

SOME YORUBA QUANTIFIER WORDS AND SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION: A CRITIQUE*

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This work takes a close look at the Yoruba quantifiers, *púpò*, *òpò*, and *òpòlòpò* 'many', and concludes that, contrary to Lawal's [1986] claim, it is difficult to differentiate semantically between them.

1. Introduction

Lawal [1986:95] examines the Yoruba quantifiers, *pò*, *púpò*, *òpò*, and *òpòlòpò*, which she regards as the "four morphological encodings for the quantifier 'many'" and concludes that the last three differ not only morphologically and syntactically, but also semantically.¹ She does not compare the first with the others because, according to her, it is the verb from which the others are derived. We agree that these three words differ both morphologically and syntactically, but we find it very difficult to differentiate semantically between them. The same applies to other native speakers we consulted. To support our argument, we shall use (i) Odell's [1984] paraphrastic criteria for determining whether "a linguistic expression has, in the same or a different linguistic context, the same sense as another linguistic expression" [Odell 1984:118] and (ii) one of the criteria for lexical relations proposed by Cruse [1986] to see if one could differentiate semantically between the

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¹This classification assumes that *òpò* 'cheap' is distinct from *òpò* 'many' and *ogunlógó*, often glossed as 'many/several', is not a morphological encoding for 'many'. Note, too, that the three items can be used adverbially as in *ó pò púpò*, *ó pò lópò*, and *ó pò lópòlópò* 'they are too many'. Lawal does not discuss this use of the items and we shall not be concerned with them here.

items $\dot{o}p\dot{o}$, $p\acute{u}p\dot{o}$, and $\dot{o}p\dot{o}l\dot{o}p\dot{o}$. We shall then present empirical evidence to support our argument.

2. Theoretical Consideration

2.1. Odell's [1984] paraphrastic criteria. Odell [1984:118-119] distinguishes between two kinds of synonymy, "the kind which exists between two tokens of the same type, and ... the kind that exists between two tokens of different types". The former is referred to as *monotypical* synonymy while the latter is called *multitypical* synonymy. They are defined as follows:

An expression e in S1 is *monotypically synonymous* with e in S2 if e is used in the same sense in S1 and S2.

An expression e in S1 is *multitypically synonymous* with f in S2 if e and f are used in the same sense.

As the items $\dot{o}p\dot{o}$, $\dot{o}p\dot{o}l\dot{o}p\dot{o}$, and $p\acute{u}p\dot{o}$ are not three tokens of the same type, it is the latter definition that concerns us here. The criterion formulated by Odell [1984:119] for deciding whether some given items are multitypically synonymous is as follows:

An expression e in S1 is *multitypically synonymous* with f in S2 if (1) there is a word or phrase g which is a metaphrase of e in S1 and of f in S2, (2) there is no word h which is a metaphrase of e in S1 but not of f in S2, and (3) neither S1 nor S2 is odd.

If one applies this criterion to the use of the items $\dot{o}p\dot{o}$, $p\acute{u}p\dot{o}$, and $\dot{o}p\dot{o}l\dot{o}p\dot{o}$ in sentences, one would note that they are multitypically synonymous. Given a situation of a thousand people standing watching a play and only fifty people sitting watching the same play, consider the following sentences where

$p\acute{u}p\dot{o}$	=	e
$\dot{o}p\dot{o}$	=	f
$\dot{o}p\dot{o}l\dot{o}p\dot{o}$	=	g
$d\acute{i}\dot{e}$	=	h

- | | | |
|--------|--|-------------------------------|
| (1) a. | $\acute{o} r\acute{i} \ \acute{e}n\grave{i} \ y\grave{a}n \ p\acute{u}p\dot{o} \ n\acute{i} \ \grave{i} \ d\acute{u}r\acute{o}$ | ‘he saw many people standing’ |
| | he see people many in standing | |
| b. | $\acute{o} r\acute{i} \ \dot{o}p\dot{o} \ \acute{e}n\grave{i} \ y\grave{a}n \ n\acute{i} \ \grave{i} \ d\acute{u}r\acute{o}$ | ‘he saw many people standing’ |
| | he see many people in standing | |
| c. | $\acute{o} r\acute{i} \ \dot{o}p\dot{o}l\dot{o}p\dot{o} \ \acute{e}n\grave{i} \ y\grave{a}n \ n\acute{i} \ \grave{i} \ d\acute{u}r\acute{o}$ | ‘he saw many people standing’ |
| | he see many people in standing | |

- d. *??ó rí ènì yàn díè ní ì dúró* 'he saw a few people standing'
 he see people few in standing

The *púpò* in (1a), the *òpò* in (1b), and the *òpòlòpò* in (1c) are multitypically synonymous, but the 4th (=h) is not because one cannot use *díè* 'a few' to describe a thousand people standing where only fifty are sitting.

2.2. Cruse [1986] on lexical meaning. Cruse [1986] also provides some criteria for determining whether some items are logically equivalent. According to him, a useful semantic test for deciding the logical relations between items is to see if the items mutually entail each other [Cruse 1986:15]. If one applies this test to the quantifiers under discussion, one would note that they are logically equivalent. For instance, I can say (2a,b,c) but not (2d).

- (2) a. *ó bá ènì yàn púpò ní ì dúró ní ibi eré náà nítorí nínú*
 he meet people many in standing in place play the because inside
egbèrún ènì yàn, àádóta pére ni ó rí ìjókòó
 one thousand people fifty only FOC he get seats

'he met many people standing in the concert because out of one thousand people, only fifty were able to get seats'

- b. *ó bá òpòlòpò ènì yàn ní ì dúró ní ibi eré náà nítorí*
 he meet many people in standing in place play the because
nínú egbèrún ènì yàn, àádóta pére ni ó rí ìjókòó
 in inside one thousand people fifty only FOC he get seat

'he met many people standing in the concert because out of one thousand people, only fifty were able to get seats'

- c. *ó bá òpò ènì yàn ní ì dúró ní ibi eré náà nítorí nínú*
 he meet many people in standing in place play the because in inside
egbèrún ènì yàn, àádóta pére ni ó rí ìjókòó
 one thousand people fifty only FOC he get seat

'he met many people standing in the concert because out of one thousand people, only fifty were able to get seats'

d. ??ó bá ènìyàn díè ní ìdúró ní ibi eré náà nítorí nínú
 he meet people few in standing in place play the because in inside

egbèrún ènìyàn, àádóta pére ni ó rí ìjókódó
 one thousand people fifty only FOC he get seat

‘he met a few people standing in the concert because out of one thousand people, only fifty were able to get seats’

Example (2d) is anomalous because in talking about people at a concert, nine hundred and fifty people would be an entailment of “many” not “few”.

From these tests, one can conclude that the quantifiers *òpò*, *òpòlòpò*, and *púpò* are logically equivalent. To further support our argument, we shall check how these words are used in a Yoruba literary work. Our choice for this is Okediji's [1983] *Atótó Arére*.

3. Empirical Evidence

3.1. Why *Atótó Arére*? As we have stated elsewhere,² this prose is of interest because it depicts not only real characters but also reflects real life experiences of some Yoruba cities and villages. The prose is also one of those few writings in Yoruba which adequately represent the standard language. The dialectal variation is minimal, and most tones are indicated. The author has also been described as one who “makes use of the reader's cultural knowledge and linguistic competence to good stylistic advantage” [Işola 1978:501]. In this work, references from the novel are put in brackets []. Before we start quoting examples from the novel to justify our claim, let us summarize some of the points touched upon by Lawal.

3.2. Lawal [1986] in brief. The points raised by Lawal which concern us in this work are that:

The size of the set referred to by *òpòlòpò* is greater than that of *òpò* and the one referred to by the latter is greater than that of *púpò*.

Púpò and *òpò* emphasize the number or largeness of the set, *òpòlòpò* emphasizes variety within a set.

Púpò and *òpò* imply undifferentiated mass of people only while *òpòlòpò* is used for individual interpretation of a given set of people.

²See Adewole [forthcoming].

NP's higher in animacy are quantified by *òpòlòpò* while those lower in animacy are quantified by *òpò* or *púpò*. This supports Comrie's view on animacy that "individuated objects ... are viewed by humans as being higher in animacy than less individuated objects" [Lawal 1986:103].

In what follows, we shall examine these points one by one to see if they are justified by the facts of the language. We begin with size distinction.

3.3. The problem of size. Lawal states that the set referred to by *òpòlòpò* is greater than the one *òpò* refers to and that the one referred to by the latter is greater than the one referred to by *púpò*. That this claim is not correct is shown by the following examples:

(3) a. *ó rí òpò èrò tí wọn ní lu àwọn méjì kan* [p. 249]³
 he see many people that they PROG hit they two one
 'he saw a crowd of people hitting two people'

b. *nígba tí àwọn èrò náà rí ọlọpáá, wọn síwọ́ọ lílu àwọn*
 in time that they crowd the see police they stop hitting they

àlejò náà, òpòlòpò sì sá lọ [p. 249]
 stranger the many then run go

'when the (crowd of) people saw a policeman, they stopped hitting the strangers, many of them ran away'

What should be noted is that these two sentences are referring to the same set of people who are all farmers. The example in (3a), in which *òpò* is used, refers to the whole set of people. The example in (3b), where *òpòlòpò* is used, refers to only some of these people. This is contrary to Lawal's claim that *òpòlòpò* is used to refer to a set which is greater than the one referred to by *òpò*. If any of the two is greater in these two examples, it should be *òpò* because in (3b) where *òpòlòpò* is used, only some of the people ran away on seeing the policeman.

This is not to say that *òpò* cannot be used in place of *òpòlòpò* in (3b) and the latter in place of the former in (3a), but what we note is that when they are so used, they still give the same meaning. We still have more people in (3a) than (3b). Their use in sentences such as (3a) and (3b) depends on which of the two the speaker prefers.

³Context: A man has just been murdered in a village. The murderer escaped but some villagers, all middle-aged farmers, searching for the murderer/murderers saw two men loitering around. They concluded that the two men should be the murderers. They took the law into their hands and started hitting the men. A policeman came just in time to save the men from being lynched.

The two readings in the sentences are called forth by different types of contexts. The two items realize a common core meaning.

3.4. Largeness of the set and variation within the set. Lawal's claim that *òpòlòpò* indicates variety within a set while *púpò* and *òpò* imply largeness of the set is also incorrect. Witness the following examples:

- (4) *ó léegun ju omò olóbì lọ, sùgbón omò olóbì*
 he has power more than child kola-owner but child kola-owner

mọ àyínì ke ìja púpò [p. 26]
 know technique fight many

'he is stronger than the boy selling kola but the boy knows the technique of wrestling better than he does'

- (5) *Alàbá gba òpòlòpò sùgà* [p. 106]
 Alaba get much sugar

'Alaba collected a lot of sugar'

In (4), it is not the largeness of techniques of wrestling that the boy knows but the various types that are being discussed. In (5), on the other hand, we are talking about the amount of sugar and not different types of sugars. This is because all the sugars are plain, white cubes.

In addition, if one looks at sentences (3a) and (3b), one would note that the people are farmers, so the use of *òpòlòpò* does not emphasize their background or discipline. The people are also all middle-aged, so, no distinction either of sex or age-group is made with the use of *òpòlòpò* in (3b).

We also note that *òpòlòpò* can mean 'much' or 'many' when applied to mass nouns or uncountable items. For example, both (6a) and (6b) are ambiguous between 'a lot of palm wine' and '(many) different kinds of palm wine' with no difference in preferred reading. The reading 'a lot of palm wine' applies when the same type of palm wine is used for the sacrifice and the other reading applies when different types of palm wine, e.g. *isà* 'a day old palm wine', *àyò* 'palm wine tapped and drunk on the same day', *ògidi ẹmu* 'a palm-wine not mixed with water', *òjú-ògún* 'the first palm-wine to be tapped from a palm tree often used in sacrifice to Ogún, god of iron', etc., are used for sacrifice.

- (6) a. *ó fi òpòlòpò ẹmu bọ àwọn òrìsà*
 he use many/much palm-wine sacrifice many gods
 'he used many different kinds of/a lot of palm-wine to sacrifice to the gods'

- b. *ó fi ẹmu púpọ̀ bọ àwọn òrìṣà*
 he use palm-wine many/much sacrifice many gods
 'he used many different kind of/a lot of palm-wine to sacrifice to the gods'

3.5. Undifferentiated mass vs. individual interpretation. Lawal also claims that while *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀* is used for individual interpretation, *ọ̀pọ̀* and *púpọ̀* are used for undifferentiated mass. Our examples (3a) and (3b) counter this claim. As stated above, both *ọ̀pọ̀* and *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀* in (3a) and (3b) are used for the same set of people, *ọ̀pọ̀* for all of them and *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀* for some of them. There is no way one can know whether the people are differentiated or not. For one thing, the narrator of the story does not know any of the people hitting the men. What this means is that the set of people hitting the man is undifferentiated yet, as we have seen, both *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀* and *ọ̀pọ̀* can be used interchangeably.

3.6. The animacy property. The last criterion used by Lawal to distinguish these words from each other is that of animacy. According to her, NP's that are regarded as higher in animacy are quantified by *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀* while those that are regarded as lower in animacy are quantified either by *ọ̀pọ̀* or *púpọ̀* [Lawal 1986:102-103].

Most of the examples given by Lawal herself are counterexamples to this claim. Witness the following examples [Lawal 1986:101] (the numbering is ours):

- (7) *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ènì yàn lọ ibi òkú náà*
 many people went place-of funeral the
 'many people attended the funeral'
- (8) *ọ̀pọ̀ ènì yàn lọ ibi òkú náà*
 many people went place-of funeral the
 'many people attended the funeral'
- (9) *ènì yàn púpọ̀ lọ ibi òkú náà*
 people many went place-of funeral the
 'many people went to [sic] the funeral'

As the glosses show, the three sentences have the same meaning, and they are all acceptable. Yet, in the three sentences, we have *ènì yàn* 'people', which is animate.

Other counterexamples to Lawal's claim are the following popular Yorùbá sayings:

- (10) *òpò ẹja ní nì bẹ nínú ibú*
 many fish FOC PROG exist in inside deep sea
 'there are many fishes in the ocean'
- (11) *òpòlòpò ìràwò ní nì bẹ lódé òrun*
 many star FOC PROG exist in outside heaven
 'there are many stars in the sky'
- (12) *òpòlòpò iyanrìn ní nì bẹ létí òkun*
 many sands FOC PROG exist in side ocean
 'there are a lot of sands by the side of the ocean'

In (10-12), *ẹja* 'fish' is higher in animacy than both *ìràwò* 'star' and *iyandrìn* 'sand' yet, while *òpò* is used to quantify *ẹja* 'fish', *òpòlòpò* is used to quantify both *ìràwò* 'star' and *iyandrìn* 'sand'.

Also, examples (13-15) which Lawal [1986:103-104] marks as semantically anomalous are acceptable to some Yoruba speakers we interviewed (the numbering is ours).

- (13) *òpòlòpò iyanrìn ló ẹ é po síbẹntì* [sic]
 many sands be do INF mix cement
 'many sands can be used to mix cement'
- (14) *òpòlòpò ẹfọn máa ní kú ní àsìkò oyẹ*
 many mosquitoes habitual die at time cold
 'many mosquitoes die during the cold weather'
- (15) *wọn kó òpòlòpò kóríkò dà sí àjà*
 they carried many grass throw at loft
 'they throw many grasses in the loft'

Other counterexamples to Lawal's claim taken from *Atótó Arére* are as follows:

- (16) *òpò ènì yàn àtì aláì lágbara tààrà kò jẹkí Fòràwái lè*
 many people and powerless much NEG allow Forawai able

sá lọ ní tirẹ [p. 249]
 run go in his own

'Forawai could not escape because apart from the number of people around, he was also powerless'

(17) *nígba tí ó wo olúwa-rẹ̀, ó rí i pé ẹnì kan tí*
 in time that he look person-his he see him that one person that

ó bá òun ra ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ táyà ní Ilé-Ifẹ̀ láìpẹ̀ ni [p. 103]
 he follow him buy many tyres in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in-not-long FOC

‘when he looked at the person, he saw that the person was the one who bought many tyres from him in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ recently’

In (16), *èni yàn* ‘people’ is quantified with *ọ̀pọ̀*, and in (17), *táyà* ‘tyre’ is quantified with *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀*. With the animacy principle the reverse should be the case.

3.7. Further comments on animacy. We quite agree with Palmer [1986:2] that linguists should look into different languages for items “identified and defined in terms of the formal characteristics of each of those languages” that could be used to illustrate some scholars’ typological postulates. Such illustrations have recently become the subject of a number of scholarly works. Some proposed illustrations are entirely justified, but quite a few are not. Our detailed examination of the quantifiers *ọ̀pọ̀*, *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀*, and *púpọ̀* shows that the proposal that they could be distinguished on the basis of their animacy property falls into the latter category.

4. Conclusion

The quantifiers *ọ̀pọ̀*, *ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀*, and *púpọ̀*, therefore, are semantically identical. We are quite aware of the fact that absolute synonymy is a rare phenomenon but, despite this, we have been able to provide both theoretical and empirical evidence to show that if these items differ in respect of some semantic properties,⁴ they are not the ones noted by Lawal.

⁴These still need to be investigated.

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