

## COREFERENTIALITY AND FOCUS IN TEXTUAL COHESION: EVIDENCE FROM YORUBA

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Pronoun substitution for a noun previously mentioned is a well-known cohesive device in texts. Its use is, however, not automatic, since ellipsis can replace substitution of a noun object by a pronoun. Coreferentiality is often associated with pronoun substitution, while non-coreferentiality is associated with ellipsis. Since both devices occur regardless of presence or absence of coreferentiality, however, there is a need to look for a more valid discriminator. Alternative criteria such as animacy and definiteness of the noun or contextual and semantic features of the verb are shown to be equally inadequate. However, the tendency of speakers to focus on part of a discourse is regarded as a more plausible alternative. When the focus falls on the noun object, there is pronoun substitution, and when it falls on the verb, there is ellipsis.

La substitution par un pronom d'un nom déjà mentionné est un procédé de cohésion bien connu dans la littérature. Son emploi, néanmoins, n'est pas automatique, puisque l'ellipse peut remplacer la substitution d'un nom objet par un pronom. La coréférentialité est souvent associée à la substitution de pronom, alors que la non-coréférentialité est associée à l'ellipse. Pourtant, puisque ces deux procédés peuvent être utilisés sans référence à la présence ou l'absence de la coréférentialité, il est nécessaire de chercher un discriminateur plus valable. Les critères alternatifs tels que le caractère animé ou défini du nom ou les traits contextuels ou sémantiques du verbe se révèlent être également inadéquats. Néanmoins, la tendance des locuteurs à se concentrer sur une partie d'un discours se présente comme une alternative plus plausible. Quand l'attention se porte sur le nom objet, il y a substitution par un pronom, et quand elle se porte sur le verbe, il y a ellipse.

One of the well-known markers of cohesion in texts is the third-person pronoun used in reference to a preceding noun. This is the basis for the generalization that a noun marked as [-First Mention] can be substituted by a pronoun (Ingram 1971:18). Hence, in questions and answers and in a sequence of sentences, it is usual to have such pronoun substitution as a cohesive device.

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|-----|--|---|
| (1) | <p>a. <b>ṣé wón kí ọba</b><br/>Q 3pl greet king<br/>Did they greet the king?</p> | <p><b>wón kí i</b><br/>3pl greet 3sg<br/>They greeted him.</p>          |
|     | <p>b. <b>bísí kí ọba</b><br/>PN greet king<br/>Bisi greeted the king.</p>        | <p><b>èmi náà kí i</b><br/>1sg DET greet 3sg<br/>I too greeted him.</p> |

(Please note that the use of the definite article in the English gloss is only for convenience, since a noun without any definitizing qualifier in Yoruba may be generic or specific, i.e., 'a king' or 'the king'.)

One point that is often lost sight of, however, is that pronoun substitution as a cohesive device is by no means automatic. A mechanical application of the generalization that a third-person pronoun substitutes for a previously mentioned noun leads to wrong predictions as may be illustrated by (2).

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| (2) | <p>a. <b>ṣé wón fé owó</b><br/>Q 3pl want money<br/>Do they want money?</p> | <p><b>*wón fé ẹ</b><br/>Q want 3sg<br/>They want it.</p> |
|-----|---|--|

- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| b. <b>bísí fẹ owó</b> | <b>èmi náà fẹ ẹ</b> |
| PN want money         | 1sg DET want 3sg    |
| Bisi wants money.     | I too want it.      |

In place of pronoun substitution as in (2), the appropriate cohesive device is ellipsis, which takes the form of a deletion of the previously mentioned noun. This is also referred to syntactically as null object.

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| (3) a. <b>şé wọn fẹ owó</b> | <b>wọn fẹ</b>            |
| Q 3pl want money            | 3pl want                 |
| Do they want money?         | They want (= They do).   |
| b. <b>bísí fẹ owó</b>       | <b>èmi náà fẹ</b>        |
| PN want money               | 1sg DET want             |
| Bisi wants money.           | I too want (= I too do). |

Like pronoun substitution, ellipsis too is not automatic as a cohesive device. For example, while ellipsis is possible in (3), it is not in (4).

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (4) a. <b>şé wọn kí ọba</b> | <b>*wọn kí</b>             |
| Q 3pl greet king?           | 3pl greet                  |
| Did they greet the king?    | They greeted (= They did). |
| b. <b>bísí kí ọba</b>       | <b>*èmi náà kí</b>         |
| PN greet king               | 1sg DET greet              |
| Bisi greeted the king.      | I too greeted (= I did).   |

Under what conditions can either device occur? Is there a constraint linked to the type of verb? Does definiteness of the noun affect which device is selected? The rest of this article will be devoted to these questions. But at this point, it is necessary to point out that there is a third device that can occur in these sentences. This is lexical repetition as in (5) and (6).

- |                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| (5) a. <b>şé wọn kí ọba</b> | <b>wọn kí ọba</b>       |
| Q 3pl greet king?           | 3pl greet king          |
| Did they greet the king?    | They greeted the king.  |
| b. <b>bísí kí ọba</b>       | <b>èmi náà kí ọba</b>   |
| PN greet king               | 1sg DET greet 3sg       |
| Bisi greeted the king.      | I too greeted the king. |
| (6) a. <b>şé wọn fẹ owó</b> | <b>wọn fẹ owó</b>       |
| Q 3pl want money            | Q want money            |
| Do they want money?         | They want money.        |
| b. <b>bísí fẹ owó</b>       | <b>èmi náà fẹ owó</b>   |
| PN want money               | 1sg DET want money      |
| Bisi wants money.           | I too want money.       |

Although superficially, (5) and (6) are similar in terms of the repetition of identical lexical items and the fact that the noun object in each case can be generic, there are other possible semantic interpretations in which they differ. For example, while the text in (5) may be referring to greeting of the same or different kings, that in (6) is

most unlikely to refer to the same money. The cohesive device of lexical repetition, though interesting in itself, will not be discussed further in this article. It is worth mentioning, however, that in the extensive literature on Yoruba, only pronoun substitution has featured as a cohesive device, and this has led to artificial linguistic creations devoid of context such as in (2), whose occurrence in natural texts is virtually nil.

### COREFERENTIALITY AS A CRITERION

It has been suggested that the distinction between pronoun substitution and ellipsis of noun object may be accounted for in terms of coreferentiality. In (1) where the pronoun object is anaphoric in that it is coreferential with the preceding noun object, pronoun substitution as a cohesive device is possible, whereas in (2) and (3) where there is no such coreferentiality, no pronoun substitution is possible. The noun that is understood in the case of an ellipsis merely belongs in the same semantic field as the first noun, or is generic rather than specific, but is not identical with it. Halliday and Hasan (1985:74) refer to the distinction between the two as "co-reference" and "co-classification" and go on to point out that "it is more typical for reference type devices to signify co-referentiality and for substitution and ellipsis to signify the relation of co-classification." Quirk et al. (1985:864) also refer to the same distinction as one between a "coreferential pro-form" and a "substitute pro-form", with the latter being substitutable by the antecedent without a change in meaning, and the former always definite.

The pronoun object that substitutes for a previously mentioned noun is a referential pronoun, and coreferentiality arises when there is an identity of reference between this pronoun and the noun. As Bosch (1983:42) puts it, "In the case of an RP [referential pronoun]...the pronoun does require a referent, as does its antecedent. It is a further question, partly of contextual nature, whether one wants to regard these two referents as identical. If so, we are dealing with a case of co-reference, i.e., literally reference of two independently referring expressions to one and the same referent." It is in this sense of identity of contextual reference that coreferentiality is employed in this article. The use of the criterion of coreferentiality to determine the choice between pronoun substitution and ellipsis as strategies of cohesion is problematic because it is not in all cases that its presence corresponds with one and its absence with the other. Consider, for instance, the following counterexamples:

### CO-OCCURRENCE OF COREFERENTIALITY AND ELLIPSIS

For example, in (7) there are two possible semantic interpretations. The noise heard by the two people could be the same noise (a coreferential interpretation) or it could be two different noises (a noncoreferential interpretation). In either case, however, ellipsis is permissible.

- (7)    **adé gbó ariwo**                      **dúpé náà gbó**  
       PN    hear noise                      PN        DET    hear  
       Ade heard some noise.            Dupe, too, heard.  
       ( = Ade heard some noise. Dupe too did.)

## ELLIPSIS BLOCKED EVEN WHEN THERE IS NO COREFERENTIALITY

For example, in (8) it is possible that the clocks looked at are different clocks, in which case the classic condition for ellipsis (i.e., noncoreferentiality) is satisfied. But, contrary to expectation, ellipsis is blocked.

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| (8) | <b>ó wo aago</b><br>3sg look clock<br>She looked at the clock.<br>(= She looked at the clock. I too did.) | <b>*èmi náà wò</b><br>1sg DET look<br>I, too, looked. |
|-----|---|---|

## DEFINITENESS OF THE NOUN CO-OCCURRING WITH ELLIPSIS

While it is true that pronoun substitution for any definite noun object necessarily implies that it is coreferential, ellipsis may occur whether the noun object is definite or not. For example, while (9a) is ambiguous as between a coreferential or a non-coreferential interpretation (i.e., with a reference to the same wall or two different walls), as soon as the object is made definite as in (9b), such ambiguity disappears and the relation becomes only one of coreferentiality. But this is not necessarily the case with ellipsis as shown in (10).

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| (9)  | <b>a. ò fara tí ògiri</b><br>3sg take-body push wall<br>She leaned against the wall.         | <b>emi náà fara tí í</b><br>1sg DET take-body push 3sg<br>I too leaned against it. |
|      | <b>b. ó fara tí ògiri náà</b><br>3sg take-body push wall DET<br>She leaned against the wall. | <b>emi náà fara tí í</b><br>1sg too take-body push 3sg<br>I too leaned against it. |
| (10) | <b>a. sé bàbá jẹ ịsu náà</b><br>Q father eat yam DET<br>Did father eat the yam?              | <b>ò jẹ é</b><br>3sg eat 3sg<br>He ate it.   |
|      | <b>b. sé bàbá jẹ ịsu náà</b><br>Q father eat yam DET<br>Did father eat the yam?              | <b>*ò jẹ</b><br>3sg eat<br>He ate (= He did).                                      |
|      | <b>c. sé adé gbọ ariwo náà</b><br>Q PN hear noise DET<br>Did Ade hear the noise?             | <b>ó gbọ</b><br>3sg hear<br>He heard (= He did).                                   |

Example (10a) shows that, when the noun is definite, pronoun substitution is obligatory, and by the same token, ellipsis is ruled out as shown in (10b). But this is contradicted by (10c) where a definite noun object admits of ellipsis.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the preceding examples and counter-examples is that the criterion of coreferentiality is inadequate to account for the total range of texts in which pronoun substitution and ellipsis are employed as cohesive devices.

## SEMANTIC AND CONTEXTUAL FEATURES OF THE VERB

What is the influence of semantic and contextual features of the verb on coreferentiality? A look at some verbs suggests that there may well be semantic and contextual features of the verb that determine coreferentiality or its absence. For example, in (11) the reference cannot be to the same fish, since fish having been consumed by one agent cannot subsequently be eaten by the second. This interpretation is further reinforced by the sequence of the two actions, with the first action occurring before the second. Hence, coreferentiality is ruled out.

- |      |                    |                      |
|------|--------------------|----------------------|
| (11) | <b>bísí jẹ eja</b> | <b>*èmi náà jẹ é</b> |
|      | PN eat fish        | 1sg DET eat 3sg      |
|      | Bisi ate fish.     | I also ate it.       |

In light of this, one can consider semantic and contextual constraints as an alternative to the criterion of coreferentiality. For this purpose, it is useful to examine three sub-categories of verbs: change-of-state, object-inducing, and object-implied verbs.

## CHANGE-OF-STATE VERBS

These are verbs whose objects undergo a change of state as a result of the action of the verb. Such verbs include: *jẹ* 'eat', *sè* 'cook', *gé* 'cut', *fọ* 'wash', *rò* 'cook (vegetable, flour)', *dín* 'fry', *pa* 'kill', *wọ* 'wear', *dé* 'wear (cap)', etc. Quite apart from the large number of verbs in this category, the problem with this type of criterion is that a context can often be found in which the supposedly unacceptable interpretation becomes possible and acceptable. Consider the following:

- |      |                               |                             |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (12) | a. <b>adé gé igi náà</b>      | <b>èmi náà gé e</b>         |
|      | PN cut tree DET               | 1sg DET cut 3sg             |
|      | Ade cut the tree.             | I too cut it.               |
|      | b. <b>bísí se eja náà</b>     | <b>èmi náà sè é</b>         |
|      | PN cook fish DET              | 1sg DET cook 3sg            |
|      | Bisi cooked the fish.         | I too cooked it.            |
|      | c. <b>bísí se irú eja náà</b> | <b>èmi náà sè é</b>         |
|      | PN cook fish DET              | 1sg DET cook 3sg            |
|      | Bisi cooked the type of fish. | I too cooked it.            |
|      | d. <b>bísí se irú eja náà</b> | <b>èmi náà sè</b>           |
|      | PN cook fish DET              | 1sg DET cook                |
|      | Bisi cooked the type of fish. | I too cooked (= I too did). |

In (12a), it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which one person will start cutting a tree and another will complete the process. What would have ruled out two persons carrying out this action is if it is specified that the first agent has actually felled the tree. (12b) is even more straightforward. By normal interpretation, it should be unacceptable, since fish already cooked by one person is unlikely to be cooked further by another person. However, given an appropriate contextualization, it can be interpreted as (12c) and then become totally acceptable. There is no coreferentiality in (12c), since what determines what the pronoun substitutes for is basically the head of the noun phrase *irú* 'type' rather than its qualifier *eja náà* 'the fish'. This explains why (12c),

which involves pronoun substitution, has exactly the same meaning as (12d), which involves an ellipsis.

### OBJECT-INDUCING VERBS

Another aspect of the semantics of the verb (which is also related to the syntax) is whether the nature of the verb has a bearing on whether ellipsis is possible or not. In (8) where the verb *wò* 'look at' occurs, ellipsis is ruled out. This verb happens to belong to a category of verbs, which necessarily have to take an object. Is it possible that this is the reason why ellipsis is ruled out? Some other verbs in this category include *kí* 'greet', *pa* 'kill', *je* 'eat', *nà* 'flog', *wò* 'look at', *kọ* 'build', *lẹ* 'grind', *rò* 'cook (vegetable, flour)', *gún* 'pound', etc. Consider the examples in (13).

- (13) a. *sé dúpé ro ẹfọ*                      *ó rò*  
           Q PN        cook vegetable        3sg cook  
           Did Dupe cook vegetable dish?    She cooked (= She did).
- b. *bísí gún iyán*                                *rẹmí náà gún*  
           PN pound yam                        PN DET pound  
           Bisi pounded yam.                    Remi too pounded (= Remi too did).
- c. *tísà na ọmọ*                                 *\*adé náà nà*  
           teacher beat child                    PN DET beat  
           The teacher beat the child.         Ade too beat (= Ade too did).

Ellipsis is possible in (13a) and (13b) but not in (13c). The same is true of (8). It follows then that the determining factor is not the verb.

### OBJECT-IMPLIED VERBS

Another category of verbs typified by *gbọ* 'hear' is one in which there is an implied object. Is it possible that the reason why ellipsis can occur in (7) and (10c) is that the verb itself presupposes the existence of an object, i.e., 'to hear' presupposes hearing some kind of sound. Examples of verbs in this category include *rí* 'find', *fẹ* 'want', *ní* 'have', *tà* 'sell', *rà* 'buy', *mọ* 'know', *rò* 'think', etc. Consider the examples in (14).

- (14) a. *̀njé ó ní owó*                            *ó ní*  
           Q 3sg have money                    3sg have  
           Does he have money?                 He has (= He does).
- b. *̀njé ó ra aṣọ*                                *ó rà*  
           Q 3sg buy cloth                        3sg buy  
           Did she buy clothes?                 She bought (= She did).
- c. *adé mọ ọ̀nà*                                 *\*dúpé náà mọ*  
           PN know way                            PN DET know  
           Ade knows the way.                    Dupe too knows (= Dupe too does).
- d. *wón ro ọ̀rọ náà*                            *\*awa náà rò*  
           3pl think matter DET                1pl DET think  
           They considered the matter.         We also considered (= We also did).

All the verbs in (14) belong in the same category. In spite of this, those in (14a) and (14b) allow ellipsis, while those in (14c) and (14d) do not. Again, it is clear that ellipsis has nothing to do with whether a verb belongs in this category or not.

The logical conclusion that can be drawn from the behaviour of these verbs is that just as coreferentiality is in itself inadequate to account for the processes of cohesion, the semantic and contextual characteristics of the verb are even more inadequate.

#### FOCUS IN YORUBA DISCOURSE

An alternative to coreferentiality as the criterion for determining choice of cohesive device is to consider that speakers and addressees alike tend to focus on specific parts of a discourse in order to show that these are the main points of interest to them in those parts of the discourse. Invoking Bosch's aboutness principle which states that "Within a discourse, the most salient object at any point is always the object the discourse at that point is about" (Bosch 1983:52), we can say that the salient part of the discourse that the speaker focuses on in this case is either the noun object or the verb. Consider, for example, (1b) and (4b).

- |      |                        |                              |
|------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1b) | <b>bísí kí ọba</b>     | <b>èmi náà kí i</b>          |
|      | PN greet king          | 1sg DET greet 3sg            |
|      | Bisi greeted the king. | I too greeted him.           |
| (4b) | <b>bísí kí ọba</b>     | <b>*èmi náà kí</b>           |
|      | PN greet king          | 1sg DET greet                |
|      | Bisi greeted the king. | I too greeted (= I too did). |

Why is it that only pronoun substitution is possible and ellipsis is blocked? It seems that a plausible way of explaining this is that in (1b) the part of the discourse that the speaker is focusing on is the noun object *ọba* 'king'. To have an ellipsis as in (4b) would mean focusing on the verb *kí* 'greet', which does not appear to be acceptable. It is for the same reason that (10a) is acceptable but (10b) is not. Focusing on a noun object definitely means choice of pronoun substitution as a cohesive device. In contrast to pronoun substitution, ellipsis presupposes focusing on the verb, as in (14a) and (14b). In fact, in (14a), focusing on the noun does not occur at all. That is why (15) does not occur either.

- |      |                      |                |
|------|----------------------|----------------|
| (15) | <b>̀njé ó ní owó</b> | <b>*ó ní i</b> |
|      | Q 3sg have money     | 3sg have 3sg   |
|      | Does he have money?  | He has it.     |

According to Crystal (1980:148), focus is new information at the centre of a speaker's communicative interest as opposed to given information. Following Quirk et al. (1985:1361-1366), two types of focus may be distinguished: unmarked focus and marked focus. Unmarked focus is normally placed at the end of an information unit. Hence, it is also referred to as end focus. For example, in (16) the given information is that Olu bought something, while the new information, which constitutes the unmarked focus, is that what she bought was yams.

- |      |                   |
|------|-------------------|
| (16) | <b>olú ra iṣu</b> |
|      | PN buy yams       |
|      | Olu bought yams.  |

Marked focus, on the other hand, is signalled by fronting and the placement of the focus particle *ní* immediately after the focused item. For example, in (17) the subject *Olú*, the verb *rà* 'buy', and the object *isù* 'yams' are the focused items in (17a), (17b) and (17c), respectively. Of the two types of focus, it is unmarked focus that is involved in the choice between the pronoun object or its absence as a cohesive device.

- (17) a. *olú ní ó ra isù*  
 PN FOC 3sg buy yams  
 It was Olu that bought yams.
- b. *rírà ní olú ra isù*  
 buying FOC PN buy yams  
 It was buying that Olu bought yams.
- c. *isù ní olú rà*  
 yams FOC PN buy  
 It was yams that Olu bought.

Thus, in all cases where pronoun substitution is possible as a cohesive device (as in (1), (9), (10a), (12a)), it is because the focus falls on the noun or noun phrase object in the preceding sentence. When, however, an ellipsis is the cohesive device (as in (3), (7), (10c), (13a)), it is because the focus falls on the verb in the preceding sentence.<sup>1</sup>

In the literature on African languages, it has been suggested that the phenomenon described in terms of focus here can be accounted for in terms of animacy (Wilson 1994:115 on Dagbani; Schuh 1998:297–300 on Miya) or in terms of animacy and specificity (Cowan and Schuh 1976:135 on Hausa). For instance, it is suggested that in Hausa the pronoun object is never deleted when referring to a human, and it is deleted when the object is not specific. Hausa sentences supplied by Laouali Abdoulaye of the University of Leipzig in (18) contradict these conditions where the noun object in (18a) is human, yet object deletion is possible as in (18b); it is not specific, yet pronoun object is possible as in (18c). As will be shown later, the criterion of animacy will not work for Yoruba either.

- (18) Hausa
- a. *kun sàamu sarkii*  
 2pl.PERF find king  
 Did you find a king?
- b. *ii mun saamùu*  
 yes 1pl.PERF find  
 Yes, we found (= Yes, we did).
- c. *ii mun sàamee shi*  
 yes 1pl.PERF find 3msg  
 Yes, we found him.

The closest parallel to my use of focus in this article is the way presence or absence of object prefix in Swahili has been accounted for as follows: The sentences below differ by the absence of the object prefix in (18) as opposed to its presence in (19).

<sup>1</sup>The fact that either the noun object or the verb can bear focus means that unmarked focus is not always an end focus.



- (19) Swahili
- a. **u-me-leta chakula**  
 2sg-TAM-bring 7 food  
 Have you brought the food?
- b. **ni-me-leta bwana**  
 1sg-TAM-bring mister/sir  
 I have brought (it) sir.
- (20) a. **u-me-ki-leta chakula**  
 2sg-TAM-OP-bring 7 food  
 Have you brought the food?
- b. **ni-me-ki-leta bwana**  
 1sg-TAM-OP-bring mister/sir  
 I have brought it, sir.

Commenting on this, Ashton (1947:45) says of (18), where there is no object prefix **ki** in the verb, "The important thing here is the action, not the object. In replies to such question, no object is usually expressed." In (19) where there is an object prefix in the verb, she says that "attention is directed to the object rather than to the action" and that "[i]n replies to such questions the noun is omitted but the object prefix is usually retained." I am told (Abdilatif Abdalla, personal communication) that (19b) can also be an answer to (18a) just as (18b) can be an answer to (19a). In effect, this confirms the freedom of the addressee to focus on either the action or the goal of the action in his or her reply. Allan (1983:332–333) actually uses the term "topic focusing" to refer to the same object prefix behaviour in Swahili. Although in the original version of this article, I adopted this term, I have been persuaded by the arguments of the anonymous reviewer of the article to abandon it in order not to cause confusion between TOPIC on the one hand and FOCUS on the other.

If criteria such as animacy and definiteness do not work for Yoruba in determining whether focus will be on the noun object or the verb in textual cohesion, what factors should we appeal to? In (4), (13c), (14c), and (14d), we have seen how some verbs cannot be focused. In (15), there is also an example of a verb that only permits of a focus. For most other verbs, however, focus can fall on either the noun or the verb. Some of the determinants include: increasing specificity of the noun, idiomaticness, and contrastive information.

#### INCREASING SPECIFICITY

In (2b) and (3b), the verb **fé** 'want' is presented as only occurring in an ellipsis. Consider, however, (20).

- (2b) **bísí fé owó**                      **\*èmi náà fé ẹ**  
 PN want money                      1sg DET want 3sg  
 Bisi wants money.                      I too want it.
- (3b) **bísí fé owó**                      **èmi náà fé**  
 PN want money                      1sg DET want  
 Bisi wants money.                      I too want (= I too do).



The expression **gbó Yorùbá** 'understand Yoruba' is virtually a fixed collocation. Hence, it does not allow for pronoun substitution for the nominal part of the collocation as in (22b). The only possibility is an ellipsis as in (23a).<sup>2</sup>

### CONTRASTIVE INFORMATION

Focus can be contrastive when attention is deliberately shifted from the action to the goal of the action or vice versa. Example (24) is an illustration of this type of contrast.

- |      |    |                                 |          |            |            |                             |           |            |             |              |              |
|------|----|---------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| (24) | a. | <b>̀̀jé</b>                     | <b>o</b> | <b>gbó</b> | <b>ikú</b> | <b>abíólá</b>               | <b>mo</b> | <b>gbó</b> | <b>lórí</b> | <b>rédíò</b> |              |
|      |    | Q                               | 2sg      | hear       | death      | PN                          | 1sg       | hear       | in-head     | radio        |              |
|      |    | Did you hear of Abiola's death? |          |            |            | I heard on the radio.       |           |            |             |              |              |
|      | b. | <b>̀̀jé</b>                     | <b>o</b> | <b>gbó</b> | <b>ikú</b> | <b>abíólá</b>               | <b>mo</b> | <b>gbó</b> | <b>o</b>    | <b>lórí</b>  | <b>rédíò</b> |
|      |    | Q                               | 2sg      | hear       | death      | PN                          | 1sg       | hear       | 3sg         | in-head      | radio        |
|      |    | Did you hear of Abiola's death? |          |            |            | I heard of it on the radio. |           |            |             |              |              |

In (24), the question is about whether the interlocutor heard of a specific event, i.e., the death of Abiola. In (24a), the response focuses on the hearing (hence the ellipsis) while in (24b), the response focuses on the death (hence the anaphoric pronoun).<sup>3</sup> Notice that pronoun substitution for a noun object with the same verb has been shown to be unacceptable in (23b). The fact that it can occur here, and is acceptable, is proof that it is not this verb as such that determines focus, but other factors, of which contrastive information is one.

### CONCLUSION

In accounting for the choice between pronoun substitution and ellipsis as a cohesive device in Yoruba, it has been shown that factors such as coreferentiality, contextual and semantic features of the verb, and animacy and definiteness of the noun are not adequate as determinants of this choice. Focus appears to be a more valid criterion, as it accounts for the speaker or hearer's ability to place either the goal or the action at the centre of interest in the discourse. It is also interesting to

<sup>2</sup>Some of the Swahili examples on which Allan (1983:323-333) bases his concept of "topic focus" show a contrast of idiomaticness in much the same way as these Yoruba examples.

<sup>3</sup>A similar contrastive use of focus occurs in Hausa where, although focus is allowed on both the verb and the noun object in the (a) sentence, it is only allowed on the verb in the (b) sentence. This behaviour would have been difficult to explain other than through contrast in focus placement.

- |     |            |            |                |                |                                      |
|-----|------------|------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| (a) | <b>kun</b> | <b>ji</b>  | <b>kaaraa</b>  |                | Did you hear the noise?              |
|     | 2pl.PERF   | hear       | noise          |                |                                      |
|     | <b>ii</b>  | <b>mun</b> | <b>ji</b>      |                | Yes, we heard (= Yes, we did).       |
|     | yes        | 1pl.PERF   | hear           |                |                                      |
|     | <b>ii</b>  | <b>mun</b> | <b>jii</b>     | <b>tà</b>      | Yes, we heard it.                    |
|     | yes        | 1pl.PERF   | hear           | 3fsg           |                                      |
| (b) | <b>kaa</b> | <b>ji</b>  | <b>mutuwàr</b> | <b>àbachà</b>  | Did you hear of the death of Abacha? |
|     | 2msg.PERF  | hear       | death-of       | pers. N        |                                      |
|     | <b>ii</b>  | <b>naa</b> | <b>ji</b>      | <b>à cikin</b> | <b>reediyòò</b>                      |
|     | yes        | 1sg.PERF   | hear           | in             | radio                                |
|     | <b>*ii</b> | <b>naa</b> | <b>jii</b>     | <b>tà</b>      | <b>à cikin</b>                       |
|     | yes        | 1sg.PERF   | hear           | 3fsg           | in radio                             |
|     |            |            |                |                | Yes, I heard it on the radio.        |

note that presence or absence of an object prefix in Swahili, which has been explained in similar terms, gives greater validity to this criterion of focus. It will be interesting to see if the same cohesive or concordial phenomenon in other African languages can be accounted for in terms of focus, particularly in those languages in which such phenomena have hitherto been described in alternative ways.

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