

Journal of West African Languages XVI.2 (1986)

A NOTE ON THE YORUBA SUBORDINATOR 'TI'

Nike S. Lawal

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

This paper focuses on the Yoruba subordinator 'Ti'. This subordinator occurs in a variety of clauses some of whose syntactic status have been a subject of controversy amongst Yoruba linguists. Attention is paid here, in particular, to its dual status as a relative marker and as a complementizer.

A number of hypotheses are suggested. The paper concludes that a significant generalisation will be made if 'Ti' is treated as a generalised marker of syntactic subordination.

Cette étude est centrée sur la conjonction de subordination 'Ti' en Yoruba. Cette conjonction de subordination intervient dans une variété de propositions dont le statut syntactique de certaines d'entre elles a suscité de la controverse parmi les linguistes Yoruba. Nous nous intéressons pour notre part à son double statut en tant que conjonction introduisant les subordonnées compléments circonstanciels. Nous suggérons un certain nombre d'hypothèses. Et la conclusion de cette étude est que si l'on considère 'Ti' comme un marqueur généralisé de subordination syntactique, on aura fait une généralisation significative.

0. INTRODUCTION

Our attention in this paper¹ is on the Yoruba subordinating particle *tí*. This is because sentences containing this particle have generated some controversy amongst Yoruba linguists (Awobuluyi (1975), Bamgboṣe (1975)).

Our aim is to examine the behaviour of this particle in both complement and relative clauses with the hope that in the process its status will become clearer.

1. THE PARTICLE *TÍ*

Tí is found in a variety of clauses. It occurs not only in complement and relative clauses but also in conditional clauses and gerundive nominalisations. Examples of such sentences are:

1. *Ayò tí n bọ dára*
Ayò that prog. come good
'It is good that Ayò is coming.'
2. *Obìnrin tí Ayò fẹ ní ewà*
Woman that Ayò married has beauty
'The woman that Ayò married is beautiful.'

3. **Lílo tí ó lọ dára**
 Going that he went good
 'It is good that he went.'
4. **Tí ẹ ò bá gbálẹ ẹ ò ni jẹun**
 If you not sweep you not eat
 'If you don't sweep you will not eat.'
5. **Mo gbó tí Bólá n rẹrìn-ín**
 I heard that Bola prog.laugh
 'I heard Bola laughing.'

(1) and (5) are complement sentences, (2) is a relative clause, (3) is a gerundive nominalisation while (4) is a conditional. The above sentences clearly show that *tí* is not restricted to only one type of construction. In this paper we are concerned with the behaviour of *tí* in complement and relative clauses only.

The particle *tí* is more often associated with relativisation than with complementation and is therefore regarded as a relative marker. (Awobuluyi, 1975). The neglect of this aspect of *tí* is unfortunate as it has contributed in no small measure to the controversy surrounding some constructions containing the particle.

Another contributing factor is the surface similarity between *tí* complement clauses and *tí* relative clauses. Some *tí* constructions are, in fact, ambiguous between a relative clause interpretation and a complement interpretation.

We examine below the behaviour of *tí* in complement clauses.

2. TÍ IN COMPLEMENT CLAUSES

Tí is one of the four complementisers in the language. The others are *pékí/kí*, *látí* and *pé*. In complement clauses *tí* occurs in the syntactic frame:

[*tí* NP V P]

as in the sentence below:

6. **Mo rí móto rẹ tí ó kojá**
 I saw car his that it passed
 'I saw his car pass.'
7. **Ó dára tí móto rẹ tóbi**
 It good that car his big
 'It is good that his car is big.'

However, *tí* is very much unlike the other complementisers. First *tí* does not occur in initial position. Thus we do not have sentences like (8) or (9) below:

8. ***Tí Ayọ n bọ dára**
 That Ayọ prog. come good
9. ***Tí móto rẹ tóbi dára**
 That car his big good

Contrast the above with the pé, pékí/kí and láti clauses below.

10. Pé Ayọ ñ bọ dára
That Ayọ prog. come good
'That Ayọ is coming is good.'
11. Pékí/kí Ayọ wá dára
That Ayọ come good
'That Ayọ comes is good.'
12. Láti lọ dára
To go good
'It is good to go.'

Secondly, tí seems to have a much freer movement than the other complementisers - it can occur either before or after the embedded subject. The sentences below illustrate this:

13. (a) Mo ríí tí Ayọ fọ àwo
I saw that Ayọ broke plates
'I saw that Ayọ broke plates.'
- (b) Mo rí Ayọ tí ó fọ àwo
I saw Ayọ that he broke plates
'I saw Ayọ break the plates.'
14. (a) Mo gbọ tí Ayọ ñ rérin-in
I heard that Ayọ is laughing
'I heard Ayọ laughing.'
- (b) Mo gbọ Ayọ tí ñ rérin-in
I heard Ayọ that is laughing
'I heard Ayọ laughing.'
15. (a) Bọla wò ó tí Ayọ fisí lẹkùn
Bọla watched that Ayọ opened door
'Bọla watched Ayọ open the door.'
- (b) Bọla wo Ayọ tí ó fisí lẹkùn
Bọla watched Ayọ that he opened door
'Bọla watched Ayọ open the door.'

The two sentences (a) and (b) mean exactly the same. This type of freedom is not found in other complement clauses.

2.1 MATRIX VERB

The number of verbs that occur in the matrix clause of tí clauses is very small. The list below consists of six verbs, and it is unlikely that there are many more. Most of them are perception verbs:

rí	'see'	dùn	'pain'
gbọ	'hear'	dùn mọ	'please'
wo	'watch'	dára	'be good'

2.1 TENSE RESTRICTION

Two types of verb forms occur in *tí* clauses. These are the progressive and the simple past. This can be seen in the sentences below:

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 16. (a) | Ó dún mi tí Ayo lo | Simple past |
| | 'It pained me that Ayo went.' | |
| (b) | Ó dùn mi tí Ayo nlo | Progressive |
| | 'It pained me that Ayo is going.' | |
| (c) | *Ó dùn mi tí Ayo ti lo | Perfect |
| | 'It pained me that Ayo has gone.' | |
| (d) | *Ó dùn mi tí Ayo o lo | Future |
| | 'It pained me that Ayo will go.' | |

The choice between the progressive and simple past depends on whether the end of the action is known or not. The progressive is used when the end of the action is not known while the simple past indicates that the speaker knows that the action has ended. For instance, in (17) below it is not known whether they reached the end of the bridge or not, while (18), on the other hand, indicates that they have reached the other side.

17. Mo rii tí wón nkojá ní oríi gáda
I saw that they were crossing at top bridge
'I saw them crossing the bridge.'
18. Mo rii tí wón kojá ní oríi gádà
I saw that they crossed at top bridge
'I saw them cross the bridge.'

The same interpretation goes for (19) and (20) below:

19. Mo gbó tí Ayò n rérin-in
I heard that Ayo is laughing
'I heard Ayo laughing.'
20. Mo gbó tí Ayò ó rérin-in
I heard that Ayo laughed
'I heard Ayo laugh.'

Sentence (19) indicates that Ayo was still laughing, and it is not known whether he stopped laughing or not. (20), on the other hand, indicates that the speaker heard Ayo laugh and stop.

I do not know why the perfect tense is excluded. It could be because *tí* clauses describe the events themselves rather than a state resulting from the events.

3. TÍ COMPLEMENT CLAUSES AND RELATIVE CLAUSES

There is a great surface similarity between *tí* complement clauses and *tí* relative clauses. This is partly due to the fact that both clauses are introduced by the same particle and partly also to the position of the particle in the sentences. The examples below illustrate this.

21. Iwé é Bólá tí mo kà dùn
 Book Bola that I read sweet
 'Bola's book that I read is interesting.'
22. Iwé é Bólá tí wón jí dùn mí
 Book Bola that they stole pained me
 'It pained me that they stole Bola's book.'

(21) is a relative clause whilst (22) is a complement clause. As can be seen from the sentences, the order of elements in both constructions including the positioning of the particle is the same. The only surface difference is the substitution of the verb **dùn mí** in (22) with **dun** in (21) while in (22) we have **wón** 'they'. There are, in fact, some sentences which are ambiguous with respect to complement or relative clause meaning. An example is (23) below:

23. Iwé tí mo rá dára
 Book that I bought good

Most linguists would agree with Bamgboşe (1975), that this sentence is ambiguous. It can mean either 'the book that I bought is good' or 'it is a good thing that I bought the book.'

The above shows that there is no difference in surface structure between the **tí** complement clauses and **tí** relative clauses.

However, not all **tí** clauses are as easily analysable as the above. There are some that have generated controversy. These are mainly constructions in which the head noun phrase is a gerundive nominal. Linguists like Awobuluyi regard such sentences as relative clauses, whilst others like Bamgboşe classify them as factive nominalisations. However, Wayne Williams (1977) has pointed out that some of such sentences are clearly factive complements whilst others are more compatible with a relative clause interpretation. We are not interested in such sentences here.

4. THE STATUS TO TÍ

From the above it appears logical to distinguish two different **tí** particles: one a relative marker **tí** and the other a complementiser **tí**. But is such an analysis tenable? How, for instance, would we account for the close resemblance in structure between the **tí** relative clause and **tí** complement clauses?

Two kinds of hypothesis can be postulated:

The first is that the resemblance in structure between **tí** complement clauses and **tí** relative clauses is purely accidental, brought on by some obligatory transformational process which happens in **tí** clauses.

Thus we postulate that the complementiser **tí** occupies initial position in deep structure, an obligatory fronting transformation then takes place. Thus instead of

(24a) **Tí iwé é Bọlá wọn jí dún mí**
 That book Bọla they stole pained me

we have

(24b) **Iwé é Bọla tí wọn jí dún mí**
 Book Bọla that they stole pained me

We can state this fronting rule as follows.

[Tí	X	NP	Z]
1	2	3	4
3+1	2	0	4

The result of this fronting process is to make the *tí* complement clause similar in structure to the relative clause. For instance, contrast the above sentence (b) with the relative clause sentence below:

(25) **Ìwé tí Bọlá káá dún**
 Book that Bọla read sweet
 'The book that Bọla read is interesting.'

Here as in (24b) above we have [NP *tí* VP]. This fronting rule would seem to be restricted to *tí* complement clauses only, as the other complementisers in the language would not undergo this process. All the complementisers can occupy sentence initial position. This can be seen in the examples below:

26. **Pé Ayọ lọ dára**
 That Ayọ went good

27. **Pékí/kí Ayọ lọ dára**
 That Ayọ go good

28. **Láti lọ dára**
 To go good

This type of surface similarity between two different deep structures is not peculiar to Yoruba. In French, for instance, the verb for 'see' often has a relative clause structure after it, with the meaning of complement. For instance, the French equivalent for 'I can see John coming' is

29. **Je vois Jean qui vient**
 I see John who comes.

However, whether the French example is a result of a transformational process or not is something we have not looked into. In any case, it is not crucial to the argument here.

An alternative explanation is to regard *tí* as serving a single function in all its uses - a generalised marker of syntactic subordination. Thus, its interpretation as complement or relative is imposed on it by virtue of the fact that we are conditioned to think in terms of one of these types of clauses.

This second alternative seems to be preferable because it can account for a number of apparent inconsistencies which are otherwise inexplicable without resort to ad hoc solutions like obligatory transformations. For instance, the fronting solution

would be peculiar to tí clauses only. It also explains why tí occurs in other related and unrelated constructions e.g. conditionals and gerundive nominalisations.

Considering the above facts, it is obvious that a significant generalisation will be gained by treating tí as a generalized marker of syntactic subordination.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have examined the Yoruba particle tí. Tí, we found, does not occur only in relative clauses and nominalized clauses, but also in complement clauses and conditionals. Our conclusion therefore is that tí should be regarded as a generalised marker of syntactic subordination.

NOTES

¹This paper was presented at the 17th West African Linguistic Society Congress in Ibadan, March, 1986.

REFERENCES

- Awobuluyi, O. 1975a. Nominalization or Relativization? Paper read at the Linguistics Seminar, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Bamgboṣe, A. 1975b. Relative Clauses and Nominalized Sentences in Yoruba. Working Papers in Linguistics, No. 20. Ohio State University.
- Schacter, P. 1973. Focus and Relativization. *Language* 49: 19-46.
- Stackwell, Schachter and Partee. 1973. *The Major Syntactic Structures of English*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Williams, R.Wayne. 1977. The So-called Relativized and Cleft Predicates in Krio: One step closer to An Understanding of Creolization. *Language and Linguistic Problems in Africa. Proceedings of the VII Conference on African Linguistics.*