

Yoruba *Pé* and *Kí*: Verbs or Complementizers

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This paper discusses the Yoruba items *Pé* and *Kí*. These items have sometimes been analyzed as verbs and sometimes as complementizers. Thus their status has not been clearly established. In this paper, we look at the various structures in which these items occur and at their behaviour and proceed to reanalyze them. In this re-examination attention is paid to the distributional criteria of both verbs and complementizers. The paper concludes that *pé* and *kí* are complementizers not verbs.

1. Introduction

Complementizers may be defined simply as particles which serve to mark out clause boundaries. They are usually found at the beginning of subordinate or embedded clauses. Complementizers thus serve to introduce clauses. An example of a complementizer is *that* in English as found in the sentence below:

(1) I know *that* he will arrive early.

The properties of complementizers play a crucial role in clause analysis and in the formulation of general properties of grammar, particularly within the GB framework. It is hoped that a study of comp-like elements in Yoruba will provide further insights into the role and properties of complementizers in grammar. Before going into the discussion of Yoruba complementizer-like elements we will briefly discuss some relevant features of the complementizer system.

1.1. Syntactic position of complementizers. Our discussion here will be within the framework of Government and Binding Theory [Chomsky 1977, 1981]. The syntactic position occupied by complementizers is that of COMP. The COMP node is introduced by the phrase structure rule for sentences:

S' → COMP S

COMP → ±WH

One of the main assumptions in GB is that all sentences begin with a COMP node. The COMP node is specified for the feature ±WH, where -WH is the abstract element that dominates non-interrogative clauses while +WH dominates interrogative clauses. Verbs select for the feature ±WH. The main function of COMP is to designate a node in sentence initial position where constituents moved by fronting transformations can be attached. An example is the WH-movement transformation which moves constituents into sentence initial position. A second important function of COMP is to provide a syntactic position for sentence introducing elements such as question particles and complementizers. That Yoruba sentences begin with a COMP node is not controversial as Yoruba has sentence initial question particles such as *ńjé* and *sé*. Also, WH-movement takes place in the language. These facts are illustrated in the examples below:

- (2) a. *Ñjé Bólá wá?* 'Did Bola come?'
 QPRT Bola came
- b. *Sé Bólá wá?* 'Did Bola come?'
 QPRT Bola came
- c. *Ta ni ó rí?* 'What did you see?'
 WH FOC you saw

1.2. Complementizer-like elements in Yoruba. In Yoruba there are three items which may be identified as complementizers. They are *pé*, *kí* and *ti*.¹ In this paper

¹The sentence introducer *kí* is sometimes realized as *pé kí*, that is everytime we have *kí* alone it may be taken as an instance of deletion of *pé* from *pé kí*, but *pé* alone does not represent deletion of *kí* from *pé kí*. *Pé* alone is a separate complementizer as can be seen in the following examples.

- (i) *Ayọ mọ pé Bólá ti lọ*
 Ayo knows that Bola has gone
- (ii) **Ayọ mọ (pé) kí Bólá ti lọ*
 Ayo knows that Bola has gone

we are concerned with the elements *pé* and *kí* as these are the elements on which controversy exists. Not all Yoruba linguists agree that *pé* and *kí* are complementizers. Some Yoruba linguists regard these items as verbs [Oyelaran 1983, Bamgbose 1966]. Below we will attempt to establish the true status of these elements. First we look at *pé*:

2. The Sentence Introducer *pé*

Arguments for *pé* as a verb have been motivated mainly by the fact that *pé* occurs in minimal sentences where it means 'say'. The examples below illustrate this usage:

- (3) a. *Olú pé awọn ti dé*
 Olu says they have arrived
- b. *Olú pé wọn wá*
 Olu said they came

Sentences such as those in (3), where *pé* cooccurs with other verbs, have been analysed as serial verbal constructions [Oyelaran 1983]. Serial verbal constructions (SVC) are sentences which contain sequences of two or more verbs without any syntactic marker of subordination such as complementizers. Thus Oyelaran, on the basis of sentences such as (3), analyzes the sentences (4) below as instances of SVC [Oyelaran 1983]:

- (4) a. *Olú gbàgbé pé Bólá ti jáde*
 Olu forget (?) Bola PERF go out
 'Olu forgot that Bola has gone out'
- b. *Olú rántí pé Bólá nísun*
 Olu remember (?) Bola sleeping
 'Olu remembered that Bola was sleeping'

(iii) *Ayọ ní retí (pé) kí Bólá lọ* 'Ayo is expecting Bola to go.'
 Ayo PROG expect that Bola go

(iv) **Ayọ ní retí pé Bólá lọ*
 Ayo PROG expect that Bola go

From the examples we can see that *pé kí* and *kí* occur in the same context but *pé*, *pé kí*, and *kí* may not substitute for each other without a change in meaning. (See Lawal [1989] for some discussion on their distribution and meanings). The shorter form *kí* is used more frequently than the longer *pé kí*, so whenever we talk of *kí* we are also referring to *pé kí*.

- c. *Ó dàbí ẹ̀ni pẹ́ mo ti pàdé rẹ̀*
 it seem person (?) I have met him
 'it seems that I have met him'
- d. *Ó jọ bí ẹ̀ni pẹ́ òjò fẹ́ẹ̀ rọ̀*
 it look like person (?) rain want fall
 'it looks like (that) it wants to rain'

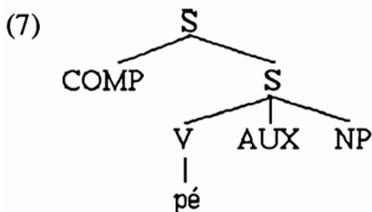
The claim is that *pẹ́* in (4) above is similar or identical in meaning with the sequence of *pẹ́* and another verb in (3) where it is a verb meaning 'say'. We will show below that this claim is untenable and that the sentences in (4) are not instances of SVC but sentential complement clauses with *pẹ́* having the status of a complementiser. We will give arguments based on the distributional and syntactic properties of *pẹ́* to support our claim.

2.1. Syntactic position of *pẹ́*. One of the main problems which anyone who wants to analyze *pẹ́* as a verb will have to account for is why *pẹ́* occurs in sentence initial position, i.e. the COMP position. This is illustrated with the examples below:

- (5) *pẹ́ a jọ lọ dára*
 () we together went good
 'that we went together was good'
- (6) *pẹ́ obinrin ló borí jọ mí lójú*
 () woman FOC-she won resemble me eye
 'that a woman won surprised me'

In the above examples *pẹ́* cannot be said to be the subject of the sentence as claimed by Oyelaran [1983]. In the first place for *pẹ́* to be the subject of the sentence it must be a phrasal category not a lexical category since only phrasal categories can occupy an argument position, e.g. subject position. But *pẹ́* is a lexical category not a phrasal category since it is only a bare verb stem.

The implication of having a bare verb as a subject of the sentence is theoretically not acceptable as it will mean permitting a structure like (7).



Such a structure cannot be defended or justified. Moreover, before a verb can occupy the subject position of a sentence in Yoruba, it must be nominalized. In Yoruba, nominalized verbs take special forms. They are either reduplicated as illustrated in (8),

- (8) a. *jó* → *jíjó* ‘dancing’
dance
- b. *lọ* → *lílọ* ‘going’
go
- c. *pe* → *pipe* ‘calling’
call

or they are preceded by a nominalizing morpheme, as in (9):

- (9) a. *jó* → *i-jó* ‘dancing’
dance
- b. *lọ* → *à-lọ* ‘going’
go
- c. *mọ* → *ì-mọ* ‘knowledge’
know
- d. *gbàgbé* → *ì-gbàgbé* ‘forgetting’
forget

The sentence introducer *pe* cannot be classified as a nominalized verb because it does not exhibit the required nominalized form. *Pé* also does not satisfy another minimum criteria for verbs which is that it cannot undergo reduplication for nominalization. All Yoruba verbs have this ability. Even defective verbs like *bá*, *fí*, and, *tètè* may be reduplicated. This is illustrated in (10a-c):

- (10) a. *tútètè tí ó tètè lọ dára*
hurry that he hurry go good
‘his hurrying to go is good’
- b. *bíbá tí ó bá Bólá lọ dára*
accompanying that he accompany Bola go good
‘his accompanying Bola’s going is good’

- c. *fifì tí Bólá fì òbẹ́ gé isu dára*
 using that Bola use knif cut yam good
 e

‘Bola’s cutting the yam with a knife is good’

Contrast the above with the *pé* sentences in (10d-f):

- d. **pípé tí ó dára pé a lọ*
 () that it good () we went
- e. **pípé tí ó gbàgbé pé Bísí n̄bọ*
 () that he forgot () Bisi is coming
- f. **pípé tí pé a lọ*
 () that () we went

Another point against classifying *pé* as a verb is the fact that *pé* clauses may be conjoined with *àti*. In Yoruba the coordinator for verbs or VP is *sì* not *àti*. The coordinator *àti* may only conjoin nouns. It cannot conjoin verbs or VP’s:

- (11) a. **mo [VP lọ sí oja] àti mo [VP ra isu]*
 I went to market and I bought yams
- b. *mo [VP lọ sí oja] mo sì [VP ra isu]*
 I went to market I and bought yams
 ‘I went to the market and I bought yams’
- c. [_{NP} *pé Bólá wa*] *àti* [_{NP} *pé mo wa*] *dára*
 () Bola came and () I came good
 ‘that Bola came and that I too came is a good thing’
- d. *_{[NP} *pé Bólá wa*] *sì* [_{NP} *pé mo wa*] *dára*
 () Bola came and () I came good

Koopman [1984] argues for the verbal status of a similar element in Vata by claiming that the element *na* in Vata is an empty verb selected by the higher verb which cannot directly select a sentential complement. Such a hypothesis cannot work for *pé* for the simple reason that *pé* does not introduce only verbal complements. It also introduces noun complement clauses:

- (12) a. [_{NP} *iròhìn pé iyawó oga bímọ*] VP ...
 news () wife boss bring forth baby
 ‘the news that the boss’ wife has had a baby ...’
- b. [_{NP} *èro pé òun ó lọ sí ẹ̀wọ̀n*] VP ...
 idea () he will go to prison
 ‘the idea that he will go to prison ...’
- c. [_S *mo gbọ* [_{NP} *iròhìn pé Babangida ní bọ*]]
 I heard news () Babangida is coming
 ‘I heard the news that Babangida is coming’

Thus, *pé* cannot be analyzed as an empty verb which is selected by the main verb as is the case with *Vata na*.

2.2. *Pé* in the S’ system. Having shown that *pé* is not a verb we are now in a position to account for the S-initial position of *pé* in sentences such as (5) and (6) repeated here as (13):

- (13) a. *pé a jọ lọ dára*
 () we together went good
 ‘that we went together was good’
- b. *pé obinrin ló borí jọ mí lójú*
 () woman FOC-she won resemble me eye
 ‘that a woman won surprised me’

Let us consider the phrase structure rules for the sentence which we gave earlier:

S’ → COMP S

COMP → ±WH

The assumption from the above rules is that all sentences begin with a COMP node. As shown earlier, Yoruba sentences also begin with a COMP node. The syntactic position occupied by *pé* which is sentence initial is the position of COMP, i.e. the position occupied by items such as complementisers and other sentence introducing particles. The COMP node is specified for the binary feature ±WH. The sentence introducer *pé* introduces non-interrogative clauses. It can therefore be safely assumed that *pé* has the feature -WH. Its syntactic position and

its syntactic distribution in contrast to that of the verb *pé* in (3) makes it uncontroversially a complementiser. It occurs in the position where complementisers occur.

Further evidence in support of the complementiser status of *pé* comes from its behaviour in coordinated clauses:

- (14) a. [*pé Bólá wa*] àti [*pé ó jẹun*] VP ...
 that Bola came and that she ate
- b. [*pé Bólá jáde*] àti [*pé Bísí dé*] VP ...
 that Bola went out and that Bisi arrived

In such coordinated clauses as can be seen from the examples above *pé* must be repeated. This shows that *pé* is a constituent of the S' system.

The above facts and the foregoing discussion show that *pé* is an instance of an initial COMP node, not a verb or VP. *Pé* may be translated as *that* in English. See Lawal [1989] for a discussion of the meaning properties of this element.

3. The Sentence Introducer *Kí*

The second COMP-like element we shall examine is the sentence introducer *kí*. As with *pé* not all Yoruba linguists agree on the complementiser status of *kí*. For instance Awobuluyi [1978] classifies *kí* as a nominalizing morpheme while Bamgbose [1966] classifies it as a preverb.

3.1. The two “*kV*” morphemes of Yoruba. Before we proceed, however, it is important to point out that the sequence involving the *kí* classified by Awobuluyi as a nominalizer should be distinguished from the homophonous sequence involving the *kí* which introduces clauses. Awobuluyi, however, lumps the two together as can be seen in the example given in Awobuluyi [1978].

- (15) a. *eni kí eni* → *enikéni* ‘anybody’
 person () person
- b. *kí kó ilé* ‘building houses’
 () build house
- c. *éyan kí èniyan* → *èyankéniyan* ‘a good for nothing’
 person () person
- d. *kí a sọ òótó dára* ‘it is good to say the truth’
 () we say truth good

- e. *kí a sọ òtító* 'to say the truth'
 () we say truth

It is obvious that Awobuluyi's analysis of *kí* as a nominalizer is wrong as the nominalizing morpheme is *kú* rather than *kí*.² That this morpheme shows up as *kú* in the examples below supports this claim:

- (16) a. *ìgbà kú ìgbà* → *ìgbàkúbà* 'anytime'
 time () time
 b. *ìsọ kú ìsọ* → *ìsọkúsọ* 'bad sayings'
 saying () saying

The 'u' is sometimes deleted before vowels other than 'i', and optionally deleted before 'i'. Secondly in (15b) the sequence *ki* is not the nominalizing morpheme *kú* but the reduplicated 'k' of the verb *ko*, followed by the vowel 'i' as in examples like (17):

- (17) a. *lọ* → *lílọ* 'going'
 go
 b. *wá* → *wíwá* 'coming'
 come
 c. *kí* → *kíkí* 'greetings'
 greet

And in (15d) and (15e) *kí* is a sentence or clause introducer not a nominalizing morpheme. We shall justify this below.

3.2. Syntactic distribution of *kí*. The sentence introducer *kí* is analysed in Bamgbose [1966] as a verb, more precisely a preverb, but *kí* shares most of the syntactic features and behaviour associated with the element *pé*, which suggests that *kí* cannot be a verb. First, like *pé*, and unlike verbs, *kí* occurs in S-initial position, a position which a bare verb cannot occupy without being nominalized. *Kí* does not have a nominalized form in this position:

- (18) a. **kíkí a lọ dára*
 ki-NOM we go good

²This was first pointed out to me by a reviewer.

- b. *kí a lọ dára* 'that we should go is good'
 () we go good

Contrast the *kí* sentence above with the sentence below where a verb occupies the S-initial position:

- c. [*lílọ wa*] *dára* 'our going is good'
 going our good
- d. *[*lọ wa*] *dára*
 go our good

Example (18d) is ungrammatical because the verb has not been nominalized. Secondly, *kí* unlike verbs cannot undergo the process of predicate clefting by reduplication:

- (19) a. **kíkí tí ó dára kí ó wa*
 ki-NOM that it good () we go
- b. **kíkí tí ó dára kí a lọ*
 ki-NOM that it good () we good

Contrast the unacceptable *ki* sentences with the sentences below where the verb has been clefted:

- c. *gbígbàgbé tí Bólá gbàgbé kí ó ti ilẹ̀kùn*
 forgetting FOC Bola forgot () she shut door
 'forgetting to shut the door that Bola forgot'
- d. *fífé tí mo fẹ́ kí Bólá fẹ́ Bísí*
 marrying FOC I want () Bola marry Bisi
 'marrying that I want Bola to marry Bisi'

Thirdly, *kí* clauses just like *pé* clauses may not be coordinated with *sì*, the coordinator for VPs. Rather the coordinator that may be used is *àti*, the coordinator for NPs and PPs.

- (20) a. *wọn gbàgbé [kí wọn ra búrédì] àti [kí wọn gbé ọmọ]*
 they forgot () they bought bread and () they pick child
 'they forgot to buy bread and to pick the child'

- b. **wón gbàgbé* [*kí wón ra búrédi wón*] *sì* [*kí gbé ọmọ*]
 they forgot () they buy bread they and () pick child

Fourthly, when *kí* clauses are coordinated, *kí* like *pé* must be repeated, showing that it forms part of the expansion system of S' system (see the examples (20a) above).

Kí is sometimes found in main clauses, and this has been used as evidence against its complementiser status [Bamgbose 1966]. However, this fact is uncontroversial since in such sentences *kí* occupies the S-initial position, which is the COMP position:

- (21) a. *kí Olúwa pèlú wa*
 () God be with us

- b. *kí ẹ tètè dé*
 () you quick come
 'that come back quickly'

Its occurrence in such structures does not count as evidence against its complementiser status. Moreover, other COMP-like elements are also realized in main clauses in Yoruba. The examples below illustrate this:

- (22) a. *sé Bọlá ti dé?*
 QPrt Bola PERF arrived
 'has Bola arrived?'

- b. *ńjé Bọlá lọ?*
 QPrt Bola went
 'did Bola go?'

The COMP position in a main clause may have zero-realization or it may be overt. What the data here shows is that Yoruba is one of the few languages where the COMP is realized overtly in main clauses and is unlike English, which has zero-realization of COMP in main clauses. The occurrence of *kí* in main clauses does not therefore count as evidence against its status as a complementiser.

4. Conclusion

We have shown in this paper that the items *pé* and *kí* in Yoruba are complementizers, not verbs. We found that *pé* and *kí* have the properties which characterize complementizers rather than verbs. Most importantly, our analysis clarifies certain issues in Yoruba grammar: First, sentences in which *pé* cooccurs

with other verbs are not serial verbal constructions but complement clauses and secondly, the syntactic position occupied by *pé* and *kí* is shown not to be that of subject but rather that of COMP, a position which is consistent with the facts and with the true status of these items.

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