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## **Yoruba polar question markers: “Sé/ Njé” and the putative question marker “bí”**

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### **Abstract**

*Polar questions are questions which require a “yes” or “no” among other responses. The question marker sé/ñjé is always attached clause initially. Sometimes, it may have bí, often regarded as another marker invariably attached to the clause sentence finally. However, the presence of bí which may or may not be included in the clause while the construction is still adjudged as grammatical, questions the status of bí as a question marker. Some scholars assumed it is a question marker and some left it unaccounted for in most cases. Hence, this paper investigates the status of bí in the syntax of Yes-No question in Yoruba with the view of determining its function in relation to sé/ñjé. The paper adopted the Minimalist Program as its theoretical framework. Data were collected with Ibadan syntactic checklist. Also, data in extant works on Yorùbá were also used. The paper notes that bí is not a question marker in Yoruba. Bí may be dropped in polar questions while the interrogative interpretation is still derived through an abstract polar question marker. It emphasised that bí is a sentence adverbial which reinforces the asked questions, and it does not bear the interrogative force like sé/ñjé. Derivationally, sé/ñjé has a weak specifier feature; consequently, it does not trigger movement to specifier. Sèbí, sebí, sentence final raised tone and an abstract form are variants of sé/ñjé identified in the paper. The paper concludes that an analysis which stresses that bí is a question marker in Yorùbá is inadequate.*

**Keywords:** bí, Interrogative Force, polar question, function, sé/ñjé.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Cross-linguistically, language users could structure novel syntactic constructions primarily for the purpose of communication. This could be to give command, which is a form of imperative construction; to state information as in declarative construction, and to make a request which is often the

area of interrogative constructions. The first two types of construction are not of immediate concern in the present work. On interrogatives however, there are different syntactic structures which a speaker of a language could produce to get certain responses which may be sentential in nature or in form of a "Yes" or a "No" answer. The construction in (1a) is an example of declarative sentence in Yoruba, while (1b1d) are interrogatives. (1b) is a polar question which is also called Yes-No construction in syntactic literature, (1c) is an example of content questions and (1d) involves a rather different type of complex question construction. The structure in (1d) involves interrogative verbs in the final sentence position.

1a) Olú pa eku  
 Olu kill (NF) rat  
 "Olu killed a rat"

1b) Sé/ñjé Olú pa eku?  
 QM Olu kill (NF) rat  
 "Did Olu kill a rat?"

1c) Ta ni ó pa eku?  
 Who foc HTS kill (NF) rat  
 "WHO killed a rat?"

1d) Olú tí ó pa eku dà?  
 Olu RelM HTS kill (NF) rat QV  
 "Where is Olu who killed a rat?"

The type of questions rendered in (1c) and (1d) are outside the scope of the present paper. However, (1b) could be rendered as (2a) and (2b) which are grammatical and are understood as interrogative constructions. However, (2a) has question marker and also *bí* which has not been adequately described in the grammar of the language. But (2b) does not have any marker overtly whereas *bí* is noticeable in the construction.

2a)      Sé/ñjé Olú pa eku bí?

QM    Olu kill (NF) rat

“Did Olu kill a rat?”

2b)      Olú pa eku bí?

Olu kill (NF) rat

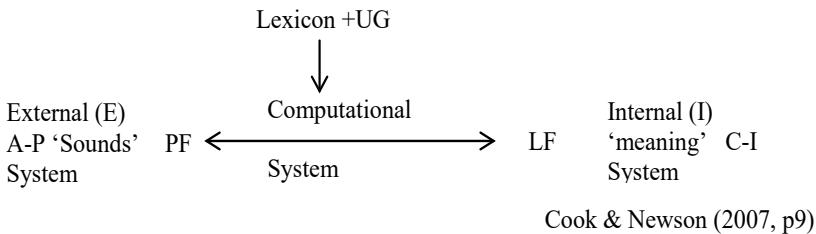
“Did Olu kill a rat?”

The questions begging for answers from these are: what is the question marker in (2b) if not *bí*? What is the function of *bíin* (2a) since there is an overt question marker in the construction? And what is the status of *bí* in Yoruba interrogative constructions? The present work investigates the syntactic derivations involving *sé/ñjé...bí*, their status and derivation in the Yes-No question types.

## 1.1 Theoretical framework

Our analysis is carried out under the Minimalist framework as proposed in works of Chomsky (2000, 2001). Minimalist Program (MP) views language processes from the computational point of view where lexical items are built in the Computation ( $C_{HL}$ ) from the bottom to the top through Merge and Move economy operations. The  $C_{HL}$  is shown below as Fig.1. Within the current MP, clause structure is assumed to be in this order; CP>TP>vP i.e. a sentence is marked with the actual force triggered by the  $C^0$  at the LF- interface. In this wise, an interrogative interpretation is marked by an  $Inter^0$  marker derived in the left periphery. Within this model, only an item may head a functional category for the exertion of the force marked on a given sentence. In this work, our analysis examines the headedness of  $C^0$  force-marked by  $InterP$  to ascertain the status of *bí* as sentence final conjunction?

Figure1. MP's Computational System



The Lexicon is composed of lexical items with all the lexical properties fully specified with all the features required at interpretive and pronunciation levels. The lexicon feeds the computational system through the *Numeration* before the derivation can be mapped unto the PF and LF components.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The language under investigation has different ways of forming interrogative structures. In the Yes-No question type, there are different items marking the clause as the interrogative. The literature on Yoruba interrogative construction is proliferated already with forms like *sé* and *Ànjé* which are undisputable YesNo question markers and *bí* a prather puzzling that can cooccur with both *sé* and *Ànjé*. It is often assumed by linguists and Yoruba language scholars, in most cases, as a question marker without any form of investigation or analysis of its functions as a way of ascertaining possible interrogative feature of the item.

## 1.3 Research questions

Based on the aim and objectives specified above, the following are the research questions guiding the research.

- i. What is the distribution of question markers in polar questions?
- ii. What is the function and status of *bí* in Yoruba?
- iii. What is the distribution of *bí*?

## 1.4 Aim and Objectives

This research aims at examining the status of *bí*, a

controversial sentencefinal element in Yes-No question derivation which some scholars have termed question marker. In line with this aim, the following are the objectives of this research are to:

- i. examine the distribution of polar question markers.
- ii. determine the status and function of *bí* in polar questions
- iii. examine the co-occurrence of *bí* and other question markers in Yes-No questions.

## 2.0 Previous studies on YorùbáInterrogatives

As said in the previous section, works which examine the status of *bí* in interrogative sentences are almost non-existent. Scholars have described Yes-No questions and Content word questions without serious reference to *ñjé/sé* with *bí* in the sentence final. This may be oversight or deliberate avoidance of that type. Scholars who refer to *bí* equate it with other Yes-No question markers without proper description.

Awobuluyi (1978) noted that interrogative sentences are used to ask or request for information, responses are required when certain element distinguish such constructions from declarative forms. Based on the responses required, there are basically two structural forms prevalent in information seeking constructions, polar or YesNo question are syntactic constructions which requires a yes or no answers among other possible responses (Olaogun, 2018) in the language on the one hand. On the other hand, the content word questions otherwise referred to as whquestions are interrogative constructions which requires items like *kí*, *ta*, among others and their movements sentence initially. Yusuf (1998) examines whquestions in Òkò dialect of Yoruba, he argued that whitems are wh phrases and not question markers. He did not consider polar questions. Yusuf (2010) He noted that *sé*YesNo constructions are derived through adjunction, a type of insertion process. He opined that *ñjé*could substitute *sé*. Nothing was said about *bí*and its functions.

Ilori (2010) assumes that *bí* like *sé* and *ñjé* in the language is a question markerstranded sentence finally while the real question marker is in the clause. His analysis shows that *bí* is a question marker. Apart from his analysis, scholars only mention it passively. He opined that *sé*can never be used with *bí*without resulting to

ungrammaticality. Contrary to Ilori's claim, speakers of the language do use sentences like the one given below:

4. *Şo ó lọ bí* (i.e. "sé o ó lọ bí" in written form)

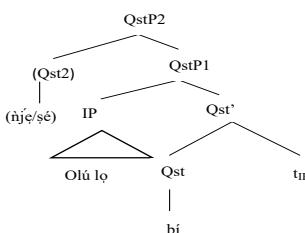
Wherethe vowel segment of *sé* in this regard undergoes deletion then, the consonant remnant merged with the form of the so-called high tone syllable (HTS).As a matter of fact (3) is a well-formed and grammatical structure in the language. Ilori (2010) also assumes that only *sé* and "njé" are adjoined to convergent IPs in Yorùbá to derive Yes-No question form. He also identified *bías* a Yes-No question element in Yorùbá which occurs constantly sentence finally in unlike *sé* and *njé*. According to Ilori, *sé* and *bí* never co-occur together while *bí*optionally co-occur "njé". Invariably, he views Yes-No questions as consisting of two distinct interrogative heads. Each of them could induce interrogative force in separate sentences. As implied from his analysis the two operator heads participate in the marking of a single interrogative sentence with interrogative force. They are marking the derivation as a discontinuous or bipartite item where the two are mutually selected for the same purpose before the rest of the clause is sandwiched into discontinuous or bipartite elements. That is, a case where an operator element breaks up into two parts. This goes without saying that the two operators are not discontinuous items in the language. Rather, they are separate items listed in the lexicon with their idiosyncratic features specifying how they can be used. He also opined that *bí* is dialectal just like the interrogative marker *ndan* (in Oyo dialect).

4a) [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> O rí Olú] ndan]?

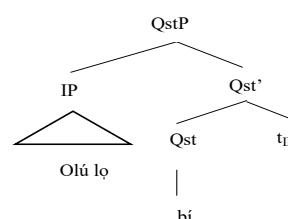
[<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> You see Olu] QM]

"Did you see Olu?"

4b)



4c)



The structure in (4b) and (4c) are Ilori's (2010) structural representation of polar question's interrogative projection (334a & 334b). His representation of interrogative projection having two specifiers, and two interrogative markers is shown in (4c). Other possible sequences in dialectal constructions are indicated below:

5a. [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> O rí Olú] è]? (Oyo/Ogbomoso dialect)

[<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> 2sg see Olu] QM]

"Did you see Olu?"

5b. [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> O yó ] ni] è]?

[<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> 2sgfill-NF]foc<sup>0</sup>] QM]

"ARE YOU DRUNK?"

Our summation from his analysis is that *bí* is not a question marker in Yorùbá. The item has a different function in the language. Apart from that, Ilori's treatment of *sé* and *ńjé* above shows that the real interrogative force resides in *bí* which he regarded as a question marker because it has strong interrogative features; in essence, *sé* and *ńjé* are just mere dummy heads which may be selected by *bí*, as such they take interpretation from *bí*. This cannot be the case because the force of the Inter<sup>0</sup> is activated in the clausal left periphery and by only one head. Also, his analysis did not take into consideration what the head would be should one have a sentence like(6a-c) below where *bí* is not marked. In the language, (6c) is rendered with a raised intonation-like process.

6a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú lo]]

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu go]]

"Did Olu go?"

6b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Ńjé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú lo]]

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu go]]

"Did Olu go?"

6c) [<sub>InterP</sub> Ø [<sub>TP</sub> Olú lo]]

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu go]]

"Did Olu go?"

Would the covertness of "bí" still inform the interrogative force of the sentence? Or would it be the case that the covertness of "bí" informs the weakness of its features? Obviously, that position cannot be taken. As it stands, the description is not adequately represented. Also, "bí" is not the head of the interrogative phrase. Or how would one assume that an instance of occurrence of an item changes the head of a derivation whereas the reverse is the case in similar constructions? According to Abimbola (2019), Taiwo and Abimbola (2014), a question sentence is marked with interrogative force by the functional head of that derivation and the force is understood as question when the projection is Inter<sup>0</sup>. The following are the properties of interrogative constructions in Yorùbá.

- i. Question markers are merged in the derivation at the same point.
- ii. Both overt and covert question markers are in complementary distribution.
- iii. Either covertly or overtly marked, a question marker has interpretable features at LF.
- iv. A questioned item is different from the question marker. Questioned item is the item you seek information about while the question marker is the item which marks a derivation with the force required or identifies a construction as interrogative (Abimbola, 2019).

Olakolu and Taiwo (2016) identified *sé*, *njé* and *ṣébí/ṣebí* in Akinwunmi Ishola's O le kú sentences. They argued following Ilori (2010) that derivationally, the question markers are attached through adjunction to convergent IP projection to derive interrogative constructions. But *bí* was mentioned as a form of a question marker in the language. Sanusi, O. and Eleshin (2016) drew a comparison between the formation of question forms in standard Yoruba and Olukumi dialect. Their description involves both Yes/No questions and whquestion forms but there is no discussion on the interpretation of *sé*, *njé* and *bí*. Olaogun (2016) argued against the claim that yes/no question markers occur cross linguistically either in clause final or sentence finally. The question marker occurs immediately after the subject DP and that Yes/no interrogative constructions require two licensors for convergence, the interrogative marker and the emphatic marker. This is not the case in Yoruba as it shall be shown in the course of the work. Olaogun (2017) a different view on *kí*, *ta*, etc which Awobuluyi (1978) had argued are interrogative nouns and scholars

have said are moved to sentence initial to license interrogative. He argued based on information structural evidence that the movement of interrogative nouns are for focus and not for interrogating. Also, he noted that the question marker in such constructions are null phonetically. Since the present work is focused on polar question and the item *bí*, the work will limit its discussions to polar question concerned.

Olanrewaju (2022) examines the morphological derivations of question markers and erroneously added whitems as question markers. He identified monomorphemic whitems, *bí*, etc. and argued that prefixation and compounding are basic for the morphological derivations apart from some phonological processes, which were not mentioned. He classified *bí* as monomorphemic question marker along with *ta*, *kí*, *se*, *bí*, *wo*, *dà* and *sé*. Although, *sé* is an undisputable question marker in the language, other items listed are not to be taken as one. Abimbola & Olaogun (2016), Abimbola (2019) have argued that items such as *ta*, *kí*, among others are not question markers. Rather, they are the items questioned in which information is being sort of. Similarly, Awobuluyi (1978; 2013), Olaogun (2017) among others have regarded as nouns based on their function interrogating nominal items within the clause. The interrogative nouns or whwords are not central to the present discussion. Hence, our review will be limited to the polar question markers.

*Dà* (and *níkó*) are not question markers outrightly but interrogative verbs. For more on the issue, see Awobuluyi (2013), Taiwo and Abimbola (2014; forthcoming) for divergent views and Akanbi (2014) for the distinctions between *dà* and *níkó*. Olanrewaju (2022) did not discuss the function of *bí*. He assumes *sébí/sébí* other forms noteworthy in the present work are derived as shown below:

$$\text{se/sé} + \text{bí} = \text{sébí/sébí}$$

$$\text{ní} + \text{jé} = \text{níjé}.$$

$$\text{ní} + \text{kó} = \text{níkó}$$

He argues that the last two forms are combinations of two free morphemes which means that *ní* and *kó*, which are functional morphemes, are taken to be free morphemes that can occur in isolation whereas they are not. He assumes erroneously that *ní* is a variant of the continuative marker without any explanation on the possibility. There is never a time or an environment where *ní* becomes *níkó* in the language

. Apart from that, in the case of *ńkó*, he assumes that *ńis* the continuative marker merged with *kóá* verb, which he claimed to be negative. Even in the examples he gave, the item does not denote any negation. Despite the preponderance of the flaws in his works, he did not mention how *bí* is a question marker nor its relationship to undisputable *sé* and *njé*.

EleshinAjikobi (2025) examines Yes/no question in Olukumi dialect of Yoruba and argues that Olukumi uses a highlow tone morph that takes its tone bearing unit from the last affirmative item which ends the clause in sentence final position. Contrastively, tone raising has not been discussed in standard Yoruba. However, some scholars have noted that there is sentence final tone form used intonationally at sentence final position in some dialects.

### 3.0 Types of question forms in Yorùbá

There are proliferating numbers of classifications in literature today. But one would want to agree with Hornstine, Nunes and Grohman (2005) that questions are understood based on the responses triggered. And if there is anything to go by on this view, responses to questions are in two structural forms as stated in Abimbola (2019). The following sentences are interrogative in the language.

7) [<sub>TP</sub> Olú      ra      bátà]  
 [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe]  
 “Olu bought a pair of shoe”

8a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sé    [<sub>TP</sub> Olú      ra      bátà]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe]]  
 “Did Olu buy a pair of shoes?”

8b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Njé    [<sub>TP</sub> Olú      ra      bátà]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe]  
 “Did Olu buy a pair of shoes?”

8c) [<sub>InterP</sub> Olú      ra      bátà bí]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe *bí*]  
 “Did Olu buy a pair of shoes?”

8d) [<sub>InterP</sub> Olú      ni      ó      ra      bátà bí]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> Olu foc<sup>0</sup> HTS buy-NF shoe *bí*]

“Is Olu the one who bought the shoe?”

9a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Kí ni [<sub>TP</sub> Olú rà]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> What foc<sup>0</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF]]  
 “What did Olu buy?”

9b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Ta ni [<sub>TP</sub> ø ó ra bàtà]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> Who foc<sup>0</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> 3sg HTS buy-NF shoe]]  
 “Who is the one that bought the shoe?”

10a) [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Olú dà]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> OluQV]]  
 “Where is Olu?”

10b) [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Olú nkó]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Olu QV]]  
 “Where is Olu/How about Olu?”

In many instances, Yorùbá grammarians and linguists alike have examined the types and derivation of interrogative sentences without placing much emphasis on the derivation of syntactic structures of some of those exemplified above. All the sentences above can be sub-classified into two groups. (8a), (8b) and (8c) may be classified as Yes-No questions because they require simple Yes or No answers while (9a) and (9b) require sentential answers and so are classified as content word questions. A lot has been said concerning the structural forms in (8a) and (8b) which are within our description here. Nothing other than mere speculations, those constructions are that of interrogative sentence. Those constructions in (10a) and (10b) are outside the scope of this research. From the foregoing, we can say that *sé*, *ṇjé* are question markers in Yoruba. Apart from these there are *ṣebí* and *ṣebí* both of which are used in Yes-No questions in the language.

### 3.1 question marker “ṣebí” and “ṣebí”

As many are likely to assume that there are basically three question markers in Yorùbá Yes-No question types following Ilori’s (2010) claim, in some context however, other forms like *ṣebí* and *ṣebí* can also be identified in the language.

11a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sèbí [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra bátà]]  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe]]  
 "Is it the case that Olu bought a new shoe?"

11b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sébí [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra bátà]]  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF shoe]]  
 "Is it the case that Olu bought a new shoe?"

Both (11a) and (11b) above have the question markers as *sèbí* or *sebí* above. They are alternants of *sé*. In some dialects of Yorùbá only *sé* is used as Yes-No question marker, not even *ñjé*, looking at the morphology of the *sèbí* and *sebí*, they seem to have been derived from the same form of *se*. But this idea negates the basic tenet of MP that lexical items are fully formed in the lexicon. Besides, proposing morphological derivation rules for these elements will require too many morphological rules. As for *ñjé* which is morphologically different from the others, it could not have been derived from *sé* or others. So, *sé*, *sebí* and *sèbí* are listed in the lexicon and they are possible question markers which can be selected for computation. Based on this, these three lexical items' behavior, *sèbí*, *sebí*, and *sé* are variants of *sé*.

On the position of occurrences, *sèbí* and *sebí* do not co-occur with *bí*, *bí* occurs sentence finally as shown by the ungrammaticality of the sentences below.

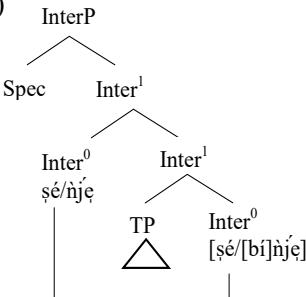
12a) \* Sèbí Olú ra bátà bí  
 b) \* Sébí Olú ra bátà bí

As a corollary to the distribution stated above, *sèbí* and *sebí* are only used rhetorically. Invariably, they don't trigger response naturally from the respondent. The interlocutor may want a response from the respondent, it depends on the respondent to respond to the rhetorical questions. The two forms are used interchangeably, but they are never used as beginning a sentence or starting a new discourse unlike *sé/ñjé*. That is, you must have said something or imply a discourse related statement before one could *sèbí* and *sebí*.

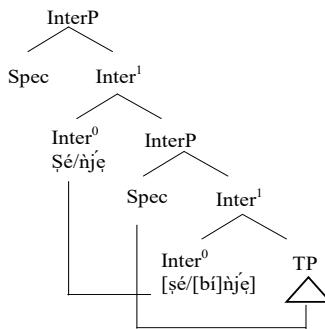
### 3.2 Phonological and theoretical explanation

In this section, we present our analysis of bí. Given the requirement of the numeration that whatever item not listed in it cannot take part in sentence computation, supposed bí is listed with other items in the numeration, and based on the phonological similarity of *sébí/sebí* with *sé* and *bí*, one may likely assume that both *sé* and *bí* are selected at the same time as head of InterP before the *sé*'s raised to the head of InterP while *bí* is left at the point of entry into the computation or stranded sentence finally as shown in (13a) and (13b) below.

13a)



13b)



This assumption holds that both are heads but split to derive the word order. One pertinent question which is likely to be raised as one of the core strong minimalist assumptions is that once a syntactic object has been formed it cannot be split at any level of derivation. At which point in the derivation shall the splitting of the syntactic object take place? This cannot be predicted, and it will prompt pedagogical questions on language learning.

From the Lexicon, lexical items (LI) are projected with all the required features necessary for the LI to project and participate fully in the computation processes. Breaking up *sébí* and *sebí* as *sé* and *bí*; *se* and *bí* will contradict this Minimalist conception of LIs. Apart from this, there is a far cry difference between *sebí*/*sébí* which induces confirmatory question i.e. the one who asked the question knows but needed to confirm from the respondent which may not require a vocalized response, and *sé* phonologically even though one may not be able to establish such contrast with *bí*. It will be wrong to take such assumption. And it is more wrong to assume that *bí* is a variant because they occur in different environments.

Apart from that, it should also be noted that InterP is a non-recursive projection when compared with TopP as shown in (14) below. InterP is maximum projection of the ForceP just like declarative, negative and vocative.

14) [<sub>TopP</sub> Dádì [<sub>TopP</sub>Mómì [<sub>FocP</sub>Àgbálájóbí ni [<sub>comp</sub> kí [<sub>TP</sub> e dìbò fún]  
 [<sub>TopP</sub> Daddy [<sub>TopP</sub>Mummy [<sub>FocP</sub>Àgbálájóbí ni [<sub>comp</sub> that [<sub>TP</sub>2pl vote prep]  
 "Daddy, Mummy, you are to vote for ÀGBÁLÁJÓBÍ"

Tonologically, these items cannot be the same because they are different from one another. Within the Minimalist view, *ṣebí*, *ṣèbí*, *ṣé* and *bí* are all listed in the Lexicon. Has stated earlier, the distribution of these items shows that *ṣéis* never used in rhetorical questions, hence it could not have been derived from it. But *ṣebí* and *ṣèbí* are variants of *ṣé* that can be used interchangeably. The positions of usage are the same, hence, where one occurs the other can also occur. So, there is no way where *ṣé* and *bí* are selected or could have been selected at the same time to head the Inter<sup>0</sup> since they are not both used as question markers as two separate heads inducing interrogative force. Apart from this, there is no known language where an interrogative sentence has two question markers where one can be deleted at will; and when the one deleted is used to question a clause, it will still exert the interrogative force. Again, this further reinforces our earlier statement that *bí* is not a question marker. Assuming this so-called Split-head analysis, the whole of the domain of the *bí* is first moved to spec, InterP2 in the lower InterP such that *bí* is stranded sentence finally to derive the sentence order. This means that there are two heads projected in the InterP. But there is no known language with such a cartography. It will further raise theoretical questions regarding the head which has the power to always activate the force whenever the two heads occur together in one sentence, such will lead to theoretical claims and counter claims which cannot be substantiated with language internal evidence. Similarly, if both are heads derived in the clausal left periphery, then where does the first question marker enter the derivation, and which is to be taken as the actual head? Lowering of heads is not allowed, as a principle in MP, because sentences are built from bottom to the top and not the other way round. Without missing words, the undisputable question markers; *ṣé/ṣnjé* would mark whatever sentence construction with the

interrogative force.

From the two assumptions raised above, movement of TP to spec-InterP2 is not possible because the real force presumably resides in *bí* whose part *sé/Ńjé* has been raised to lexicalize the InterP1 head. Apart from this, overt Yes-No question markers do not trigger movement of TP to spec-InterP.

### 3.3 On non-realization of *bí* clause finally

As observed above, *bí* always occurs sentence finally while all other question markers occur sentence initially. Most often, *bí* occurs with *Ńjé* than any other question marker in Yorùbá. The actual question here is this; how many question markers or particles are required by a sentence to activate interrogative force?

Just as sentences (5a-b) above, contain at least one question marker each. In Minimalism, the mood-force projection marks its domain with required force for the purpose of interpretation and understanding of any sentence in the clause structure (Rizzi, 1997; Chomsky 2000 among others).

The so-called sentence final question can be dropped at will, and whenever *bí* is dropped, the sentence is still marked with question force. So, what marks the force is not the presence of *bí*, and one cannot so attribute the role to it. As observed in the data below, *bí* may be dropped and this does not stop the grammaticality of the sentence or the reading of the sentence as a question sentence. Also, if we drop *Ńjé* and *sé* in the examples below in (15a) and (15b), (16a) and (16b) the sentence will still be grammatical but would not have question reading unlike (17a) which still does because the non-overt question marker activates the interrogative force. (17b) however, has sentence final raised tone as the marker (Awobuluyi, 1978)

15a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Ńjé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo]]?

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth]]

"Did Olu buy a cloth?"

15b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Ńjé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo]]

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth]]

"Did Olu buy a cloth?"

16a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo]]?

[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth]]  
"Did Olu buy a cloth?"

16b) [<sub>InterP</sub> Sé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo]]  
[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth]]  
"Did Olu buy a cloth?"

17a) [<sub>InterP</sub> Φ [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo bí]]?  
[<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth bí]]  
"Olu bought a cloth?"

17b) [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo (with sentence final raised tone)]]?  
[<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buy-NF cloth (QM)]]  
"Olu bought a cloth?"

As shown in (15b) and (16b) above, the absence of *sé* and *ànjé* in those constructions rendered them declarative sentences. If one compares (17a) with (15b) above, it becomes more obvious that *bí* does not occur in the position of *ànjé* and *sé* structurally. Apart from that (15b) is declarative while (17a) is interrogative. However, the presence of *bí* does not induce interrogative force. There is a covert form which licenses the interrogation since the presence of *bí* does not induce the force when *ànjé* and *sé* were used in the same sentence with it. We speculate here that (17a) has question marker of its own which is the non-overt question morpheme which heads the InterP, a variant of *sé*. As observed, (17b) should have crashed but interrogation was marked by sentence final raised tone. Thus, the undisputable question markers, *ànjé* and *sé* still mark their respective discussives with the appropriate force through the non-overt question marker. If *bí* does not mark interrogation in questions where *sé*, *ànjé*, *ṣebí*, *ṣèbí* or the raised tone on declarative structure where the undisputed question markers occur, then it cannot be when they are there. It is clear *bí* previously regarded as question marker does not induce any given Yes/No-question containing it with the question force as conceived previously. What then is the status of *bí*? It is not the question marker in those sentences which do not contain *ànjé* or *sé*. In the next section we turn to determining the status of *bí*.

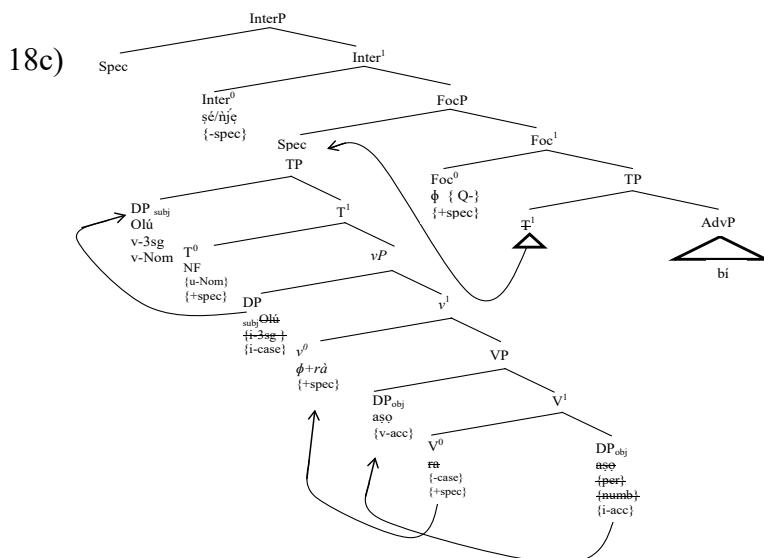
### 3.4 "bí" as sentence adverbial

Our analysis assumes that *bí* is a sentence adverbial which

performs adverbial function of reinforcement on the asked question. Little wonder that *bí* may be dropped at will even in sentences without overt question marker. The adverbial *bí* is meant to reinforce the force of the question marker and not marking the sentence with interrogative force. Under this view, no theoretical question would be raised nor an eyebrow towards a unitary head of the functional category. If our assumption is right, that overt Yes-No question marker does not trigger the whole TP to move and that *bí* is an adverbial which rather reinforces the question echoically, then it seems right that MP assumption that the one head marking the force is derived in the left periphery. From the foregoing and using (18a) and (18b) below would be like the tree schema in (18c). The tree schemata in (18c) shows the feature valuation processes and derivation of the structures.

18a) [<sub>InterP</sub> sé/ñjé [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo bí]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buyNFcloth intensifier]]  
 “Olu bought a cloth?”

18b) [<sub>InterP</sub> φ[<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra aṣo bí]]?  
 [<sub>InterP</sub> QM [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buyNFcloth intensifier]]  
 “Olu bought a cloth?”



The derivation of (18a) and (18b) are similar. The derivation can be explained this way: the TP is a wellformed and a convergent derivation which was merged with the sentence adverbial bí for intensification. Following Aboh and Pfau (2012), Olaogun (2012), Abimbola and Olaogun (2016) and Abimbola (2019), the activation of interrogation must be licensed by the activation of the domain of focus given the unified analysis of content word questions and polar questions and because interrogation licenses discourse new information which is mapped on clauses by Focus. Then, it was first merged with Foc<sup>0</sup> which projects Foc<sup>1</sup>. Foc<sup>0</sup> has a strong specifier {+spec} feature which must be satisfied in overt syntax despite being a null head. Thus, the whole of the TP is moved to specFocP where the Ffeature (focus feature) is valued. As stated earlier, both sé and njé cannot licence a specifier due to having a weak specifier {spec} feature. The null focus head is stranded sentence finally while sé/ njé remains at its position without moving a thing to its specifier in specInterP to derive a convergent interrogative structure.

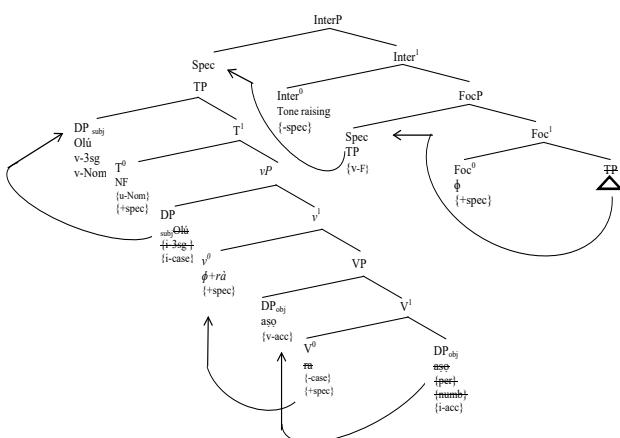
Similarly, in situation where the sentence final raised tone serves as the question marker, the derivation can be explained using the tree diagram in (19b) where (19a) indicates the sentence structure. Both the feature valuation processes, and the projection of derivation are represented on the diagram.

18c) [<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>Inter</sub><sup>1</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> Olú ra asø ] raised tone]?]

[<sub>InterP</sub> [<sub>Inter</sub><sup>1</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> Olu buyNFcloth] QM]

"Olu bought a cloth?"

19b)



The derivation of the question proceeds this way: a convergent TP was merged with focus since the activation of interrogation necessarily trigger the domain of focus. Hence, it was first merged with  $\text{Foc}^0$  which projects  $\text{Foc}^1$ .  $\text{Foc}^0$  has a strong specifier { + spec} feature which must be satisfied in overt syntax, thus, the whole of the TP is fronted or pied piped to  $\text{specFocP}$  where the Ffeature (focus feature) is valued. The sentence final raised tone being the head of the  $\text{Inter}^0$  is merged with the  $\text{FocP}$  to project  $\text{Foc}^1$  which also has a strong specifier { + spec} feature requiring valuation for convergence of the domain. Thus, the derivation is mapped in  $\text{specFocP}$  is fronted and merged at  $\text{specInterP}$ . The surface word order is derived in the process while the sentence final raised tone is stranded clause finally since the focus marker is always covert in polar derivation in Yorùbá.

From the foregoing, there are basically two groups of markers in the Yes-No question form in Yorùbá; (i) the overt markers *ṇjé* and *sé* which don't trigger TP to move to spec,  $\text{InterP}$ . As observed from (18b) moved items usually trigger emphatic or topic reading of the moved items landing in the Spec of a functional projection. Prominence is assigned to the whole TP whenever it is questioned.

The findings deduced from the discussion can be stated as follows:

- a. The question markers in Yorùbá are: *sé*, *ṇjé*, *sèbí*, *ṣebí*, an abstract marker and a raised sentence final tone.
- b. *Sé* and *ṇjé* are used interchangeably sentence initially.
- c. *Sèbí* and *ṣebí* are used to denote confirmatory questions which depending on the respondent, a response may be given but not required.
- d. The abstract question marker is used only why *bí* occurs without any overt question marker in interrogative constructions.
- e. The sentence final raised tone is a tone morph which is mapped on the clause without any other over interrogative marker in Yes-No question.
- f. *Bí* is a sentence adverbial which intensifies the questions. *Bí* does not substitute any of the question markers. Rather, an abstract form is used. That is why it seems that *bí* is performing a function which is not its own.

## 4.0 Conclusion

From the discussion so far, we have shown that the previously less-favoured *bí* in the Yes-No question formation analyses is not a question marker as argued by Ilori (2010) rather, the item is a sentence final adverbial which reinforces the force of the question asked. This is further ascertained by the fact that *bí* does not participate in marking the question force in sentences with raised voice presumably triggered by the absence of overt question marker. It is observed that there are two Yes-No question markers in Yorùbá the overt question marker and the non-overt question marker which triggers voice/pitch raising for marking interrogative questions. *bí*s never used in any other kind of sentence in the language except interrogatives. Apart from all these, only non-overt question marker in Yorùbá may trigger TP to move to Spec-InterP consequently resulting in raised voice.

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## ENDNOTES

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1Versions of this paper were read at IBALSG (Ibadan Language Study Group) Colloquium, University of Ibadan, Ibadan on 25th September 2015 and 9th October 2015. The audience are appreciated for their contributions to the work.

These two items, dà and nkó, were classified traditionally as interrogative verbs in the language. They were assumed by Awobuluyi (2013) as interrogative markers and not verbs because they cannot co-occur with short pronouns in the language. Taiwo and Abimbola (2014) have also suggested that the items are verbs predicating their respective clauses. The position of the present paper is that these items are verbs, and they have interrogative features following Abimbola (forthcoming). He itemized those features which make dà and nkó verbs in the language. Interested readers are advised to see cited works for details.

Parametric variation applied from one language to the other towards lexicalization of these core functional categories. According to Ajongolo (2005), the Yorùbá I-layer is headed by a Neg item which dominates T0 in syntactic cartography. However, we are assuming simple syntactic structures, which means that NegPs as it is in this clausal architecture ForceP > NegP > vP are not considered.

Yoruba language has a type of verb called splits verb (Awobuluyi 178 & 2013) such verbs split into two allowing the object of the sentence to be sandwiched between the verbs. Notice that there is no specific rule which predicts the forms of the two parts. That is, one cannot determine the form of the other half from the form of the first part of the verbs.

1) bájé:	Olú ba ìwé mi jé	2)gbàgbó:	Mo gba Olúwa gbó
Spoil/	Olu v book my v	believe	1sg v Lord v
Destroy “Olu destroyed my book”			“I believed in the Lord”

In Aika a neighbouring language to Yoruba spoken in Akoko-Edo local government area of Edo state where Yoruba functions as a unifying language just as English as reported in Abimbola (2014 & 2019), which demonstrates a morphological form as a discontinuous item, the language can only use the discontinuous affix as one item. And that demonstrates the way disconous items behave in languages of the world contrary to forced assumption imposed by Ilori's analysis on independent free lexical forms. However, the nature of the question marker of the Yes-No interrogative sentence is not the same. This research is predicated on an assumption that

there is only one question marker used in any given Yes-No question sentence in Yoruba language. And that there is no discontinuous lexical form used as interrogative marker because the language does not demonstrate anything of such. Any assumption on a split lexical form would result into creating a non-linguistic item in the language.

For convenience and ease of reference, the following are the abbreviations used in this paper: TP- Tense Phrase; InterP – interrogative Phrase; foc0 – Focus marker; PF – Phonetic form/ level; LF – interpretive form/level; MP – Minimalist Program; CHL – Computational system of human language; CP – Complementizer Phrase; vP – light verb phrase; 1/2/3sg – first/second/third person singular; QM – question marker; QV – interrogative verb; HTS – High Tone Syllable; C0 – complementizer marker; obj – Object; subj – Subject; v – verb; Adv – Adverb/adverbial; ForceP – Force Phrase; ø – non-overt; IP – Inflection phrase; emp/emp0 – emphatic feature/ head; EmpP – Emphatic Phrase; QF – question feature; EF – edge feature; Acc – Accusative case; Nom – Nominative case; F-focus feature; u–unvalued feature; v–valued feature.

Focused element is capitalized following Aboh (2006) and Olaogun (2016) to avoid cleft interpretation. In (5b) above, the whole clause is first focused before being interrogated. "ni" is the invariable focus marker in Yoruba language. It always allows the focused element to move to spec-FocP i.e. positioned on the left of the focus marker as the whole sentence is in that data in focus phrase. The question marker is stranded sentence finally after the domain of the dialectal question marker were fronted to the specInterP to derive the surface word order. The specifier feature of the marker in the dialect is quite strong to trigger movement of the domain while it is weak in the Standard Yoruba which does not allow such movement.

The form ñ is a syllabified nasal presumably derived from ni ó jé = where the vowels are deleted and the nasal is turned to a syllable. This is not an alien process in the language because there are expressions Olá bí mi pé = Olábímpé; Olá ní ïké = Olánké/Lánké, etc.

Yoruba language operates future and non-future opposition in the tense system. NF is used for non-future tense while FT represents Future Tense.

See Taiwo and Abimbola (2014) for more on the two interrogative verbs. Abimbola (forthcoming) discussed extensively on the predication of the two interrogative verbs as opposed to the different ways they have been conceptualized.

Kénà dialect of Yorùbá spoken at the border line of Ogun state, Nigeria, for instance only sé is used. In fact most of the Yoruba dialects spoken in Nigeria dont have njé.

Basically, whenever the two question forms are used, the likely answers are “Yes” or “No” depending on the predetermined answer of the interlocutor who knows what is being asked.

Technically, this assumption is not significantly different from Ilori’s (2010) analysis which an objection has already been raised about its failure.

Cf. Rizzi (1997) and other related publications. Rizzi (1997) has shown that interrogation is not a recursive projection in the force domain.

As implied from the analysis raised in Ilori (2010), there are two functional heads’ groups which can perform this function. As it is, position of occurrences differs considerably