

16

A Contrastive Analysis of Ọyó Dialect and Standard Yorùbá

Popoola, Babatunde Olaṣayọ

Abstract

This paper investigates the linguistic distinction between the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá, two closely related yet different variants within the Yorùbá language. Historically, the Ọyó dialect served as the foundation for the development of Standard Yorùbá, particularly during the missionary era when the need for a unified written form of the language emerged. This choice was not arbitrary; Ọyó was the most powerful Yorùbá empire at the time, widely regarded as the political and cultural capital of the Yorùbá people, also, some Yorùbá subgroups trace their origins to Ọyó, and in language planning, such prestige and centrality are key factors in selecting a dialect upon which to base a standard form. As a result, the Ọyó dialect was adopted and elaborated to form the basis of the standard orthography. Consequently, scholars like Olumuyiwa (2013), Fabunmi (2013), Adéníyì (2017), Arókoyò (2020) have regarded Ọyó as nearly identical to Standard Yorùbá, but with minor differences. This perception has contributed to the limited scholarly attention paid to the distinct features of the Ọyó dialect. In response, this study employs a descriptive and comparative linguistic approach to examine phonological, grammatical, and lexical distinctions between the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with native Ọyó speakers and supported by secondary sources, including textbooks, journals, and other research materials. The analysis reveals notable differences, including phonological, grammatical, and lexical distinctions. These findings highlight the distinctiveness of the Ọyó dialect and support its formal recognition within Yorùbá linguistics, emphasizing the need for further scholarly attention and preservation efforts.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis, Dialect, Ọyó, Standard Yorùbá, Distinction

1. Introduction

Yorùbá language belongs to the West Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo phylum, (Williamson and Blench 2000). In their efforts to stimulate writing in Yorùbá language for evangelism in Yorùbá nation, the missionaries, involuntarily and perhaps unconsciously, contributed to the creation of a written form, known as standard Yorùbá, (Olumuyiwa, 2013). Yorùbá language comprises several dialects, which have been grouped into major dialectal regions by scholars such as Adétùgbó (1967), Akinkúgbé (1976), Oyèlaràn (1976), and Awóbùlúyì (1998). These dialects share some linguistic features which allow some degree of mutual intelligibility. On the other hand, the Ọyó dialect (OYD) is a variant of the Yorùbá language spoken primarily in the Ọyó region. Ọyó dialect is spoken across two distinct states: Ọyó State and Ọṣun State. In Ọyó State, the dialect is spoken in cities such as Ìbàdàn, Ògbómòṣó, Ọyó, Modákéké, Ilorà, Aáwé, Fidítì, and Òkò, among others. Meanwhile, in Ọṣun State, it is spoken in cities like Ọdè-Òmu, Gbòngán, Ìpetumodù, Apòmù, and Èjìgbò.

According to Arokoyo (2020), the Ọyó dialect is believed to be Standard Yorùbá. Similarly, Adéníyì (2017) supported Fabunmi's (2013:1) claim that the Ọyó dialect was the basis for Yorùbá standardization but went further by stating that the present-day Standard Yorùbá has diverged so much from the Ọyó dialect that it is now regarded as different. These observations could suggest that there was a time when the Ọyó dialect functioned as the standard variety among Yorùbá speakers, particularly in cities that were part of the old Ọyó Empire. This may be because many of these cities traced their origins to Ọyó. It seems that social factors and commerce played a significant role in this development. A survey of the Yorùbá history reveals that Ọyó was among the first cities to achieve a level of civilization that others sought to emulate. Many other Yorùbá groups with their own dialects were eager to align themselves with the prestige of Ọyó; however, did not necessarily abandon their dialects, but they did express a strong desire to learn the speech form of the Ọyó people, because of its status as the most advanced at the time. This phenomenon reflects the saying, *Ajíṣe bí Ọyó làáří...* (You will only find people aspiring to emulate the Ọyó people...).

The historical influence of the Ọyó dialect seems to find a parallel in contemporary times with the Èkó dialect. Today, many Yorùbá

speakers, particularly the younger generation, aspire to speak like the people of Lagos. It is common to observe children from areas outside the Èkó dialect zone, who have never even been to Lagos, adopting sounds and expressions typical of the Èkó dialect, such as *mi*, *dè*, and others.

Standard Yorùbá refers to the conventional form of the language used primarily for formal writing and communication. Awobuluyi (1994) asserts that, approximately two centuries ago, there was nothing identifiable as “Standard Yorùbá.” If we assess this claim against this present date, we may reasonably conclude that Standard Yorùbá has not existed up to 250 years. This form emerged from the efforts of Christian missionaries who, in their attempt to codify the language for religious and educational purposes, laid the foundation for what is now known as the standard form. Although the initial codification marked a significant linguistic milestone, it is important to note that numerous revisions have taken place since that period.

Enikuomehin (2015) reports the formation of various committees both governmental and academic between the 1960s and 1970s, which were tasked with reviewing and refining the standard orthography of the language. Notably, significant reforms were implemented following the report of the Orthography Committee in 1966. Today, Standard Yorùbá is the form taught in formal educational settings and studied in academic contexts. It is the variety employed in official domains such as schools, legislative assemblies, and public discourse.

It is important to note that the Yorùbá language has existed in various forms long before the emergence of the Standard form. Some of these forms include numerous regional dialects, each with unique phonological, grammatical, and lexical features. Despite this rich diversity, there has been little focused research specifically distinguishing the Ọyó dialect from Standard Yorùbá or assessing the extent of their differences. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the key linguistic features that set Ọyó apart from Standard. It argues that although the Ọyó dialect laid the foundation for Standard Yorùbá, formally recognizing Ọyó as a distinct dialect is crucial for deeper scholarly engagement and the preservation of its unique linguistic identity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Contribution to the Classification of the Yorùbá Dialects

Numerous scholars have examined the classification of Yorùbá dialects with attention to their phonological, morphological, and geographical distinctions. Delano (1958) was one of the early researchers who categorized Yorùbá dialects into ten groups, placing the Ọyó dialect within the Ọyó-Ìbàdàn subgroup. Building on this, Adétígbó (1967) further refined the classification by situating the Ọyó dialect under the Northwest group, alongside dialects spoken in prominent cities such as Lagos, Abéòkúta, Ọyó, Ìbàdàn, Oṣogbo, Ìséyin, Ede, Gbongan, Ìkirè, and Igbóorà. In a similar vein, Awóbùlúyì (1998) expanded on these classifications by including the Ọyó dialect within the North-West group, grouping it with dialects like those of Lagos, Àwóri, Egbádò, Ọyó, Ọṣun, Oñkò, Ìbòló, and Ìgbómìnà. Awóbùlúyì's (1998) classification is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: The Classification of Yorùbá dialects

| North-West Yorùbá | | North-East Yorùbá |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Èkó, Àwóri, Egbádò, Ọyó, Ọṣun, Oñkò, Ìbòló, Ìgbómìnà | | Ìyàgbà, Ìjùmú, Ọwórò, Owé |
| | Central Yorùbá | |
| | Ifè, Ìjèṣà, Èkítì, Mòbà | |
| South-West Yorùbá | | South-East Yorùbá |
| Şáàbę-Kétu (Ànágó), Ifè (Togo) | | Ègbá, Ìjèbú, Ìlaje, Ìkálè, Oñdó, Ọwò, Ọbà-Ìkàrè |

2.2 Scholarly Contributions to the Study of Yorùbá Dialects

The study of Yorùbá dialects has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years. Among the earliest contributions is Adétígbó (1967), which provided a foundational classification of

major Yorùbá dialect groups in Western Nigeria. This was followed by Bámgbósé (1967a, 1983, 1989), whose works addressed assimilation, contraction, and vowel harmony within Yorùbá, offering insights into dialectal phonological processes. Akinkugbe (1976) carried out internal classification among Yoruboid languages including Yorùbá, Itsekiri, and Ìgalà. Adéníyì (1988) explored phonological and morphological features of the Èkìtì dialect, while Ajíbóyè (1989) and Bamisile (1986) carried out dialectal phonological studies on the Mòbà variety. Awóbùlúyì (1992, 1998) later deepened the dialectological perspective on Standard Yorùbá and dialect classification. Oládèjì (2015) addressed north-eastern dialects, enriching the scope of dialectal variation studies. Oládèjì (2017) revisited vowel assimilation in monosyllabic verb-noun constructions.

Notable among these works is Awóbùlúyì (1998), who classified the Yorùbá dialects into five major groups. North-West Yorùbá North-East Yorùbá Central Yorùbá South-West Yorùbá South-East Yorùbá. Awóbùlúyì (1998) described the South-East Yorùbá dialects as varieties characterized by the frequent occurrence of nasal vowels, particularly the vowel “en.” He cited examples such as *jórèn* in place of the Standard Yorùbá *ojó ye*, and *fén* instead of *fín* in the Ègbá dialect. He also identified the Ìjèbú dialect as another variety with similar features, offering examples like *èwèn* instead of *èyin*, as found in SY. Additional dialects that exhibit these features include Oñdó, Ọwò, and Ìkàré. Furthermore, Awóbùlúyì noted the occurrence of the nasal consonant “n” preceding oral vowels, as in *Nè*, a pattern not found in Standard Yorùbá. Another key observation was that dialects in this group generally do not use *ni* as a focus marker, in contrast to its common usage in Standard Yorùbá.

Regarding the North-East Yorùbá dialects, Awóbùlúyì (1998) observed a frequent substitution of the consonant “h” where Standard Yorùbá uses “s.” This phonological feature is especially prominent in dialects such as Owé, Ọwórò, and Ìjùmú. Examples include *èho* (instead of *èṣo*), *hè* (instead of *ṣe*), and *hùn* (instead of *sùn*), all differing from their SY counterparts. He also pointed out differences in the use of complementizers, particularly alternative forms of *pé*, as well as distinct pronoun systems that deviate from those of Standard Yorùbá.

In a later work, Awóbùlúyì (1998) categorized dialects such as Mòbà, Ifè, Ìjèṣà, and Èkìtì as part of the Central Yorùbá group. He identified the use of *yéé* and *kì i* as relative clause markers in these

dialects, as opposed to *tí*, which is prevalent in SY. He also noted the presence of a unique pronoun form *éè*, along with the widespread use of the focus marker *ni*, which aligns with Standard Yorùbá usage.

Awóbùlúyì did not provide data on dialects of the South-West Yorùbá area such as Ọhòrì, Șábẹ, Ànàgó, and Kétu due to insufficient information. However, he did document features of the North-West Yorùbá dialects, including Ọyó, Èkó, Àwóri, Ònkò, and Ìbòló. One notable observation from these dialects is that the vowel *u* rarely occurs in word-initial position, unlike in some other Yorùbá varieties such as Ìjèṣà, Èkítì, Ìkálè, Ìlaje etc.

Arókoyò (2020) is another significant contribution that contrasts some dialects and related languages with Standard Yorùbá. The study explains the phonological systems of Owé, Ìgalà, and Olùkùmì languages in contrast with Standard Yorùbá, with particular emphasis on the sound segments and syllable structure. Arókoyo affirms, in line with Akinkugbe (1976, 1978), that the Ìgalà language is distinguishable as an independent language due to its unique historical and environmental experiences. The study also establishes that while Olùkùmì is genetically related to Yorùbá, it cannot be classified as a dialect of Yorùbá. Similarly, Owé, despite its affinity to both Ìgalà and Olùkùmì, is seen as a dialect of Yorùbá. The study identifies several notable phonological differences and similarities. It attributes the presence of [ʒ] in Olùkùmì to contact with Igbo, which also attests to the consonant. The occurrence of [gw] in both Olùkùmì and Ìgalà is similarly traced to language contact. Moreover, the presence of [p] and [tʃ], the absence of [s], and systematic vowel changes in Ìgalà are highlighted as major distinguishing features from Yorùbá. Arókoyo also notes that the alveolar nasal [n] remains intervocalic in Ìgalà in contexts where it has changed to a lateral in Yorùbá and Owé. Additionally, Ìgalà is reported to maintain both the voiceless bilabial [p] and the voiceless labio-velar stop [kp]. Importantly, the study concludes that the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] was originally present in Yorùbá but was lost over time due to processes of oversimplification.

Aturamu (2024) presents a significant comparative phonological study of the Èkítì, Oñdó, and Yàgbà dialects, focusing on the processes of deletion and assimilation, and their divergence from Standard Yorùbá. The research reveals that although all three dialects exhibit deletion processes, consonant deletion particularly /r/ deletion, which is prominent in Standard Yorùbá is largely absent in the dialects examined. Notably, the Oñdó dialect reflects historical traces

of /r/-deletion, but only in a few lexical items. In contrast, vowel deletion is shown to be a productive and active process across the dialects. In terms of assimilation, the study finds that the dialects diverge from Standard Yorùbá by not applying assimilation in certain syntactic contexts such as noun + noun compounds or post-deletion environments. Nevertheless, assimilation is prevalent in other constructions across all three dialects. For example, reduplication structures, genitive noun formations, and pronoun + future marker sequences consistently exhibit assimilation patterns.

While Awóbùlúyì (1998) contrasts each dialect group with Standard Yorùbá, Arákøyò's (2020) research focuses solely on the Olükùmi, Owé ànd Ìgalà dialect. Similarly, Àtùràmù (2024) concentrated on the Èkitì, Oñdó, and Yàgbà dialects, in relation to Standard Yorùbá. Despite this extensive body of work outline the features and contrasting Yorùbá dialects and Standard Yorùbá, there is a lack of focused contrastive analysis between the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá. This gap justifies the need for dedicated scholarly engagement to the Ọyó dialect.

3. Data Collection

Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from the native speakers of Ọyó dialect through semi-structured interviews and natural speech interactions. Secondary data were sourced from written materials on Yorùbá, including textbooks, journals, and both published and unpublished research works.

4. Research Method

The study adopts a descriptive and comparative linguistic approach to analyse the differences between Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá. Features from Ọyó dialect were systematically compared with their equivalents in Standard Yorùbá by focusing on phonology (such as segment and suprasegmental), syntax (forms of pronouns, negations and aspect), and lexical differences. The analysis enabled the identification of distinctive linguistic features specific to the Ọyó variety of Yorùbá. These findings offer a foundation for future theoretical and applied linguistic research, particularly within the domain of dialectology and contrastive analysis.

5. Data Presentations and Findings

5.1 Phonological Distinction of the Ọyó Dialect and Standard Yorùbá

The Ọyó dialect is characterized by several distinct phonological features that differentiate it from Standard Yorùbá. This section identifies and analyzes two key differences.

5.1.1 The Absence of (/ʃ/ phoneme) “ṣ”

A major distinction between the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá is the absence of the palatal fricative /ʃ/ (the “ṣ” sound). The Ọyó dialect speakers use /s/ where /ʃ/ is expected. This phonetic variation is so pronounced that it has become a recognizable characteristic in casual conversations, especially when speakers from other Yorùbá dialects are interacting with an Ọyó dialect speaker or someone from Ìbàdàn region, which also fall under falls within the Ọyó-speaking area.

Ìbàdàn kí ni sóò?

Sóò sure ni.

Kí ni ẹ jẹ lánàá?

Ẹran sínkìn ni.

Kí lẹ fi jókòó?

Kúsìn síà ni.

Ìbàdàn, what is the show?

The show is sure.

What do you eat yesterday?

It's chicken

What did you sit/sat on?

It's coaching chair

As contained above, the feature observed in Ọyó dialect, where the consonant /s/ is used in places where Standard Yorùbá would use /ʃ/, due to the lack of /ʃ/ in the dialect. For instance, here, /ʃóò/ is pronounced with /s/ as /sóò/, while in SY, it is pronounced with /ʃ/ as /ʃóò/. Similarly, /ʃúò/ is pronounced as /súò/, contrary to the SY.

Likewise, /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/ in /síkì/ and /kúsi-sià/. Let's also consider other examples:

| 1. | SY | OYD | |
|------|---------|---------|--------------|
| i. | /iʃé/ | /isé/ | ‘work’ |
| ii. | /iʃu/ | /isu/ | ‘yam’ |
| iii. | /ʃóra/ | /sóra/ | ‘be careful’ |
| iv. | /ʃùgbó/ | /sùgbó/ | ‘but’ |

As above, the Ọyó dialect uses the consonant /s/ sound where Standard Yorùbá uses the /ʃ/ sound, due to the lack of /ʃ/ in the dialect.

5.1.2 The Absence of (Vowel /ẽ/) “en”

Awóbùlúyì (1998) indicates that the mid-low, front nasal vowel /ẽ/ is absent in the dialects of the Northwest, including the Ọyó dialect. This claim is supported by substantial phonetic evidence observed in the Ọyó dialect by demonstrating that this mid-low front nasal vowel is not part of the phonetic inventory of the Ọyó dialect. As a result, Standard Yorùbá words that contain the vowel /ẽ/ do not feature this sound when pronounced in the Ọyó dialect. This observation is illustrated by the examples provided below.

| 2. | SY | OYD | |
|------|----------|----------|--------------|
| i. | /jẽ/ | /jú-ú-ú/ | ‘that’ |
| ii. | /wẽjẽ/ | /wò-ú/ | ‘those’ |
| iii. | /ilé jẽ/ | /ilé ú/ | ‘that house’ |

The examples above clearly illustrate the absence of /ẽ/ and highlight the restructuring strategies employed by the Ọyó dialect speakers.

5.1.3 The Absence of (Vowel /ã/) “on”

Another notable feature of the Ọyó dialect is the absence of the vowel /ã/, which is evident from internal observations within the dialect. In the orthography of the Standard Yorùbá, the vowel /ã/ typically appears next to a non-labial consonant, while the vowel /ɔ/ is always preceded by a labial consonant. However, the Ọyó dialect deviates from this pattern by using the vowel /ã/ consistently across

both labial and non-labial environments. This is evident in their speech, as illustrated by the following examples.

3. a. Non-labial Consonant Environment

| | SY | OYD | |
|------|-------|-------|-----------|
| i. | /itā/ | /itā/ | ‘history’ |
| ii. | /erā/ | /erā/ | ‘meat’ |
| iii. | /irā/ | /irā/ | ‘vision’ |
| iv. | /ɔkā/ | /ɔkā/ | ‘one’ |

b. Labial Consonant Environment

| | SY | OYD | |
|------|--------|--------|--------------------------|
| i. | /ègbō/ | /ègbā/ | ‘senior’ |
| ii. | /ibō/ | /ibā/ | ‘gun’ |
| iii. | /emó/ | /emā/ | ‘grass rat’ |
| iv. | /èwō/ | /èwā/ | ‘chain’ |
| v. | /ipó/ | /ipā/ | ‘another name for blood’ |

As shown above, the Ọyó dialect demonstrates a distinct phonological feature by consistently employing the vowel /ā/ in both labial and non-labial consonant environments. Adéníyì (2020) further highlights this variation, arguing that in Standard Yorùbá, the sounds /ō/ and /ā/ are considered variations of the same phoneme. This view aligns with Ajibóyè and Pulleyblank’s (2014) assertion that Standard Yorùbá has only three nasal vowels (/í/, /ü/, and /ā/) that can be considered phonemes in the language. In Standard Yorùbá, the vowel /ā/ functions as a phoneme with two distinct allophones, /ā/ and /ō/.

5.1.4 Vowel Lowering in Nominative Case Pronouns

Pronouns are words that refer to a noun or noun phrase within a construction (Ilòrí, 2010). The Ọyó dialect features vowel lowering in nominative case pronouns, a phenomenon that is not observed in Standard Yorùbá. Vowel lowering is not a new phenomenon in the Yorùbá language; Akéré (1977) reports vowel lowering in the Ìjèbú dialect.

“Furthermore, it is found that the ɔ-words in Ijébu which resulted from the lowering of ū to ɔ were the ones to be first involved in variability and can now be regarded as having been involved in a completed sound change.”

Akéré (1977:351)

In Standard Yorùbá, the table below demonstrates the short pronouns used in the language at the subject position:

Table 1: The Yorùbá Short Pronoun at the Subject Position

| Pronoun | Singular (Subject Position) | Plural (Subject Position) |
|---------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1SG.NOM | Mo (I) | À (We) |
| 2SG.NOM | O (You) | È (You all) |
| 3SG.NOM | Ó (He/She/It) | Wón (They) |

In contrast to Standard Yorùbá (SY), short singular pronouns in subject position are realized with lower vowels in the Ọyó dialect. For example, the first person singular pronoun mo in SY becomes mɔ, the second person singular o becomes ɔ, and the third person singular ó becomes ɔ̄ in the Ọyó dialect. While SY uses the high vowel [o] in these pronouns, the Ọyó dialect lowers it to the low vowel [ɔ], as shown in the table below.

Table 2: The Yorùbá Short Pronoun at the Subject and the OYD Lowered Form

| Pronoun | SY [o] | OYD Lowered [ɔ] | Gloss |
|---------|--------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1SG.NOM | Mo | Mɔ | I |
| 2SG.NOM | O | ɔ | You |
| 3SG.NOM | Ó | ɔ̄ | He/She/It |

5.1.5 Tone Modification in ‘*lo*’

In both the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá, the verb *lo* means “to go.” It is important to note that most Yorùbá verbs canonically carry a low tone, which typically changes to a mid-tone when they take an object. For instance, the verb *fọ* in *fọ aşo* is canonically *fọ*, and the verb *ra* in *ra ata* is canonically *rà*. Awóbùlúyì (2008) states that it is the principle of homophony avoidance that often causes tone modification to often occur in such low-tone verbs when they take an object.

What is observed in the Ọyó dialect is that the tone modification occurring in the verb *lo* when it takes a verb phrase as its complement is distinct from the type of tone modification previously recognized. This phenomenon does not occur in Standard Yorùbá. In Standard Yorùbá, no type of object whether a prepositional phrase, verb phrase or noun phrase triggers any change in the form of the verb *lo*. This is demonstrated in the examples below:

4. a. **Example showing the verb “*lo*” with VP
Complement in SY**

- i. [_v *lo*] [_{VP} [_v *ra*] [_N *ata*]]
- ii. [_v *lo*] [_{VP} [_v *gba*] [_N *ilè*]]
- iii. [_v *lo*] [_{VP} [_v *fọ*] [_N *aşo*]]]

b. **Example showing the verb “*lo*” with NP and PP
Complement in SY**

- . i. [_v *lo*] [_{NP} [_N *Ìbàdàn*]]
- ii. [_v *lo*] [_{NP} [_N *Ọyó*]]]
- iii. [_v *lo*] [_{NP} [_v *Èkó*]]]
- iv. [_v *lo*] [_{PP} [_p *sí*] [_N *Ìbàdàn*]]]
- v. [_v *lo*] [_{PP} [_p *sí*] [_N *Ọyó*]]]
- vi. [_v *lo*] [_{PP} [_p *sí*] [_N *Èkó*]]]

Contrary to what is observed in Standard Yorùbá, there is a linguistic distinction in the Ọyó dialect in how the verb *lo* operates whenever it takes a verb phrase as its complement. In the Ọyó dialect, the verb *lo* undergoes a tonal modification when followed by a verb

phrase, resulting in the pronunciation *lòó*. This tonal change is a unique feature of the Ọyó dialect, differentiating it from Standard Yorùbá. This is a phenomenon that does not occur in Standard Yorùbá.

- c. i. [_V lòó] [_{VP} [_V ra] [_N ata]]
- ii. [_V lòó] [_{VP} [_V gba] [_N ilè]]
- iii. [_V lòó] [_{VP} [_V fo] [_N aşo]]]

It is important to recognize that this type of vowel lengthening or tonal shift in Ọyó is not exclusive to *lo*. Similar patterns occur in another verbal element, *rèé* in the dialect. Example below;

- d. i. Wón *rèé* pon omi.
'They went to fetch water.'
- ii. Àdìgún *rèé* wa isu.
'Adigún wen to Ibàdàn'
- iii. Òjó *re* Èkó
'Òjó went to Èkó'
- iv. Olú *re* ìdálè

'Olú went outside the town'

In the Ọyó dialect, *lo* is elongated to *lòó* to align phonetically with its counterpart *rèé*, which also means "to go." Both verbs share the same meaning and exhibit similar tonal and lengthening patterns in almost identical syntactic contexts. *Lo* appears in its base form before noun phrases and prepositional phrases, but is elongated to *lòó* when it precedes a verb phrase. *Rèé*, on the other hand, follows a similar pattern, it retains its base form before NPs and elongates only before a VP. However, unlike *lo*, *rèé* does not occur with locative markers such as *sí*, which typically introduce prepositional phrases. This parallel elongation pattern of *lòó* and *rèé* supports the view that the tonal and lengthening modifications are phonologically motivated processes rather than morphologically encoded features specific to one verb alone.

5.1.6 High Rate of Phonological Influence

The Ọyó dialect is particularly notable for its phonological

characteristics, especially its high rate of sound deletion and vowel reduction. This phonological behaviour sets it apart from other Yorùbá dialects, such as the Central Yorùbá (CY) and Southeastern Yorùbá (SEY) dialects, which generally avoid such extensive deletions.

In the Ọyó dialect, there is a frequent omission of sounds and reduction of vowels in many contexts. This distinctive feature makes the Ọyó dialect easily recognizable, even when the speakers attempt to use the Standard Yorùbá. When an Ọyó speaker speaks Standard Yorùbá with these phonological tendencies, it quickly signals their origin as an Ọyó speaker due to the noticeable pattern of deletion and vowel reduction.

For example, in the Ọyó dialect, certain consonants might be elided in words where Standard Yorùbá retains them. Similarly, vowel sounds that are pronounced clearly in Standard Yorùbá may be omitted or softened. These phonological features make the Ọyó dialect a unique variant of the Yorùbá language. Consider the examples below.

| | | | | |
|----------|----------------------|---|---|---------|
| 5. a. i. | SY: Owólabí | > | ‘ | Oólabí |
| ii. | SY: Ayétòrò | | | |
| | OYD: Ayétòrò | > | | Aítò |
| iii. | SY: Àyìnké | | | |
| | OYD: Àyìnké | > | | Àìnké |
| iv. | SY: Àyántólá | | | |
| | OYD: Àyántólá | > | | Àíntólá |
| v. | SY: Adéwálé | | | |
| | OYD: Adéwálé | > | | Adéálé |
| vi. | SY: Dìde | | | |
| | OYD: Dìde | > | | ìde |
| vii. | SY: Pèlé | | | |
| | OYD: Pèlé | > | | ìlé |
| viii. | SY: Àkàrà | | | |
| | OYD: Àkàrà | > | | àkà |

The above example suggest that Ọyó is very rich in such

phonological processes, deletion, vowel reduction, and assimilation are commonly observed features of the dialect, which contribute to its distinct rhythm.

5.2 Grammatical Distinction of the Ọyó Dialect and Standard Yorùbá

The Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá exhibit notable grammatical distinctions within the Yorùbá language. These differences appear in specific structural elements, including negation patterns, aspects, and the use of conjunctions in certain syntactic constructions.

5.2.1 The Negative Marker “Kè”

In the Ọyó dialect, the negative marker “kè” is used in place of “kì,” which is found in Standard Yorùbá. This usage is somewhat similar to other Yorùbá dialects, such as the Central Yorùbá (CY) dialect, which employs “èè” as a negation marker. Additionally, some dialects use *kè* or *kè*, depending on vowel harmony, in place of the standard negation marker *kì*. In the Ọyó dialect, *kì* is expressed as *kè*. This distinction forms a significant feature of the Ọyó dialect, as demonstrated below:

| | | |
|------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 6.i. | SY: Kì í | jẹ ẹwà ‘He/She/It does not eat beans’ |
| | ODYD: Kè é | jẹ ẹwà ‘He/She/It does not eat beans’ |
| ii. | SY: Kì í | sòrò ‘He/She/It does not talk’ |
| | ODYD: Kè é | sòrò ‘He/She/It does not talk’ |
| iii. | SY: Olú (k)ì í | jẹ ẹwà ‘Olú does not eat beans’ |
| | ODYD: Olú (k)è é | jẹ ẹwà ‘Olú does not eat beans’ |
| iv. | SY: Olú(k)ì í | sòrò ‘Olú does not talk’ |
| | ODYD: Olú (k)è é | sòrò ‘Olú does not talk’ |

In the example i - iv, the negative marker *kì* in Standard Yorùbá consistently appears as *kè* in the Ọyó dialect. This substitution is systematic and consistent across various syntactic environments, including null pronominal subjects (e.g., *Kì í jẹ ẹwà* → *Kè é jẹ ẹwà*) and nominal subjects (e.g., *Olú (k)ì í sòrò* → *Olú (k)è é sòrò*).

5.2.2 Asyndeton with Long Pronouns

Another feature of the Ọyó dialect is asyndeton with pronouns. According to Crystal (2008), asyndeton is defined as “the omission of normally occurring conjunctions (e.g., and, or, but) between phrases, clauses, or words in a sentence where they would usually appear, often to create a rhetorical effect or a sense of urgency.

In the Ọyó dialect, conjunctions are often deliberately omitted between two long pronouns, resulting in asyndetic constructions. As seen in the examples below, Ọyó speakers employ a linguistic style that omits conjunctions between long pronouns to create a more direct expression.

| 7.SY | OYD |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| i. èmi àti ìrẹ | èmi irè/èmiìrẹ |
| 1SG CONJ 2SG | 1SG 2SG/1SG-2SG |
| ‘you and I’ | |
| ii. èmi àti irè | èmi irè/èmiirè |
| 1SG CONJ 3SG | 1SG 3SG/1SG-3SG |
| ‘He/She/It and I’ | |
| iii. èmi àti yin | èmì yin/èmiiyín |
| 1SG CONJ 2PL/2SG.HON | 1SG 2PL/1SG-2PL/2SG.HON |
| ‘you and I’ | |
| iv. èmi àti wọn | èmì wọn/èmiiwọn |
| 1SG CONJ 3PL/3SG.HON | 1SG 3PL/1SG-3PL/3SG.HON |
| ‘They and I’ | |
| v. àwa àti ìrẹ | àwa irè/àwairè > àwaàrè |
| 1PL CONJ 2SG | 1PL 2SG/1PL-2SG |
| ‘you and we’ | |
| vi. àwa àti ìrẹ | àwa irè/àwairè > àwaarè |
| 1PL CONJ 3SG | 1PL 3SG/1PL-3SG |
| ‘he/she/it and we’ | |
| vii. àwa àti yin | àwa yin/àwayín |
| 1PL CONJ 2PL/2SG.HON | 1PL 2PL/1PL-2PL/2SG.HON |

‘you and we’

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| viii. àwa àti | wọn | àwa wọn/àwawọn |
| 1PL CONJ 3PL/3SG.HON | 1PL 3PL/1PL-3PL/3SG.HON | ‘they and we’ |

Additional examples were discovered such as Ìwọ irè, Ìwọ wọn, Òun irè, Èyin irè, and Èyin rè. While the exact factors responsible for this omission is not researched because it is not within the scope of the current work, it’s very clear that the phenomenon of asyndeton with pronouns is present in the Ọyó dialect, yet it remains absent in Standard Yorùbá.

5.2.3 The use of *Gbé* as Locative-Conditioned Perfect Aspect Marking

In Standard Yorùbá, the perfect aspect which denotes a completed state is typically expressed using the aspectual particle “ti”. This marker applies broadly across various syntactic contexts, including actional, stative, and modal predicates. Let us consider the following examples:

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|--------|-----------|
| 8.a.i. | Àìnà | ti | lọ | ojàPROPN |
| | PERF | go | market | |
| ‘Àìnà has gone to the market.’ | | | | |
| ii. | Àìnà | ti | fé | máa sòrò |
| | PROPN | PERF | want | FUT speak |
| ‘Àìná is about to speak’ | | | | |
| iii. | Ibì | ni | Olú | ti jéun |
| | place | FOC | PROPN | PERF eat |
| ‘The place where Olú ate’ | | | | |

In these examples, “ti” marks a perfect action regardless of the argument structure or semantic field of the verb. It has no selectional restrictions on the subject or predicate type.

Unlike Standard Yorùbá, the Ọyó dialect employs an alternative perfect aspectual marker “gbé”, which surfaces predominantly in locative constructions, i.e., when the subject or topic of the sentence denotes a place or location (i.e., [+LOC]). This variant of perfect aspect is not interchangeable with *ti*, and its occurrence is contextually and semantically constrained. Let us consider examples from the Ọyó dialect:

b. i. Ibi tí wón gbé í ta èwà
place REL 3PL PERF PROG sell beans
'The place where beans are being sold.'

ii. Ọyó ni a ó gbé sòkalè
PROPN FOC 1PL FUT PERF descend
'It is in Ọyó that we will descend from.'

iii. Ilé-ìwé ni ó gbé í bò
school FOC 3SG PERF PROG come.from
'It is from school that he/she is coming.'

In each case, the use of "gbé" encodes not only the completion of the action but also implies a prior spatial anchoring, aligning with the [+LOC] reading.

By contrast, *gbé* is unacceptable in contexts where the subject or topic is not locative in the dialect.

c. i. *Àìnà gbé lọ ojà
Àìnà ti lọ ojà
PROPN PERF go market
'Àìnà has gone to the market.'

ii. *Àìnà gbé fé máa sòrò
Àìnà ti fé máa sòrò
PROPN PERF want FUT speak
'Àìnà is about to speak'

These sentences demonstrate that *gbé* cannot freely substitute for *ti* in general perfect constructions. Its distribution is strictly limited to locative environments, where it likely serves to emphasize the completed nature of an action in connection to a spatial source or reference point.

5.3 Lexical Distinction

The Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá share many similarities, yet there are notable lexical distinctions that set them apart, contributing to the richness and diversity of the Yorùbá language. In the Ọyó dialect, certain words have unique equivalents that differ from those used in Standard Yorùbá. These distinctions are not just differences in terminology but also represent regional variations in how everyday objects and concepts are named and understood.

| 9. | OYD | SY | Gloss |
|----|-----------|-----------|------------------------|
| a. | Ìgànná | Ògiri | ‘Wall’ |
| b. | Òwe | Òkèlè | ‘Morsel’ |
| c. | Kórùúkọ | Rodo | ‘Scotch Bonnet Pepper’ |
| d. | Ọyó | Ewédú | ‘Jute Leaf’ |
| e. | Yangan | Àgbàdò | ‘Maize’ |
| f. | Sapala | Àbàrí | ‘Bake Maize Meal’ |
| g. | Òwò | Ìgbálè | ‘Broom’ |
| h. | Èran-Ò-Jé | Àgánrándì | ‘Mini Door’ |
| i. | Èran | Ewúré | ‘Goat’ |
| j. | Òrúkọ | Òbúkọ | ‘He-Goat’ |
| k. | Gúre | Gbúre | ‘Water Leaf’ |

6. Summary of Findings

This study has examined the linguistic distinctions between the Ọyó dialect and Standard Yorùbá, by revealing significant phonological, grammatical, and lexical differences that challenge the long-held assumption of near-identicality between the two. While historical accounts rightly acknowledge the foundational role played by the Ọyó dialect in the development of Standard Yorùbá, especially during the missionary period, it is evident from the data presented in this study that Standard Yorùbá has evolved considerably over time.

Phonologically, the Ọyó dialect exhibits several salient features such as the absence of the /ʃ/ and the nasalized vowels /ɛ̄/ and /ɔ̄/. These absences result in systematic variations in word pronunciation, which affect both mutual intelligibility and the real orthographic representation that conform to the dialect. The Ọyó dialect also features vowel lowering in nominative case pronouns and a unique tonal behavior in certain verbs like *lo* ('to go'), which further differentiates it from the standard form.

Grammatically, the Ọyó dialect is distinct from Standard Yorùbá through features such as the use of asyndeton with pronouns, which suggests a syntactic economy which is not generally observed in the Standard Yorùbá. Most notably, the study has identified the use of “gbé” as a perfect aspect marker conditioned by locative constructions,

an aspectual feature absent in Standard Yorùbá.

Lexically, a number of words and expressions peculiar to the Ọyó dialect have been identified, some of which may not be immediately intelligible to speakers of Standard Yorùbá. This lexical variants, in conjunction with phonological and grammatical distinctions, suggests that Ọyó possesses a linguistic identity robust enough to merit recognition as an independent dialect worthy of formal linguistic documentation.

7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, while Standard Yorùbá may have emerged from the prestige of the Ọyó speech form, it has since developed a life of its own. The Ọyó dialect, therefore, deserves to be studied, taught, and preserved not merely as a precursor to Standard Yorùbá, but as a vibrant, living dialect with unique linguistic features and sociohistorical relevance.

REFERENCES

Adétùgbó, A. (1967). *The Yorùbá language in Western Nigeria: Its major dialect areas* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Columbia, New York.

Adétùgbó, A. (1982). Towards a Yorùbá dialectology. In B. Afolayan (Ed.), *Yorùbá language and literature* (pp. 207–214). University Press Limited, Ibadan.

Adéníyì, H. R. (1988). *Aspects of the phonology and morphology of Ekiti dialect* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Adéníyì, K., & Bamigbade, O. E. (2017). Customised Ibadan-Yorùbá. *Linguistik Online*, 80(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.80.3563>

Adeniyi, S. (2020). Phonemes ɿ and ã and their allophones in the South-East Yoruba (SEY) dialects: An Optimality Theory account. *Ọpáñbàtà: LASU Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1, January 2021.

Ajíbóyè, J. O. (1989). *Àtúnyèwò fonołoji ẹ́ka-ede Mòbà* (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

Ajíbóyè, O., & Pulleyblank, D. (2014). Nasal vowels in Yorùbá.

University of Lagos, and University of British Columbia, (See:<https://brucehayes.org/251VowelHarmony/Readings/AjiboyePulleyblankMoba2008.pdf>)

Akere, F. (1977). *A sociolinguistic study of a Yorùbá speech community in Nigeria: Variation and change in the Ijebu dialect of Ikorodu* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

Arokoyo, B. E. (2012). A comparative phonology of the Olùkùmi, Ìgalà, Owé and Yorùbá languages [Conference presentation]. Towards Proto-Niger-Congo: Comparison and Reconstruction Conference, Paris, France, September 18 – 21.

Arokoyo, B. E. (2020). Studying the phonology of the Olùkùmi, Igala, Owé and Yorùbá languages: A comparative analysis. *Dialectologia*, 25, 45–58.

Aturamu, O. O. (2024). A study of deletion and assimilation processes in three selected Yorùbá dialects. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 16(4), 875. <https://doi.org/10.48047/intjecs/v16i4.86>

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1978). *Essentials of Yorùbá grammar*. University Press Limited, Ibadan

Awobuluyi, O. (1994) 'The Development of Standard Yoruba', István Fodor and Claude Hagège (Eds.) *Language Reform: History and Future*, Vol. VI, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg, pp. 25 - 42.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1998) October 4–8). Àwọn èka-èdè Yorùbá [Conference presentation]. *Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria Conference*, Ibadan.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1999). Aspects of contemporary standard Yorùbá in dialectological perspective. In A. Isola (Ed.), *New findings in Yorùbá studies: J. F. Odunjo Memorial Lecture Series* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–79). Ibadan/Lagos.

Bámgbósé, A. (1966). *A grammar of Yorùbá*. Cambridge University Press, Ibadan.

Bámgbósé, A. (1992). *Yorùbá metalanguage* (Vol. 1). University Press Ltd, Ibadan.

Bamisile, E. O. (1986). *Fònùlòjì èka-ede Mòbà* (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

Enikuomehin, A. O. (2015). A computerized identification system for verb sorting and arrangement in a natural language: Case study of the Nigerian Yoruba language. *European Journal of Computer Science and Information Technology*, 3(1), 43–52.

European Centre for Research Training and Development UK.
<http://www.eajournals.org>

Fábùnmi, F. (2013) Negation in Sixteen Yorùbá Dialects. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3, 1-8. doi: 10.4236/ojml.2013.31001.

Oládèjì, K. O. (2017). Vowel assimilation in monosyllabic verb + noun construction revisited. *European Journal of Language Studies*, 4(1), 38–47.

Oládèjì, K. O. (2015). *Aspects of phonology and morphology of North-East Yorùbá* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ekiti State University, Ekiti State

Olumuyiwa, T. (2013). Yorùbá writing: Standards and trends. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 40–51. Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko.