

Tense/Aspect and Negation in Mòbà (A Yorùbá Dialect)

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Abstract

The main thrust of this study is to shed light on the grammatical rules and system that are typical of Mòbà dialect with reference to tense/aspect and negation. The study shows that Mòbà has one future tense marker and the occurrence of tense/aspect markers in the dialect and standard Yorùbá resembles each other. The study identifies four negation markers in Mòbà and posit that òkò, one of the negation markers in the dialect is probably the origin of negation marker kò in standard Yorùbá. The use of the negation marker rì in the dialect require that àì be analyzed as non-unitary morphemes in standard Yorùbá.

Keywords: aspect, dialect, Mòbà, negation, tense, Yorùbá

1. Introduction

Various aspects of the phonology and syntax of the Yorùbá language have been examined in many studies such as Adéwolé (1988), Akinlabí (1985), Awóbùlúyì (1967, 1978, 2008), Bámgbósé (1966, 1990), Ìlòrí (2010), Oḍúntan (2000), Oḷa (1990), Owólábí (1976, 1989) and Oyèláran (1971) among others. These studies have thrown more light on what is permitted or prohibited in Standard Yoruba. However, very few scholarly works exists on Yorùbá dialects, which are numerous and structurally diverse. These works include Bámiṣilẹ̀ (1986), Ajíbóyè (1990), Sàláwù (1998) and Madeleire (2004). Most of these works focus more on phonology than other areas of linguistics like morphology, syntax and semantics. The inadequate attention paid to the study of these dialects probably informs Awobuluyi's (1992, 1998) appeal to Yorùbá linguistics to research into Yorùbá dialects. Such study, according to him, will provide some grammatical expositions that may teach us new things that will help in reappraising the grammar of Yorùbá language. Olúmúyiwá (2006) and the present study respond to that call as we are also of the view that such study of the Yorùbá dialects has immediate and long term benefits for Yorùbá language studies.

The main thrust of this study is to show the grammatical rules and systems that are typical of the dialect with reference to tense/aspect and negation. The approach in this analysis, which is basically descriptive, affords us the opportunity to identify and describe the forms and functions of these items in Mòbà.

2. Mòbà Linguistic Area

Mòbà is spoken in all the towns and villages of Mòbà Local Government Areas and some towns in Ilejemeje Local Government area of Èkiti State. These towns include Òtùn, Igógo, Osùn-ún, Èpè, Òsàn, Ìkùn, Ísáoyè, Íṣàn and Iyè. Mòbà is also spoken in the following towns in Kwara State of Nigeria: Osí, Ìlòfà, Ayédùn, Èkàn and Ìlálẹ̀. Each of these towns speak a variant of Mòbà. Mòbà belongs to the Central Yorùbá (CY) dialect group. Other dialects in this group are Èkiti, Ìjẹ̀sà and Ifẹ̀.

3. Tense and Aspect Markers in Mòbà

3.1 Tense

Like Yorùbá language, tense in Mòbà polarizes future and non-future: being present and past. Future tense covers only future tense. Unlike Yorùbá which have three future tense markers: yóò, máa and á, the only phonetically visible element that mark future tense in Mòbà is èè, as it occurs in the following expressions:

1. Òtún
 - i. Olú èè kólé
Olú will build-house "Olu will build house"
 - ii. Ayò èè ló
Ayò will go "Ayò will go"
 - iii. Ayò èè gbe

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Ayò will carry (it) | “Ayò will carry it” |
| iv. | Olú éè momi | |
| | Olú will drink-water | “Olu will drink water” |

As shown in (1) above, the future tense marker in Mòbà occurs between the subject noun phrase and the verb (phrase). However, the future tense marker changes form when it occurs with short pronouns as exemplified below in (2).

2. Òtun
- | | | | | |
|------|-------------|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| i. | àá èè lọ | → | À è lọ | |
| | | | We will go | ‘We will go.’ |
| ii. | àá èè gbe | → | À è gbe | |
| | | | We will carry (it) | ‘We will carry it’ |
| iii. | míí èè dide | → | Me è dide | |
| | | | I will stand (up) | ‘I will stand up.’ |
| iv. | òò èè á | → | ò è á | |
| | | | you will come | ‘You will come.’ |

As observed in (2) above, the form of the future tense marker is changed due to phonological processes of deletion in (2:i-ii,iv) and deletion/assimilation in (2:iii). The choice of either **éè** or **èè** in (1) and (2) above is dependent on the advanced tongue root (ATR) feature of the vowel of the verb that follows it.

The non-future tense is marked only by high tone syllable **é**, which also manifest itself between the noun phrase and the verb as shown in (3):

3. Òsàn
- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Ayò é ga | → | Ayò ó ga | |
| | Ayò HTS tall | | Ayò HTS tall | ‘Ayò is tall’ |
| ii. | Dadá é gbe | → | Dàda á gbe | |
| | Dada HTS carry (it) | | Dàda HTS carry it | ‘Dada carried it’ |
| iii. | Ayò é lọ | → | Ayò ó lọ | |
| | Ayò HTS go | | Ayò HTS go | ‘Ayò went’ |
| iv. | Alè é gbe | → | Alè é gbe | |
| | ground HTS dry | | ground HTS dry | ‘The ground is dry’ |
| v. | míí é lọ | → | míí í lọ | |
| | 1sg HTS go | | I HTS go | ‘I went’ |
| vi. | àá é gbe | → | àá á gbe | |
| | 3pl HTS carry | | we HTS carry | ‘we carried it’ |

As shown in (3) above, the HTS noticeably and regularly assimilates the properties of the vowel of the preceding subject NP. Utterances in (3) with HTS are exclusively interpreted as either present or past in Mòbà.

3.2 Aspect

Aspect is one of the most studied functional item in Yorùbá due to its prominence in Yorùbá sentences, Ođúntan (2000:134-135). Aspect denotes the duration of event described by the verb in a given clause to show whether such an event is on going (progressive) or have been completed (perfective), Ìlòrí (2010:150). Like Yorùbá, there are three different types of aspects which are functionally lexicalized in Mòbà. These are **í** (progressive), **mọ́ọ́ í** (habitual) and **tí** (perfective). These are exemplified below in (4)

- 4(a) Igógo
- | | | | | |
|------|-------------------|--|--|---------------------|
| i. | À í sòràn | | | |
| | 3pl prog talk | | | ‘We are talking’ |
| ii. | Ayò í juşu | | | |
| | Prog eat-yam | | | ‘Ayo is eating yam’ |
| iii. | Olú í lọ | | | |
| | prog go | | | ‘Olu is going’ |
- 4(b) Ìlọfà
- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|
| i. | Olú mọ́ọ́ í gbẹ̀bùn | | | |
| | dur prog receive-gift | | | ‘Olu habitually receives gift’ |
| ii. | Ayò mọ́ọ́ í yúnbẹ̀ | | | |
| | dur. Prog the-place | | | ‘Ayò habitually goes there.’ |

- iii. Ìṣọn ẹyẹ **mọ́ọ** **í** pario
 3pl bird dur prog make-noise ‘The birds habitually make noise.’
- (c) Ìkùn
- i. Délé **tí** rí a
 perf see 3pl ‘Dele has seen us.’
- ii. Šé ọ́ọ **tí** gbó?
 Have 2sg perf hear ‘Have you heard?’
- iii. Bábá ọ́hún **tí** kú
 father the perf die ‘The father is dead.’

The progressive marker **í** in 4 (a) refers to action or state in progress at the time of speech/utterance or at a time in the past which serves as a kind of reference point for the speech/utterance. Structures containing progressive markers are factive in Mòbà. The habitual marker in 4(b) shows that the action in such types of utterances in Mòbà is marked as being in progress and incomplete. However, the action in 4(c) has been performed / completed at the time of reference. The perfective aspect marker **tí** in Mòbà, shows that the action or state as shown in 4(c) above is the same with **tí** (perfective marker) in Standard Yorùbá.

- Like Yorùbá, two or more aspect markers may occur in a cluster in Mòbà. This can be seen in (5)
- (5) Osùn-ún
- i. Ìhan akòrin **tí** **í** kòrin
 3pl chorister perf prog sing-song ‘The choristers have started singing’
- ii. Olú **tí** **í** šusé
 ... perf prog do-work ‘Olú has started working’

Thus far, we have investigated tense and aspect situation in Mòbà. We have shown that: (i) tense markers are very few in the dialect and (ii) the occurrence of aspect markers in syntactic constructions in the dialect resembles that of Yorùbá.

4.0 Negation

Negation is a construction in grammatical and semantic analysis that typically exposes the contradiction of some or all of the sentence meaning, Crystal (1980).

- (6) Declarative: Olú gbe
 Negative: Olú kè gbe

Scholars such as Jackendoff (1972) and Klima (1964) have differentiated two types of negation, namely, constituent negation and sentence negation. As the name implies, when some or part of a sentence is negated, we talk of constituent negation. But when the whole sentence rather than its part is negated, the reference is sentence negation.

In his attempt to explain vowel harmony in Mòbà dialects, Bamişilè (1986:153-174) identified **kè** ‘not’ as the negation marker in the dialect. Ever since, no Yorùbá linguist has made any effort to investigate further on the occurrence of this and other negation markers in the syntax of Mòbà. In light of this development, we shall examine in this section, the concept of negation together with its structural representation in Mòbà.

4.1 Negation formatives in Mòbà

There are four negation markers in Mòbà. These are **kè**, **mọ́ọ**, **ọ́kọ** and **rì**. These items are free morphemes and they occur immediately after the subject NP in the dialect.

4.1.1 The Negative Marker *kè* ‘not’

This negation marker is similar to **kò/kì** ‘not’ in standard Yoruba. While standard Yorùbá optionally permits the full form of this negation marker **kò/kì**, Mòbà obligatorily permits the full form of the negation marker. The negation marker **kè** is used to negate the verb or verb phrase in grammatical formation as shown in (7)

7. Èkàn

1. Olú **kè** gbe
 neg. carry ‘Olú did not carry it.’
- ii. Olú **kè** lọ
 neg go ‘Olú did not go.’
- iii. Olè **kè** *í* rin lóşòń-òń

- thief neg prog walk afternoon ‘The thief would not walk in the afternoon’
 iv. **Kè** *í* ʃe rírà ní Olú rà á
 neg prog do buying foc. Olú buy it ‘It is not that Olú bought it.’
 v. **Kẹ** páàsi bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní **kè** fẹ̀lì
 neg pass yet foc not fail ‘s/he neither pass nor fail.’

Examples 7 (i-iii) show that no element can intervene between the subject NP and the negation marker in Mòbà. So also, example 7 (iii-iv) show that the negation marker **kè**, can occur before progressive aspect marker *í* in the dialect. The choice of either **kè/kẹ** depends on the advanced tongue root feature of the vowel of the verb that follows it.

4.1.2 The Negation marker *mòḡ* ‘not’.

Like **máà** ‘not’ in standard Yorùbá and **mòḡ** ‘not’ in Èkìtì dialects, this negation marker is used mostly to negate imperatives in Mòbà as evident in the following constructions.

8. Osí

- i. **mòḡ** jà
 neg fight ‘Don’t fight’
 ii. **mòḡ** gbe
 neg carry ‘Don’t carry it.’
 iii. **mòḡ** ké mọ
 neg cry stop ‘Don’t cry’
 iv. **mòḡ** jẹ̀ dùn mí
 neg let pain leg ‘Don’t let it pain me’

In contrast to Èkìtì dialects where **mòḡ** has **móò** as a variant and the choice between the two variants depend on the tongue height of the following vowel, i.e. when the vowel of the verb that follow it is half close, **móò** is used. The alternant **mòḡ** is used when the vowel of the verb that follows it is open or half open as in (9) below.

9. Adó

móò gbe **móò** ki
mòḡ lọ **mòḡ** jà

In Mòbà, **mòḡ** has no variant, hence its occurrence does not depend on the tongue height of the verb that follows it. This explains why the form remains constant in (8) despite being followed by verbs with different advanced tongue root features. This brings to question the claim made in Bámišilẹ̀ (1986) that Mòbà exhibits full vowel harmony system in negative constructions in Mòbà.

Another important thing to note about **kè** and **mòḡ** in Mòbà is that only the negation marker **kè**, can precede and negate a modal while **mòḡ** follows it as shown in (10) below:

10. Olú **kè** yọ̀ **mòḡ** á
 Neg modal neg come ‘Olú may not come’
 Kè yọ̀ **mòḡ** gbe
 Neg modal neg carry-it ‘H/She may not carry it.’

4.1.3 The Negation Marker *òkọ* ‘not’

Mòbà uses the negation marker **òkọ** to negate a constituent, namely, nouns/noun phrases only. The negation marker regularly follows the noun it negates in the dialect as shown in (11)

11. Ilofà

- i. Èmi **òkọ**
 Isg neg ‘I wasn’t the one.’
 ii. Olú àti Ayọ̀ **òkọ**
 Olú and Ayọ̀ neg ‘It is not Olú and Ayọ̀’
 iii. Olú **òkọ** e gbe
 Olú neg that carry ‘It is not Olu that carried it.’

Like Mòbà, which uses òkò, the standard Yoruba uses kò 'not' to negate noun/noun phrases. We want to posit here that òkò is probably the origin of kò in standard Yorùbá as no other Yorùbá dialects is known to use òkò to negate nouns/noun phrases.

4.1.4 The Negation Marker rì/ì 'not'

The negation marker rì/ì is used to negate verb phrase in nominalizations in Mòbà and other Central Yorùbá dialects. The example of its usage is shown in (12) below:

12. Èpè
- | | | | |
|------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| i. | À-je-rì-je-tán | prefix eat neg eat-finish | 'eating without finishing.' |
| ii. | À -bù- rì- bù- tán | prefix cut neg cut-finish | 'cutting without finishing.' |
| iii. | A- rì - lọ | prefix neg go | 'failure to go.' |
| iv. | À-rì-gbe | prefix neg carry | 'failure to carry it.' |

Sàláwù (1998:43; 2001:112) believes that this negation marker has the form àrì in Èkítì dialects. According to him, àrì is a unitary morpheme used to negate verbs. His reasoning is based on the premise that rì is not found in Èkítì lexemes. Our findings show, however, that rì is actually in the lexicon of Èkítì as shown below in (13).

13. Oyé/ìkòlè
- | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|--|
| rì 'sink' | ulé rì | 'The house sank' |
| rì 'spoil' | kòkò rì | 'Cocoa has spoiled' |
| rì 'negator' | ká sè e kò ọ rì jé tìn | 'Why is it that you did not finish eating it.' |

The negator marker rì as used in (12) above shows that (a) àrì is not a unitary morpheme in Mòbà. Therefore, it should be analyzed as à-prefix and rì negation marker; (b) the so-called negative prefix àì, which some Yorùbá scholars believe to be a single morpheme in Yorùbá (Bámgbòsé (1990:106), Owólabí (1995:92, 108) and Táíwò (2006)) is actually the nominalizing prefix à- followed by the negation marker ì as shown in (14) below:

14. Yorùbá
- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| à - je - ì - je - tán | prefix eat neg eat finish | 'eating without finishing' |
| à - ì - gbe | prefix neg carry | 'failure to carry it.' |

5. Conclusion

According to Trudgill (1994), the common focus of dialectologist is to expose the grammatical rules and systems that are 'typical' of a particular dialect. Attempt has been made in this paper to give a grammatical exposition with reference to tense/aspect and negation in Mòbà dialect of Yorùbá. We have been able to explore the functions and structural occurrence of these grammatical items in the dialect. We observed that the occurrence of tense and aspect markers in the dialect and standard Yorùbá resemble each other. Also, we identified four negation markers in Mòbà dialect. These are kè, mọ̀ò, òkò and rì. The negation system in the dialect differs slightly from standard Yorùbá. For instance, where standard Yorùbá optionally deletes the consonant of the negation kò, Mòbà dialect permits the full form of kè. The use of negation marker rì in Mòbà dialect require that àì which some Yorùbá linguists believe is a unitary morpheme be analyzed as two distinct morphemes.

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