

A Morpho-Syntactic Examination of Preposition as a Lexical Class in Standard Yorùbá

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Abstract

Until recently, the existence of preposition as one of the lexical classes in the standard Yorùbá language (Crowther 1852, Ògúnbòwálé 1970, Awóbùlúyì 1971, among others) seems to be firmly established. This paper examines this claim by employing the Morpho-syntactic evidence as suggested by Radford (1999 p. 38) that morpho-syntactic features must be the basis of establishing a lexical class. This we do by checking if preposition has morphological structure and processes and syntactic distribution in the language. The paper finds out that preposition neither takes part in the derivational morphology system in the standard Yorùbá language nor does it have a specific position of occurrence /syntactic features of its own as noun and verb do in the language. The paper therefore concludes that preposition is not a lexical class in the standard Yorùbá language but it is part of the functional support for the noun in the language.

Keywords: preposition, lexical class, Standard Yorùbá, morpho-syntactic evidence

Introduction

Studies of standard Yorùbá grammar have been based on the grammar of the English language, which made lexical categorization to be by means of translation equivalence. Translation equivalence brought into Yorùbá grammar more lexical classes than are in existence in the language. This is why there are controversies among the scholars of the language over some of the lexical classes established in the language. Preposition is one of the lexical classes over which there are controversies in the literature.

This paper intends to employ the morpho-syntactic evidence suggested by Radford (1999) as evidence for establishing a lexical class to re-examine the class of preposition in the standard Yorùbá language. Yorùbá language is one of the three major languages spoken in Nigeria, West Africa. It is widely spoken in the South Western part of the country and employed as a medium of communication in schools, mass media and other social and political settings. Genetically, Yorùbá is classified into the Yoruboid group of the Niger Congo language family. The paper is divided to three sections. Section one examines preposition in the literature. Section two discusses morpho-syntac-

tic evidences suggested by Radford (1999) for establishing a lexical class. The third section summarizes and comes out with the findings of the study.

Preposition in the literature

With the advent of modern linguistics, three opposing schools have emerged on scholarship on the preposition in the standard Yorùbá language. The first school is of the view that there is a lexical class of preposition in Yorùbá language, (though few in number). Scholars in the school include Crowther (1852), Johnson (1969), Ògúnbòwálé (1970), Awóyalé (1995) Awóbùlúyì (1978), and Adéşólá (1993). Items listed as prepositions by this school include: *sí* 'to' ti 'of', *pèlú* 'with' *ní* 'in/at' *fún* 'for', *dé* 'arrive', *kù* 'before' and *fi* 'with'. Others are *bá* 'help', *mọ* 'anymore/longer', *sin* 'before' and *kà ón*. Some of these are written in italics in the sentences in (1) below:

1

- a. Adé lọ *sí* Canada.
Adé go to Canada.
'Adé went to Canada'.
- b. Jọké *pèlú* Olá ra ata *ní* ojà.
Jọké with Olá buy pepper at market
'Jọké and Olá bought pepper at the market'.
- c. Àwọn akẹkọdọ *dé* ibẹ *ku* / *sin* àwọn olùkọ
PLMK student arrive there before P.LMK teacher
'The students came there before the teachers'.
- d. Olú gbé aago *ka* orí tabìlì.
Olú place bell on head table
'Olú put the bell on the table'.
- e. Jòwọ *bá* mi mú ìwé yẹn wá!
Please help me bring book that come
'Please, help me to bring that book'.
- f. Bàbá ra aṣọ *fun* Şólá.
Father buy cloth for Şólá
'Father bought cloth for Şólá'.

The second school is of the view that there is no preposition as a lexical class in standard Yorùbá language. Yusuf (1992, 1994) and Adékeyè (2015, 2016) belong to this school of thought. The third school of thought is of the view that there is a class of preposition with not more than two or three members in the language. Grammarians like Bowen (1858), Bámgbóşé (1990), Déchainé (1993) and Ajíbóyè (2011) share this view. The prepositions established by this school *ní* 'in/at', *sí* 'to' and *pèlú* 'with'.

Bámgbóṣé (1990 p. 131) identifies many of the so-called prepositions as bound verbs in Yorùbá language apart from *ní* 'in/at' and *pèlú* 'with'. He has *bá* 'with', *fèrè* 'almost', *fi* 'use', *sí* 'to' as bound verbs as in the examples in (2) below:

2.
 - a. Adé *bá* wọ̀n lọ
Adé with them go
'Adé went with them'
 - b. Wọ̀n *fèrè* dé
They soon arrive
'They will soon arrive'
 - c. Wọ̀n *fi* ọ̀ṣẹ̀ *sí* ọ̀jú
They apply soap to eye
'They applied soap into the eyes'

Bámgbóṣé (1990 p. 131) explains that the underlined words in (2 a – c) are analyzed as preposition in the literature because they are translated as preposition in the English language; otherwise they are bound verbs in the standard Yorùbá language.

The first school, which enumerates a number of items as prepositions, do so with some degree of doubt, even uncertainty that many of the items categorized as prepositions belong to some other classes. For instance, Awóbùlúyì (1978, p. 99) says of *pèlú* 'with':

"This preposition's status is somewhat doubtful, in other words, it may be possible or desirable to call it something else. When used 'correctly', it has the same meaning as *fi* (with, by)". He gives the example:

- 3
 - (a) Ó ẹ̀ e *pèlú* túlàà̀sì
He do it by force
'He did it by force'.
The sentence in (3a) above can be said as:
 - (b) Ó *fi* túlàà̀sì ẹ̀ e
He use force do it
'He did it with force'

The verb *fi* (with/use/by) in (3b) replaces *pèlú* 'with' in (3a) without a change of meaning.

This observation about *pèlú* 'with' is right as other observations are, about many other items called prepositions. They may well be verbs in serial verb construction but classified as prepositions because of their translation equivalence as preposition in the English language.

Evidences for establishing a lexical class

Radford (1999 p38) suggests that:

...the bulk of evidence in support of postulating that words belong to categories is morpho-syntactic (i.e. morphological and/or syntactic) in nature. The relevant morphological evidence relates to the inflectional and derivational properties of words: inflectional properties relate to different forms of the same word (e.g. plural form of a noun like *cat* is formed by adding the plural inflection +s to form *cats*), while derivational properties relate to the processes by which a word can be used to form a different kind of word by the addition of another morpheme (e.g. adding the suffix + *ness* to the adjective *sad*, we can form the noun, *sadness*).

Radford (1999) is saying that a lexical class must be derivable. This means a lexical class must have morphological processes and be able to serve as derivational morphemes (inputs) to derive more of its members and for deriving members of another lexical class. Thus, words of the same lexical class must have the same derivational process or that words derived by the same derivational process must belong to the same lexical class. From the above quotation from Radford (1999 p38), in the English language, adding the suffix + *ness* to an adjective forms a noun. By implication, any derived word by addition of the suffix *-ness* must be classified as a noun while the stem root must be an adjective. This means that noun and adjective are lexical classes in the English language as nouns items can be derived and adjectives serve as input morpheme to derive the class of nouns. However, Yorùbá does not attest inflectional morphemes, but it has morphological processes and morphemes for deriving new lexical items.

On the syntactic evidence, Radford (1999, p.40) says: "The syntactic evidence for assigning words to categories essentially relates to the fact that categories of words have different distributions (i.e. occupy a different range of positions within phrases and sentences)".

Radford is saying here that lexical items of the same class can be found in the same position and by implication, can substitute one another as long as the semantics of the language permits this. Words of a different class cannot appear in the position of another class. This is to say that a noun in a language has its position in a phrase or sentence, which another class cannot occupy, a verb, for instance.

From the morpho-syntactic evidence postulated by Radford (1999), the following evidences can be deduced for a lexical class to be established:

Evidence 1:

A lexical class must have its own morphological feature, i.e. it must be derivable by some morphological processes, having derivational morphemes and must be able to serve as derivational morpheme to derive items of another class.

Evidence 2:

A lexical class must have its position of occurrence in a phrase or sentence.

Application of morphological evidence for establishing a lexical class in Yorùbá

Derivational morphemes are morphemes or items that serve as input to derive new words while derivational processes are systems for deriving new words in a language. Yorùbá grammarians have established morphological processes for the classes of noun and verb in the grammar of standard Yorùbá language. Among the grammarians are Owólabí (1984, 1985, 1995), Bámbóşé (1990), Tinúoyè (2000), Awóbùlúyì (2008), Táíwò (2014), Adékeyè (2016) etc. The derivational processes established for the class of noun are affixation, reduplication (partial and full), combination of two noun items (compounding), borrowing etc. These processes are peculiar to noun derivation. This is why the class of noun is productive.

We like to exemplify some of these processes for deriving new lexical items in the standard Yorùbá language:

Derivation by affixation.

This is a process whereby affixes are attached to stem root to derive new nouns. Three types of affixes are attested in languages viz: prefix, interfix and suffix. Yorùbá language exhibits prefix and interfix only. The seven oral vowels can be prefixed to a verb in Yorùbá except the high back rounded vowel /u/ to derive new noun items in the language. Some examples are shown in 4 to illustrate this:

4

| | Prefix | Verb | Output |
|----|--------|-------------------|------------|
| a. | à | sè | àsè |
| | | to cook | delicacy |
| b. | à | lá | àlá |
| | | to dream | a dream |
| c. | ò | daràn | òdaràn |
| | | to commit a crime | a criminal |
| d. | ò | kòrin | òkòrin |
| | | to sing | a singer |
| e. | ì | tò | ìtò |
| | | to urinate | urine |
| f. | ẹ | dá | ẹdá |
| | | to create | creation |
| g. | ẹ | tàn | ẹtàn |
| | | | to deceive |
| h. | ẹ | rù | ẹrù |
| | | to carry | load |
| i. | ò | şéré | òşéré |
| | | to act | an actor |

These are few examples of noun derivation by affixation

Interfixation is a process where a morpheme is inserted in between two free morphemes. The two free morphemes in the standard Yorùbá language are always the same in form and meaning. Syntactically, the two free morphemes are nouns. The output also is always a noun. Some examples of derivation by interfixation are shown in 5 below:

5

| | Noun | Interfixal Morpheme | Noun | Output |
|----|----------|---------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| a. | òmọ | kí | òmọ | òmọkómọ |
| | child | | child | a good-for-nothing child |
| b. | ilé | kí | ilé | ilékilé |
| | house | | house | a useless house |
| c. | igbá | kí | igbá | igbákígbá |
| | calabash | | calabash | useless calabash |
| d. | ìran | kí | ìran | ìrankíran |

| | | | | |
|----|------------|------------|----------------------|-----------|
| | generation | generation | worthless generation | |
| e. | ìgbà | kí | ìgbà | ìgbàkígbà |
| | time | | time | anytime |

Reduplication is another noun derivational process in standard Yorùbá. Reduplication can be partial or full. In partial reduplication, the initial consonant of the verb root is duplicated creating a consonant cluster. Consonant clusters are not allowed in the structure of Yorùbá words; therefore, the high front vowel /i/ is inserted to split the consonant cluster. The resultant words in the examples in 6 are noun items:

6

| | Verb Root | Partial Reduplication | Vowel Insertion | Output |
|----|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| a. | ga | g-ga | g-í-ga | gíga |
| | | | tall | being tall |
| b. | mu | m-mu | m-í-mu | mímu |
| | | | drink | drinking |
| c. | sùn | s-sùn | s-í-sùn | sísùn |
| | | | sleep | sleeping |
| d. | gùn | g-gùn | g-í-gùn | gígùn |
| | | | long | being long |
| e. | rà | r-rà | r-í-rà | rírà |
| | | | rot | being rotten |

In full reduplication in standard Yorùbá, the entire stem root is always reduplicated. Noun items as well as verb phrases serve as stem roots in full reduplication. Some of its examples are as in 7:

7

| | Stem root | Reduplication | Output |
|----|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| a. | ọgbọ́n | ọgbọ́n-ọgbọ́n | ọgbọgbọ́n |
| | wisdom | wisdom-wisdom | cunnily |
| b. | ọdún | ọdún-ọdún | ọdọdún |
| | year | year-year | yearly |
| c. | oṣù | oṣù-oṣù | oṣooṣù |
| | month | month-month | monthly |
| d. | ìyá | ìyá-ìyá | ìyáàyá |

| | Stem root | Reduplication | Output |
|----|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| | mother | mother-mother | grandmother |
| e. | òtun | òtun-òtun | òtunòtun |
| | new | new-new | newly |

In the case of verb phrase forming the stem root for full reduplication, the processes differ from when the stem root is a noun. A sequence of verb and noun form a verb phrase. The verb phrase would then be reduplicated to form the new noun in the standard Yorùbá as in the examples in 8:

8

| | Verb + Noun | Verb phrase | Full reduplication | Output |
|----|-------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| a. | wo + ilé | wolé | wolé –wolé | woléwolé |
| | check house | inspect | inspect-inspect | sanitary inspector |
| b. | pa eja | peja | peja-peja | pejapeja |
| | kill fish | kill fish | kill fish-kill fish | fisher- man |
| c. | gbé omọ | gbómọ | gbómọ-gbómọ | gbómọgbómọ |
| | carry child | carry child | child-carrier | kidnapper |
| d. | gbá ilẹ̀ | gbálẹ̀ | gbálẹ̀-gbálẹ̀ | gbálẹ̀gbálẹ̀ |
| | sweep floor | sweeping | sweeping-sweeping | sweeper |
| e. | pa iná | paná | paná-paná | panápaná |
| | kill fire | fighting fire fighting fire | firefighter | |

All the output of the examples in 4 – 8 above is derived noun items in the standard Yorùbá language.

The verb also has derivational processes, which include combining a verb and a noun as well as combining two verbs in the language. The class of verb is also productive with an uncountable number of members. Some examples are as in the examples in 9 and 10 below. The examples in 9 demonstrate the combination of verb and noun deriving a verb.

9

| | Verb + Noun | | Verb (output) |
|----|-------------|------|----------------|
| a. | lọ + ata | lọta | 'grind pepper' |
| b. | fọ + aṣọ | fọṣọ | 'wash cloth' |
| c. | já + ewé | jáwé | 'pluck leaf' |

| | Verb + Noun | | Verb (output) |
|----|-------------|------|---------------|
| d. | jẹ + ohun | jẹun | 'eat' |
| e. | kọ + iwé | kọwé | 'write' |

10

| | Verb + Verb | Verb |
|----|--------------|---------|
| a. | gbà + gbọ | gbàgbọ |
| | accept –hear | believe |
| b. | jẹ + run | jẹrun |
| | eat destroy | consume |
| c. | bù + wò | bùwò |
| | take examine | examine |
| d. | bù + kún | bùkún |
| | take add | bless |
| e. | fẹ + kù | fẹkù |
| | want extinct | lose |

From the examples in 4 – 10, we see noun and verb items being derived and each of them participating in the derivation of their members as well as derivation of members of each other. These two lexical classes have distinct morphological processes as well as morphemes. The so-called class of preposition has neither morphological processes nor morphemes to derive more of its members. The few items classified as preposition cannot serve as derivational morphemes to derive more members for the class or members of any other lexical class in the language. This is why it is non-productive and has very small number of members with as few as three items. Many of the items classified as prepositions by some scholars (Crowther 1852, Ògúnḃòwálé 1970, Adéşọlá 1993, Awóbùlúyì 1978 among others) are called verbs by some other scholars (Bowen 1858, Bámgbóşé 1990, Déchaine 1993, Yusuf 1994, Adékéyè 2015 among others). The items are analyzed as prepositions by the former because they are translated into preposition in the English language, (Bámgbóşé 1990 p131). Awóbùlúyì (1978 p97) lists, (*fi* 'with/by means of', *bá* 'for, in company, *fún* 'for, on behalf of', and *pèlú* 'by') *ní* 'in', *sí* 'to' and *ti* 'of' as prepositions. Some of these (*bá*, *fi* and *fún*) are analyzed as verbs employed as prepositions in Yorùbá by Bowen (1858, p.52), while Bámgbóşé (1990, p.157) analyzes *bá*, *fi* and *ní* as "òrò-ìşe afarahé" i.e. bound verbs in the language but later lists *ní* as one of his two prepositions in the standard Yorùbá language (Bámgbóşé 1990, p.175).

In fact, Baker (2003) observes that prepositions must be part of another system as he calls it a functional head that derives adjunct modifiers. He also describes it as small and finite in number, often under five, sometimes one. He cites the following languages:

- Sranan: 1
- Mohawk: 4
- Chichewa: 2 or 5
- Edo: approximately 3 (+ some defective verbs).
- English: about 50 as examples.

Baker (2003) is also of the opinion that preposition does not take part in the derivational morphology system, as either input or output morphemes in languages. This is the case in the standard Yorùbá language. There are no morphological processes or morphemes for deriving more members for it as a lexical class, therefore, this paper does not establish preposition as a lexical class in the standard Yorùbá language because it has neither morphological morphemes nor morphological processes.

Application of evidence 2

Evidence 2 states that “a lexical class should have its syntactic position in the phrase or sentence.”

Only noun and verb have syntactic positions peculiar to them in the phrase or sentence in the standard Yorùbá language. Nouns are always found in subject and object (Argument) positions. The verb does not appear in any of these two positions but it occurs in the predicate position only. Position for noun and verb are as shown in 11 below:

11. # NP VP (NP) (VP (NP))#

There is no position like this for the preposition.

This is the reason why Grimshaw (1990) says it is part of the functional support for the noun when it occurs with a noun to become a prepositional phrase in the verb phrase. This is always an adjunct. The few items analyzed as prepositions in standard Yorùbá always occur with temporal and / or spatial nouns in the language. This is why Welmers (1973 p.314) analyses both *ní* ‘in’ and *sí* ‘to/ exist’ as verbs expressing possession and location respectively as in the sentences in (12) below:

12

- (a) Omi wà *ní* inú ikòkò

- Water exist in inside pot
'There is water in the pot'
- (b) Omi kò sí ní inú ikòkò
Water NEG exist in inside pot
'There is no water in the pot'

Yusuf (1990) argues that these items serve as predicates in sentences as in:

- ¹³
- (a) Mo ní owo
'I have money'
- (b) Mo ní owó ní àpò
'I have money in pocket'
'I have money in my pocket'

ní in sentence (13a) as well as the first instance of *ní* 'have' of (13b) are clearly verbs of possession. The second instance of *ní* 'in' in (13b) is treated as a verb of location. Thus the few items analyzed as preposition in standard Yorùbá do not have distinct syntactic position of occurrence but are found within the verb phrase surporting the noun.

Conclusion

We have engaged the two evidences for establishing a lexical class, which are morpho-syntactic in nature, proposed by Radford (1999) as part of criteria for establishing a lexical class in any language. Applying these evidences to examine the class of preposition in standard Yorùbá, we found out that preposition does not have morphological processes or morphemes to derive more of its members; the reason why it has very few members in many languages as pointed out by Baker (2003). This is the case in the standard Yorùbá language. Its few members do not serve as derivational morphemes, input to derive any other class as it is supposed to be for any lexical class; the classes of noun and verb in the standard Yorùbá language for instance. We therefore support the views of Welmers (1973 p314) that the three items: *ní* 'in', *sí* 'to' and *tí* 'of' commonly classified as prepositions in the standard Yorùbá are verbs of possession and location in the language and not a distinct lexical class like noun and verb. *ní* 'in/have and *tí* 'of' are verbs of possession while *sí* 'to' is a verb of location. Other items analyzed as preposition in the literature are bound verbs in the language. Bound verbs cannot occur alone as a free predicate but do occur with other free verbs.

We cannot establish preposition as a closed class either. Going by Robins (1964:230):

Closed class in Universal Grammar are those that contain a fixed and usually small number of members words, which are (essentially) the same for all the speakers of the language....

The “small number of member words” some scholars analyzed as preposition are not the same for all Yorùbá grammarians since it is the grammarians who carry out language analyses and not the speakers as advocated by Robins (1964:ibid)

Scholars who have preposition as a lexical class employ meaning equivalence in the English language to do so. Bámgbóšé (1990) noticed this. The position of Grimshaw (1990) that universally preposition is part of functional support for the class of noun as prepositional phrases, which are mere adjuncts, also supports our claim by morpho-syntactic evidence we employed in this study. Standard Yorùbá language therefore does not have preposition as a distinct lexical class.

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