultant contracted form, viz ó rí would have been formally indistinguishable from the output of

(ii) Ó rí NP → Ó rí 'He found (unspecified NP).'
      He see NP

Under these circumstances, examples like (i) do not constitute real exceptions to the rule governing the behavior of high tone and mid tone

Sequential application of rules (21) and (10), the relevant Yoruba
rules of vowel assimilation across a word boundary and of subject NP – HTS
contraction, would definitely produce from (31) the phonetically ill-
formed

(33)   *Mó Iǫ

rather than (30).

As indicated earlier, both Oyelaran and Fresco propose to introduce
the HTS by transformation. The element, however, normally does not occur
overtly in sentences like (30) containing the subject NP's Mo 'I', a
'we', o 'you (sing.)', ę 'you (pl.)'. Thus, if it is introduced
transformationally (whether as /ó/, according to Fresco, or as v́, accord-
ing to Oyelaran) into the structure underlying sentences like (30), viz
(31) or (34),

(34)   Mo v́ Iǫ

it would subsequently have to be removed from there by transformation.
But as already pointed out about (31), there is no principled way in the
language to delete the HTS from such underlying strings without producing
phonetically deviant outputs like (33). As a general rule in Yoruba,
specific or prescribed tonal adjustments must be carried out simultane-
ously with the deletion of any one of two contiguous vowel segments be-
longing to two different words. The prescribed adjustment in the present
case calls for the replacement of mid tone by high tone, with the predict-
able result that (34) would be turned into (33) following the deletion of
v.

This would seem to suggest, therefore, that it is at the very least
analytically inexpedient to introduce the HTS by transformation. As a
matter of fact, such a procedure is not merely inexpedient but unjusti-
fiable; for as will be shown below, the HTS possesses real semantic con-
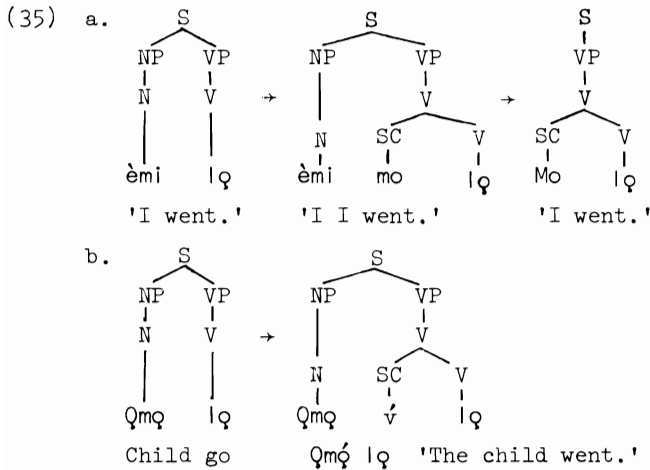tent and must therefore be introduced lexically like all other similar elements.

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under contraction.
Incidently, Oyalaran [1970:165-6] questions the authenticity of exam-
ples like (i), but this writer is inclined to agree with Bamgboṣe that
they occur in the speech of some speakers of Standard Yoruba.

5. The HTS as "Subject Concord Prefix"

Stahlke [1974], motivated by much the same morphological considera-
tions as Fresco, feels that the HTS is a "subject concord (SC) prefix"
with the shape v́ between noun subject NP's and verbs, and the shapes mo,
o and ó when the first, second, and third person singular "pronoun"
subject NP's, respectively, are involved. He provides the following sam-
ple derivations (p. 177):

(35) a.

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        S                       S                      S
      ╱   ╲                  ╱      ╲                   |
    NP    VP              NP         VP                VP
    |     |               |          |                 |
    N     V      →                   V        →        V
    |     |                       ╱     ╲            ╱     ╲
                              N    SC     V        SC      V
    |     |                   |    |      |         |      |
   èmi   lǫ                  èmi   mo     lǫ        Mo     lǫ

  'I went.'              'I I went.'              'I went.'
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    b.

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        S                       S
      ╱   ╲                  ╱      ╲
    NP    VP              NP         VP
    |     |               |          |
    N     V      →        |          V
    |     |               |       ╱     ╲
                          N    SC      V
                          |    |       |
   Ǫmǫ   lǫ              Ǫmǫ   v́      lǫ

  Child go           Ǫmǫ́ lǫ  'The child went.'
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In his own words, "if the subject NP is a personal pronoun, as in (35a),
the appropriate SC is attached to the verb and the subject NP is deleted.
If, as in (35b), the subject NP is a noun, the SC is simply the high tone
whose distribution was illustrated [earlier]. In this case, the subject
NP is not deleted" (p. 177).

Notice first of all, however, that according to Stahlke, the deep
structure string

(35) a. Èmi lǫ
          'I went'

will only yield the surface structure sentence

(36) Mo lǫ
      'I went.'

But (37) in fact also occurs in the language, and there is no principled

way to generate it alongside (36) within the framework of his analysis.

(37)   a. Èmi í lǫ   cf. (26), above
           I HTS go
           'I went.'
       b. Èmí lǫ   cf. (27), above
           I-HTS go
           'I went.'

Secondly, the analysis claims, as can be seen from (35a), that the SC which occurs with the NP èmi 'I' takes the form of Mo. But as (37) clearly shows, this is not the case. The SC that actually occurs with the NP èmi is v́; in which case, (36) in fact could not have come from (35a).

Thirdly, the transformational rule for deleting the NP èmi from the intermediate tree diagram in (35a) has no real parallel in the Yoruba language. This being the case, there would seem to be no compelling reason to suppose that it actually exists in Yoruba grammar. This is all the more so as its sole raison d'être, namely the idea that (36) derives from (35a), is mistaken, as already shown.

Fourthly, if the SC were a prefix on verbs, as suggested, actual prefixation of some of its forms, which consist simply of a vowel with a high tone. However, a well-known Yoruba rule excludes all such words as phonologically deviant,[8] and it is not clear at all how the status of the SC as a prefix can be reconciled with that rule.[9]

Fifthly, Fresco [1970:66] cites data from the Ọ̀bà and Ọ̀wọ̀ dialects of Yoruba, in which the elements Stahlke calls SC occur with their own SC, as follows:

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[8]On this, see Awobuluyi [1964:29], Bamgboṣe [1966:9], Rowlands [1969: 39], and Oyelaran [1970:76-7].

[9]Stahlke feels that the SC must be a prefix because its vowel harmonizes with that of verbs in some dialects (though not in Standard Yoruba). Such harmonizing combinations of SC and verbs, however, can have several words inserted between them, and they, therefore, cannot constitute words, as Stahlke's formulation implies.

(38) Ọ̀wọ̀ Ọ̀bà

    1st person singular: Mò ó Mù ú

                            I SC I SC

    2nd person singular: Wò ó Wò ó

                            You SC You SC

A similar phenomenon occurs in some Igbomina dialects;[10] viz

(39) Òró/Èsìé Òkè Ọdẹ

    1st person singular: Mò ó Mà á

                            I SC I SC

Even in the standard form of the language, a similar thing occurs, as ex-emplified in the case of wọn 'they', in (40):

(40) Wọn ọ́n lọ[11]

    they SC go

    'They went.'

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[10]Personal observation and Adeoye [1971:59].

[11]Existing publications on the language give the impression that (38) does not occur, as none of them either cites it or otherwise gives any indication at all that it is possible.

However, it actually occurs in this writer's idiolect as well as in some others that he has heard before. Furthermore, as Stahlke [1974:175] rightly notes, the form wọn alternates with wọ́n, as in

a(i) Wọ́n lọ   a(ii) Wọn kò lọ   a(iii) Wọn óò lọ
     'They went.'   'They did not go.'   'They will go.'

This alternation of wọn and wọ́n is not an isolated phenomenon, as Stahlke also rightly points out. Scores of other words participate in it; for example,

b(i) Ọ̀lá lọ   b(ii) Ọ̀la kò lọ   b(iii) Ọ̀la óò lọ
     'Ọla went.'   'Ọla did not go.'   'Ọla will go.'
c(i) Babá lọ   c(ii) Baba kò lọ   c(iii) Baba óò lọ
     'Father went.'   'Father did not go.'   'Father will go.'

Under these circumstances, it is clear that, as Stahlke unfortunately does not point out, the difference between wọ́n and wọn has to be explained in exactly the same way as the one between ọ̀lá and ọ̀la, and between Babá and Baba. The difference between the latter two pairs, as may be recalled, was created by rule (10). This being the case, the difference between wọ́n and wọn must similarly be considered as the effect of that same rule. Therefore, (38) exists in Yoruba, for some speakers only as an

Given such data, it is necessary to ask how an element that is said to be a concord prefix could have its own concord prefix. In other words, how are wǫn 'they', mo 'I' and wo 'you (sing.)' different from nouns like baba 'father', Ǫla 'personal name' when, like the latter, they have their own concord prefixes?

Finally, Stahlke's analysis, like others before it, assumes that the HTS has no meaning. But, in fact, this is not the case, as will be shown presently.

6. The Ideal Solution

The various questions and problems raised in the foregoing paragraphs show, among other things, that any solution to the HTS problem which is to be considered accurate must meet most, if not all, of the following specifications. First, it must account fully for the distribution of the HTS. Second, it must account for the element's morphophonemic behavior without having recourse to rules that lack independent existence in the language. Third, since the HTS forms part of the existing linguistic inventory of the Yoruba language, any would-be solution must necessarily be able to assign it a linguistic function of demonstrable current relevance in that language.[12] Finally, such a solution must be compatible with

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underlying string, and for others both as an underlying string and as a surface structure utterance.

[12]The impression one gets from Fresco [1970] and Stahlke [1974] is that they analyze the HTS as a subject marker or subject concord prefix in effect for diachronic or comparative linguistic reasons only. Thus, although Stahlke [1974:175, note 6] argues convincingly at great length that the HTS cannot be viewed as a grammatical agreement morpheme in present day Yoruba, he nevertheless analyzes it as a "Subject Concord Prefix" because, as he puts it (p. 176), "several linguists...have claimed that Yoruba, like many other Niger-Congo languages, has a Subject-Verb agreement or concord rule."

Oyelaran [1970:127, 135] calls the HTS a subject marker, as it would seem, for the following two reasons: first, because Case Grammar claims that "the subject of the sentence, when followed immediately in the chain by the verb, is always marked" (p. 127), and second, because the HTS actually "occurs whenever a noun phrase is immediately followed by any element that is a verb" (p. 135). As (62-65) show below, however, Oyelaran's second reason for calling the HTS a subject marker is incorrect, and he is therefore left with only the first reason, whose validity is yet to be demonstrated for Yoruba.

(45) Ó í lọ

    he HTS go

(46) Délé í lọ

    Dele HTS go

rule (20) would operate, giving as its output the strings

(47) Ó ó lọ

    he HTS go

(48) Délé é lọ

    Dele HTS go

Rule (10) would operate obligatorily on the latter to yield

(49) Ó[13] lọ

    'He went.'

(50) Délé lọ

    'Dele went.'

    The HTS would be present as /∅/ in deep structures containing any one of the following items in Standard Yoruba:[14]

(51) mo   'I'

    o   'You (sing.)'

    a   'We'

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    [13]Thus except when a future tense marker is present, this form ó is always a portmanteau morph, simultaneously representing the third person singular subject "pronoun" and the HTS. Incidentally, notice that the HTS is not the only pre-verbal adverb that fuses with subject NP's in the language. The adverb ì, for signifying unaccomplished actions, regularly fuses with "pronoun" subject NP's as in

    *Mo ì bá lọ → m̀ bá lọ   'I would have gone.'
    *O ì bá lọ → ò bá lọ   'You (sing.) would have gone.'
    *a ì bá lọ → à bá lọ   'We would have gone.'
    *ẹ ì bá lọ → ẹ̀ bá lọ   'You (pl.) would have gone.'
cf. Ọ̀la ì bá lọ → Ọ̀la à bá lọ   'Ọla would have gone.'

    [14]It is assumed that the entry for the HTS in the lexicon would contain information that would permit the correct allomorph, /∅/, to be selected for such deep structures.

relevant established facts, and, if possible, also shed light on related problems in the language.

7. The HTS as Non-Future Tense Marker

Many of these specifications, as it turns out, are easily met if one assumes, much as in Awobuluyi [1964:78], that the HTS is (1) a pre-verbal adverb which indicates the non-future tense, and (2) morphologically /í/ in most contexts, and /ø/ in a few contexts where it is semantically present but physically absent.

On this assumption, the HTS would be present as /í/ in the following deep structure strings:

(41) Ọ̀la í lọ
     Ọla HTS go

(42) Baba í lọ
     Father HTS go

(43) Wọn í lọ
     They HTS go

Rule (20) would convert these into

(41') Ọ̀la á lọ
     'Ọla went.'

(42') Baba á lọ
     'Father went.'

(43') Wọn ọ́n lọ
     'They went.'

and application of rule (10) would turn the latter into (12 - 14).

In the case of the deep structure string

(44) Èmi í ti lọ
     I HTS already go

rule (20) would operate vacuously to yield (26). Rule (10) would then turn (26) into (27).

Similarly, in the case of

ẹ   'You (plural)'

kò   'not'

a   habitual action (in the past/present)

ì   unaccomplished action

dà   'where is?'

ńkọ́ 'where is?'

For example,

(52) Mo ø lọ

      I HTS go

(53) Ọ̀la ø kò lọ

      Ọla HTS not go

(54) Délé ø ì bá lọ

      Dele HTS would-have happen go

      'Dele would have gone.'

A convention existing independently in the language[15] would delete the zero symbol from these underlying strings late in their derivation to yield

(55) Mo lọ (cf. 36)

      'I went.'

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[15]The convention is needed for

(i)   ì bá lọ
       would-have happen go
       'He, she, it would have gone.'

As its gloss shows, (i) contained a token of the 3rd person singular "pronoun" in deep structure. If the pronoun were represented as /ó/, as in

(ii) ó ì bá lọ

this underlying string would incorrectly be turned into

(iii) *í bá lọ

by a Yoruba rule which requires high tone to be always retained when it is involved in contraction with low tone. (On the rule, see Awobuluyi [1964: 68], Bamgboṣe [1966:9], and Oyelaran [1970:81-2]). But if the pronoun were instead represented as ø, as in

(iv) ø ì bá lọ

the desired output (i) would easily be produced by a convention deleting the symbol ø from (iv).

(56) Ọ̀la kò lọ

     'Ọla did not go.'

(57) Délé ì bá lọ

     'Dele would have gone.'

8. Discussion

    The solution just illustrated is suggested by a number of considera-
tions in the language. First and foremost among them is that of the po-
sition in which the HTS actually occurs in Yoruba sentence structure.
That position, as it turns out, is the very one in which pre-verbal ad-
verbs[16] occur in the language. This being the case, it has to be assumed
that the HTS is itself also a pre-verbal adverb, unless and until there
is proof to the contrary.

    With only one exception to be discussed later, the time reference in
any sentence in which the HTS occurs is invariably non-future, i.e. either
present or past. For example,

(58) Ọ̀la á lọ

     Ọla HTS go

     'Ọla went.'

(59) Ọ̀rọ̀ ọ́ wà

     Word HTS exist

     'We have/had some matters to discuss.'

Similarly, the time reference in any sentence displaying any one of the
pre-verbal adverbs yóò, óò, and á is always future. For example,

(60) Ọ̀la yóò lọ

     Ọla future go

     'Ọla will go.'

(61) Ayọ̀ á lọ

     Ayọ future go

     'Ayọ will go.'

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[16]Bamgboṣe [1966:68] calls these same elements verbs, though he agrees
with this writer in [1972:40] that their sole function is that of adverbs.

From these two sets of examples it can be seen that there is as much correlation between the HTS and non-future time reference as there is between the adverbs yóò, óò, and á and future time reference. Hence, if the latter adverbs are analyzed on the basis of such a correlation as the markers of the future tense,[17] then the HTS must similarly be analyzed as the marker of the non-future tense.

There appears to be only three tenses in Yoruba, namely, Future, non-Future, and Neutral--a tense without specific time reference.[18] Thus, if the claim that the HTS is the marker of non-Future is correct, any sentence in the language in which neither the HTS nor any Future tense marker occurs should have a Neutral tense meaning, that is, it should have no specific time reference. In this connection, consider the following:

(62) Ẹ̀wọ̀n já ḿ bi ó wù ú
      chain break in place which-it please it
      'The chain breaks wherever it pleases.'

(63) Eèyàn gbé òkèèrè ní yì
      person reside afar possess dignity
      'When you don't interact with someone at close quarters, he always seems to have no faults.'

(64) Èjì dín ní ogún (> èjì dín lógún)
      two be-missing in twenty
      'Eighteen'

(65) Òjì lé igba (> òjì lúgba)
      forty be-on-top two-hundred
      'Two hundred and forty'

Examples (62-63) contain no tense markers. They occur in ordinary usage as proverbs. Now, since proverbs are normally never time-bound in their import, it might seem to be only natural that (62-63) should lack

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[17]On this, see Ward [1956:88], Delanọ [1965:80-82], Bamgboṣe [1966:90], Awobuluyi [1967:259], and Rowlands [1969:92-94].

[18]The term "Tense" as used here refers, as in Hockett [1958:237], only to the location of events in time.

specific time reference. That is, in other words, it might be thought
that the lack of a specific time reference in (62-63) could be explained
solely by the fact that those sentences are proverbs and not also by the
fact that they contain no tense markers. That this is not so is shown,
however, by proverbs like (66), which are in the clear majority in the
language:

(66) Ẹṣín kú ó fi ìrù sí ayé (< Ẹṣin ín kú ó fi ìrù sí ayé)
               HTS
  horse-HTS die it put tail to earth
  'The horse died, leaving its tail behind on earth.[19]

  Proverbs like (66) are always morphologically marked for tense. For
this reason, they always possess time-bound literal meanings as well as
temporally unspecified figurative interpretations. Thus, the actual or
figurative meaning of (66) is, according to Delanọ [1970:69], "A man may
himself be absent but he has an effective deputy--be it son, relative or
friend--to look after his interests." Proverbs like (62-63), by contrast,
are never marked for tense, and in consequence possess both literal and
figurative meanings with no specific time reference.

  Furthermore, because proverbs like (66) are marked for tense, they
are easily mistaken for non-proverbs when out of context and given time-
bound, literal meanings. This never happens in the case of proverbs like
(62-63), however, and it can therefore be seen that the absence of tense
markers from such utterances serves fully to guarantee or ensure that they
can never be given time-bound interpretations. In other words, (62-63)
lack specific time references not only because they are proverbs but also
because no tense marker occurs in them.

  Examples (64-65) are sentences used for naming numerals. They contain
no tense markers, and lack specific time reference. The latter has noth-
ing to do, however, with the fact that those sentences are used for
naming, since other sentences exist in the language which are similarly

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[19]Until fairly recently, the horse was a status symbol in Yorubaland.
And even today, as Delanọ [1970:69] rightly explains, when it dies, its
tail is not buried with it. Rather, it is kept for use "as an ornament
and sign of authority by Yoruba kings."

used for naming, but which nevertheless always contain specific time reference. For example, we find the personal name

(67) Ọmọ́ tún dé (< Ọmọ ọ́n tún dé)

child-HTS again arrive

'Our child is back again.'

Sentences like (64-65) contain no tense markers and consequently lack a specific time reference, so that they, like (62-63), may never be misinterpreted as describing specific events or occurrences.[20]

If the semantic interpretation attributed to (62-63) is correct, then such sentences confirm the prediction implicit in the view that the HTS is the marker of the non-Future tense. That being the case, they further strengthen the correlation already noted between the HTS and non-Future tense.

That the HTS is indeed the marker of the non-Future tense can be seen still more clearly from a consideration of the traditional description of that tense in Yoruba grammar. The unanimous view of this tense is that it is morphologically zero in all contexts,[21] while the Future tense is marked by the presence of any one of the adverbs yóò, óò, á, or máa. If this traditional view were correct, any declarative sentence in which no Future marker is present would have a non-Future time reference. But, examples (62-65), as already seen, contain no Future markers and yet lack non-Future time reference.[22] Such examples therefore show that the

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[20] The names of some numerals contain the HTS, as in

ọgọ́ọ̀jọ ọ́ dín méèjì (more usually: méèjì dín lọ́gọ́ọ̀jọ)
160 HTS be-less two   two be-less in-160
'One hundred and fifty-eight.'

But all such numerals, unlike those that never contain the HTS, can be mistaken for ordinary descriptions of temporally specified events.

[21] On this, see, e.g. Ward [1956:78-79], Bamgboṣe [1966:91], and Awobuluyi [1967:260].

[22] Commands do not normally contain the HTS (because they contain future tense markers in deep structure, with which the HTS is mutually exclusive). For this reason, the possibility has to be considered that (62-65) may be commands. That possibility has been ruled out here,

traditional view of the morphology of the non-Future tense is erroneous:
the tense is not morphologically zero in all contexts. Quite the contrary,
it is overtly represented, at least in some contexts, by some element
which is missing from (62-65).

Now, apart from the Future tense marker, the only other element that
should alternatively appear in those sentences but which is actually not
there is the HTS. This being the case, the conclusion is completely in-
escapable that this latter element is indeed the marker of the non-Future
tense. That this conclusion is right is shown by the fact that the in-
troduction of the HTS into those sentences predictably gives them a non-
Future time reference, as in

(68) Èjì í dín ní ogún

two HTS be-missing in twenty

'Two is/was missing from twenty.'

(69) Ẹ̀wọ̀n ọ́n já ḿ bi ó wù ú

chain HTS break in place which-it please it

'The chain broke exactly where it pleased.'

9. Residual Problems

This proposed solution to the HTS problem is not completely free of
problems, however. In particular, it is unable to account for everything
about the distribution of the HTS.

As two opposing concepts, the Future tense and the non-Future tense
should never cooccur either semantically or morphologically within the
same sentence in the language. From the semantic standpoint, this is in-
deed the case throughout the language: no Yoruba sentence contains Fu-
ture tense and non-Future tense, and simultaneously refers to future time
and non-future time. From the morphological standpoint, by contrast, the
above expectation is only partially realized. For although the HTS indeed

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however, because, for one thing, the utterances do not possess imperative
meanings, and for another, because they lack the characteristic structure
of commands: they possess non-vocative subject NP's, and consequently
could not be direct commands. Moreover, they do not contain (jẹ́) kí
'(allow) that', and are, therefore, not indirect commands either.

is mutually exclusive with the Future tense markers yóò, óò, and á, as expected, it surprisingly can and does regularly cooccur with the Future tense marker máa, as in

(70) Ayọ̀ ọ́ máa lọ

      Ayọ HTS Future go

      'Ayọ will go.'

The element also occurs, contrary to expectation, in two types of embedded sentences exemplified by

(71) a. Mo fẹ kí Dàda á lọ

         I want compl. Dada HTS go

         'I want Dada to go.'

 cf. b. Mo fẹ́ kí Dàda lọ

         I want compl. Dada go

         'I want Dada to go.'

(72) Bí Dàda á bá wá, a óò rí i

      If Dada HTS happen comes, we Future see him

      'If Dada comes, we shall see him.'

Since the action denoted by the verb lọ 'to go' in the embedded sentence in (71a) must in the nature of things occur subsequently to the one denoted by fẹ́ 'to want' in the matrix sentence, it can be said that the embedded sentence has a future time reference. In which case, the HTS should not appear there at all, as in (71b).

The protasis sentence in (72) has future time reference, as required, because the apodosis sentence has future time reference also. For this reason, the occurrence of the HTS in that protasis sentence is somewhat contrary to expectation.

Notice that the above three kinds of examples actually illustrate the same phenomenon, namely, the occurrence of the HTS in contexts marked as Future, and in which its meaning is invariably completely suppressed in favor of that of the future tense. The solution to the HTS problem presented in this paper cannot explain why the element can occur as in (70-72) nor why its suggested meaning is invariably suppressed in the presence

of future time reference rather than vice versa. To this extent, the so-
lution definitely falls short of the ideal.[23]

10. Conclusion

An advantage of this solution is that it provides, as no other one
has done before, a natural semantic explanation for why the HTS is mutu-
ally exclusive of specifically the Future tense markers (except máa)
and with them alone. Secondly, it draws attention to, and is in addition
fully compatible with, the hitherto overlooked structural and semantic
implications of the position in which the HTS actually occurs in sentence
structure. Thirdly, it provides what would seem to be the only means of
accounting for both the meaning and the strucutre of utterances like (62-
65). Fourthly, it represents what would again seem to be the only viable
alternative to the traditional but completely erroneous view that the
non-Future tense is morphologically zero everywhere in the language.
Finally, it is totally cost-free, since, unlike its predecessors, it ac-
counts for the behavior of the HTS under assimilation and contraction
without employing any new rule at all. Given all these, it would appear
that, on balance, the solution is one on which further work on the HTS
problem can profitably be based.

This paper did not set out specifically to disprove the claim that
there is a subject concord marker in Yoruba. Nevertheless, it is clear
that, by showing that what all the proponents of that view identify as a
subject marker is in fact a tense marker, this paper has actually called
that view into serious question. The HTS had seemed to the proponents
of the view as the most likely, indeed the only, candidate for the

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[23]Notice, however, that the problem involved here is apparently not
specific to the Yoruba language. In English, the present tense and pro-
gressive aspect markers lose their meanings, exactly as the HTS does, in
the context of future time reference, as in

He arrives at 2 p.m. tomorrow.
He is coming to dinner tonight.

Thus, it is clear that the problem is one which must be seen and studied
from a much broader perspective than that afforded by the HTS.

suggested post of subject concord marker. But given the various considerations raised above, a new search must now be undertaken for the real candidate for that post. And if current knowledge of the language is anything to go by, such a search is likely to be completely fruitless.

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