

## ANOTHER THOUGHT ON *níláti*

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In this note, we contend that neither the Yorùbá orthography nor the grammar of English can serve as a useful guide when it comes to deciding the syntactic category and function of *ní láti*.

Dans cette note, nous soutenons le fait que ni l'orthographe yoruba ni la grammaire de l'anglais n'est d'aucune utilité en ce que concerne l'identification de la catégorie grammaticale ou des fonctions de *ní láti*.

According to Perlmutter (1974:83), 'argumentation is not the only thing that should be taught in early syntax courses ... the student also needs to learn how to see generalizations in data'. In agreement with this view, I suggest in Adéwólé (1990) that *ní* 'has/have' in the following sentences should be regarded as the same lexical item and that any different readings should be ascribed to the different lexical contexts the item finds itself in.

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1a. <i>ó ní ìwé</i><br>he has book<br>'He has a book.'             | b. <i>ó ní òbẹ</i><br>he has knife<br>'He has a knife.'                   |
| 2a. <i>ó ní ìfẹ sí i</i><br>he has love to him<br>'He loves him.'  | b. <i>ó ní owó</i><br>he has money<br>'He is rich.'                       |
| 3a. <i>ó ní ní àtìlọ</i><br>he has in act-of-go<br>'He has to go.' | b. <i>ó ní ní àtìṣe é</i><br>he has in act-of-do it<br>'He has to do it.' |
- Yoruba orthography: *ó níláti lọ*                      Yoruba orthography: *ó níláti ṣe é*

I do not base my claim here on the Yorùbá orthography because, although great progress has been made on the language's orthography, we are still very far from having an acceptable one. Neither do I base it on the English glosses because I believe that idiomatic English usage cannot serve as a useful guide when it comes to deciding what the function of a word is in a Yorùbá sentence. This view of mine has been challenged in the preceding article and I shall try and answer some of the points made.<sup>1</sup>

On p.2 (of MS) the author says:

Since there is no difference between must and have or has to, it may not be tenable to reject *gbòdò* and *níláti* as in 4 and 5 as alternants.

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| (4) <i>ó níláti ṣe é</i> | 'He has to do it.' |
| (5) <i>ó gbòdò ṣe é</i>  | 'He must do it.'   |

As I stated earlier, I would not support the view that the grammatical categories of Yorùbá should be determined on the basis of their translational equivalence into English parts of speech. That have or has to and must are alternants in English does not mean that *níláti* and *gbòdò* should be alternants in Yorùbá. Again the writer claims that:

whether *níláti* is written as a single word or divided as *ní láti*, its foreign usage still remains with it (p.3 of MS).

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the editor for making the pre-published version of the article available to me for discussion.

The reason the writer is more concerned with the so-called ‘foreign usage’ of *níláti* is because, according to him, *níláti* is a loan-translation (or calque) and as a loan-translation, *níláti* ‘may not respect the morphological or syntactic structure of its host language.’ I do not subscribe to this claim that *níláti* is a calque. A calque, according to Crystal (1985:40), is a

term used in COMPARATIVE and HISTORICAL linguistics to refer to a type of BORROWING, where the morphemic constituents of the borrowed WORD or PHRASE are translated ITEM by item into equivalent MORPHEMES in the new language. (emphasis his)

An example given for such ‘loan-translations’ in English is *power politics* from German *Macht politik*. In Yorùbá, we can also have *ònà olópòò méjì* ‘dual carriageway’. *Níláti* cannot be equated with any of these. *Níláti* is made up of *ní* ‘has/have’, *ní* ‘in’ and *àti* ‘derivational morpheme’. If the three morphemes are now translated to ‘have/has to’ in English, then we cannot regard *níláti* as a calque; if *have/has* is loan-translated into Yorùbá as *ní*, I do not see how *to* could be translated into Yorùbá as *láti*.<sup>2</sup>

What surprises me here is that despite the fact that the author would want us to write *ní ìgbà tí* as *nígbàtí*, he still recognises the structure of the item as (in-time-COMP) ‘at the time’ before translating the item into idiomatic English as *when/while*. My contention is not whether *níláti* should or should not be translated into idiomatic English as *have/has to* but that the individual morphemes that make up the word should be recognised.

One of the items used by the author to support his claim that *níláti* should be regarded as a lexical item is *tàbí* ‘or’. According to the author, nobody has ever queried the morphology of *tàbí* ‘or’. The same cannot be said of *níláti* as I stated in my 1990 article.

The author also wonders (p.6 of MS) how *láti*-VP would be classified if *ní* is separated from *ní láti*-VP and also what will be its syntactic relation to the sentence be? The answer is that *láti*-VP will be a PP and the item will be performing the normal functions performed by PP’s in sentences (see Yusuf 1985, 1987 and 1988 for detail).

The writer then (p.11 of MS) equates *níláti* with *dandan* as in

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6a. <i>ó níláti dára</i><br>3sg-must-good<br>‘It must be good.’ | b. <i>dandan ní kó dára</i><br>Compulsory-FOC-COMP-3sg-good<br>‘Obligatorily it will be good.’ |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The question that could be raised here is whether we can say that because we can use both *níláti* and *dandan* as above, they belong to the same category, that is, if we classify *níláti* as a modal, can we also classify *dandan* ‘compulsory’ as a modal? I know the writer would not do this. He would classify *dandan* ‘compulsory’ either as a noun or as an adverb. In the same manner, we are saying that even if both *níláti* and *gbòdò* share part of their meanings, it does not follow that we should classify both of them as modal verbs and even if we do that, we shall still need to account for each of the components of *níláti* which can occur independently. Lyons’ (1981:111-112) view is akin to ours when he states that:

Though there is an intrinsic connection between the meanings of forms and

<sup>2</sup> Awobuluyi (1967:136) glosses *láti* (*lâàti*) as ‘in order to’; Abraham (1958:404) glosses the same item as ‘for the purpose of/in order to’.

their distribution, it is their distribution alone that is of direct concern to the grammarian. Anyone who wishes to understand modern grammatical theory, in its most distinctive and most interesting developments, must be able to think of the distribution of forms independently of their meaning.

Note that although the following Yorùbá words are glossed as single items in English, this does not make them indivisible units

7.	<u>Yorùbá</u>	<u>English</u>
	gbé wá	'bring'
	lọ gbé wá	'fetch'
	ré jẹ	'cheat'
	rí gbà	'receive'

These few examples clearly show that English glosses should not be used to analyse Yorùbá words.

From the above comments, it will be seen that I stand by the analysis I proposed in my 1990 article.

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