

This collection was compiled by an international group of scholars in recognition of Professor Yiwola Awoyale’s contributions to African language and linguistic studies. Based at University of Pennsylvania, Professor Awoyale is particularly celebrated as a great field linguist, who pays special attention to data and data documentation. This edited volume presents current research on topics concerning the syntax, semantics, phonology, applied- and socio-linguistics of African languages, providing a state-of-the-art account of contemporary issues in African linguistics today.

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Data-Rich Linguistics

Oluseye Adesola
Akinbiyi Akinlabi
Olanike Ola Orie

DATA-RICH LINGUISTICS

PAPERS IN HONOR OF YIWOLA AWOYALE

EDITED BY
OLUSEYE ADESOLA
AKINBIYI AKINLABI
OLANIKE OLA ORIE



Data-Rich Linguistics

Data-Rich Linguistics:

Papers in Honor of Yiwola Awoyale

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CHAPTER THREE

THE COMPLEMENTARY BI-CLAUSAL PATTERN OF YORÙBÁ PROVERBS

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Language and culture are closely interconnected. Language is an important medium through which the culture of a particular group of people is expressed and preserved. In other words, language constitutes one of the cultural elements in a given society. In the same vein, proverbs form an integral part of human language. As a cultural element, proverbs are found among nations and belong to all generations. Proverbs are ‘popular sayings’ that are employed for expressing one’s thought or idea in a given discourse. They provide a concise medium of communication. Pragmatically, proverbs are used in order to avoid ‘direct contact’ with the interlocutor or listeners. The use of proverbs provides a covert method of sending messages or passing information that would otherwise injure the feelings of one’s audience. It forms an alternative medium of expression that is less offensive. As is evident in this study, most proverbs in *Yorùbá* consist of *two* clauses that may be syntactically autonomous but semantically interdependent. The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe the syntactic features that are common to Yorùbá proverbs. Such features give the proverbs their peculiar grammatical pattern. Most proverbs in Yorùbá are derived through the application of one or more syntactic transformations to basic declarative sentences. However, only Yorùbá bi-clausal proverbs that are derivatives of relativisation, focus constructions and negative constructions were employed for our analysis in this study. Based on the syntax/semantics interface in the two complementary clauses that make up a Yorùbá proverb, this paper proposes that those clauses are co-ordinate clauses, and a *semi-colon* rather than a *comma* is required to mark off the first clause from the second.

1 Introduction

The word ‘proverb’ takes its source from the Latin *proverbium* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/proverb>). The study of proverbs is technically referred to in the literature as **paremiology**, while **paremiography** refers to the collection of proverbs (Doyle et al. 2012). Every human culture has its own unique proverbs. Proverbs are part of African oral tradition. Proverbial expressions are used in a given discourse to avoid an open criticism of authority or an individual. The ability of a speaker or writer to deploy appropriate proverbs in appropriate contexts marks such a speaker or writer as being culturally at home with the language being used. On this note, Sanusi and Omoṣoṣo (2008:62) observe that:

"In the Yorùbá language (as in other languages), the deployment of proverbs implicates several aspects of the sociolinguistic profiles of the people, like the age, socio-cultural life, psychological as well as the cosmological beliefs of speakers and listeners. Appropriate use of proverbs is therefore a function of both linguistic and communicative competence. And since proverbs are rooted in the culture of the language community, their appropriate use and understanding are in the province of the elders who are the custodians of the people's linguistic, historical and cultural values."

In other words, because proverbs are elements of culture, only speakers or writers that are quite familiar with the culture of a given language can pragmatically and appropriately make use of proverbial expressions in their use of language. For example, it is not enough for one to have a good knowledge of Yorùbá proverbs, one must know how to use them in the appropriate context and have explicit knowledge of their correct interpretations.

It is interesting to note that many proverbs in standard Yorùbá could be described as derivatives of some transformational processes applied to basic declarative sentences in the language. The category of such proverbs that will be examined in this paper comprises those that are structurally **bi-clausal** and **complementary**. That is, each of the proverbs consists of two co-ordinate clauses, and the meaning of the first clause cannot be determined without making reference to the second clause. This is why we claim that the two clauses are semantically interdependent. In such proverbs, the concept of ‘movement’, within the movement transformation, is employed to move some grammatical constituents around in order to achieve rhyme or focus.

1.1 Defining Proverb

Many proverb scholars are of the view that it is very difficult to define a proverb. What may be called a proverb varies from one culture to another. That is, a proverbial statement is culturally determined by the native speakers of a given language. However, some common definitions of a proverb can be found in the literature. According to Lord John Russell (c.1850), as quoted in Mieder (1993), "A proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many". A more constructive and elaborate definition of a proverb was given by Mieder (1993), as follows:

"A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation."

Considering the functions of proverbs, Fergusson (2000:iii) gives the following definition: "a proverb is defined as a succinct and memorable statement that contains advice, warning, analytical observation, idiomatic phrases", etc.

Using a descriptive approach, Vas (2011:v) defines a proverb as follows:

"A proverb is a short, pithy, popular saying, long in use, embodying some familiar truth, practical precept, or usual thought in expressive and often picturesque language.... It is a phrase that sticks in our mind and performs a vital role in expressing ourselves effectively."

2 Yorùbá: The Language and its Speakers

Genetically, Yorùbá belongs to the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo family. It is one of the three major national languages in Nigeria, the other two being Hausa and Igbo. It is widely spoken in seven states: Ọ̀yọ́, Lagos, Ọ̀gùn, Ọ̀ndó, Ọ̀ṣun, Èkítì and Kwara. Speakers of the language are also found in some neighbouring states like Edo, Kogi, Delta, etc. The language has many dialects. They include Ọ̀yọ́, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ègbá, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkítì, Lagos, Ọ̀ndó, Ọ̀wọ́, Àkókó, etc. The Ọ̀yọ́ dialect, which is otherwise referred to in the linguistic literature as North Western Yorùbá, has been chosen to be the standard form. It was chosen as the 'norm' because of its uniformity and wide use in schools, textbooks and the media (Mosadomi 2005:231).

A comprehensive report of the history of the development of Yorùbá as a language of education can be found in the work of Awobuluyi (1994, 2014). Such a historical record is beyond the scope of this paper. However, making reference to such historical facts is inevitable in this type of research effort. While providing a brief summary of the various academic efforts that have influenced the development of Yorùbá, Awobuluyi (1994:25) makes the following submission:

"It is taught as an academic discipline and employed as a medium of instruction in its own linguistics, literature, and culture up to the post-graduate level. Painstakingly researched and served by scores of highly trained indigenous and foreign scholars, as well as by up to a hundred creative writers, the language today sustains a virile publishing industry that annually puts out a wide range of textbooks, general books, creative works, journals, magazines, and daily newspapers."

3 The Syntactic Pattern of Bi-clausal Proverbs in Yorùbá

The syntax of Yorùbá exhibits three basic sentence types: simple, compound and complex. The structure of proverbs in the language also reflects the three sentence types. However, it could be observed, as mentioned in (1.0) above, that a great number of Yorùbá proverbs have a 'complementary bi-clausal pattern', in which the meaning of a proverb is *jointly* determined by the individual meanings of the two co-ordinate clauses involved. They operate like a pair of scissors. When a speaker of the language deploys a Yorùbá proverb for a specific communicative purpose, s/he is only required to produce the first clause, his/her interlocutor/audience is expected to complete the proverb by supplying the second clause. For example, the Yorùbá proverb: "Àitètémúolè; olè ñ mú olóko" meaning 'The negligence of a farmer in arresting a thief; leads to the thief arresting the farmer,'¹ consists of two complementary clauses. Pragmatically, a speaker who deploys such a proverb can just produce the first clause, and expect his/her listeners (who share the same cultural knowledge of the proverb) to spontaneously supply the second complementary clause. Ample and illuminating examples of such complementary bi-clausal Yorùbá proverbs are presented in (3.1.1) - (3.1.3) below.

3.1 Data Presentation

As described in (3.0) above, our data for the analysis of 'complementary bi-clausal proverbs in Yorùbá' in this paper consist of

proverbs that could be described as products or derivatives of certain transformational processes applied to some basic declarative sentences in the language. However, for reasons of space, our corpus will be restricted to the derivatives of three syntactic transformations:

- (i) Relativization
- (ii) Focus construction
- (iii) Negation

It should be noted that in a given Yorùbá proverb, two or more syntactic transformations can apply in the derivation of that proverb. Relevant data that are the derivatives of these transformations will be presented in the subsequent sub-headings.

3.1.1 Yorùbá Proverbs that are Derivatives of Relativization

As rightly observed by Sanusi (2013:86), all categories of NPs can be relativised in standard Yorùbá. However, in terms of an accessibility hierarchy, the subject-NPs are much more accessible than any other nominal category in the language.

In all the Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of relativization, it is the subject-NP in the first clause that is relativized, while the second clause serves as a complement. Consider the example in (1):

- (1) ilé ọba tí ó jó; ẹwà l'ó bù sí.
house king that it burn beauty it put to it

Rel.

‘The palace of a king that got burnt; has added a beauty.’ (i.e. In some cases, a loss of any kind may turn out to be a blessing in disguise).

The first clause of the proverb in (1) has its D-structure as in (2a):

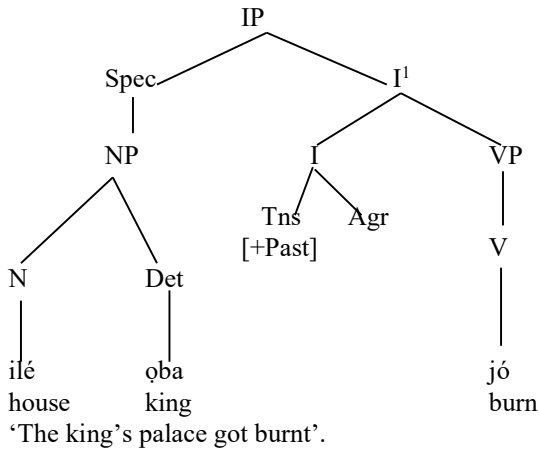
- (2a) [_{IP} ilé ọba] [_{VP} jó].
house king burn
‘The king’s palace got burnt’.

The subject-NP “Ilé ọba” (‘king’s palace’) has “ilé” (‘house’) as the head noun, while “ọba” (‘king’) serves as its determiner, and the verb “jó” is an intransitive verb. When the subject-NP is relativized, the S-structure will appear as in (2b):

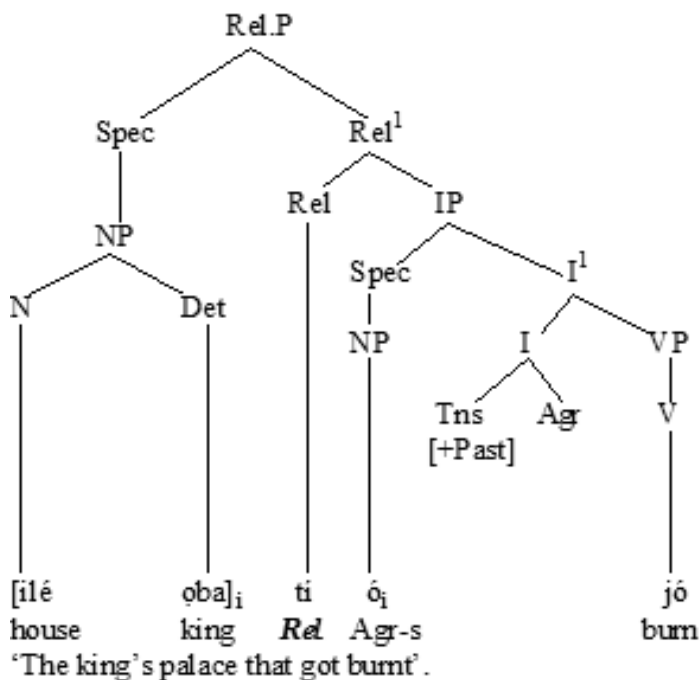
- (2b) [ilé ɔba]_i tí ó_i jó.
 house king *Rel.* Agr-s burn
 ‘The king’s palace that got burnt’.

Both the D-structure and the S-structure of the first clause, as shown in (2a) and (2b), can be phrase-marked as in figures (1) and (2) respectively.

(Fig.1) The D-Structure



(Fig.2) The S-Structure



Other examples of Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of relativization are presented in (3) below:

(3)

- (i) ikòkò **tí** ó jẹ ata; idí rẹ á gbóná.
clay pot that will eat pepper bottom it's will be hot

Rel.

'A pot that will enjoy the sweetness of soup will have its bottom properly heated.'

(i.e. whoever wants to enjoy, must be ready to endure hardship.)

- (ii) ohun **tí** a kò bá jiyà fún; kì í pé l'ówọ ẹni.
something that one doesn't suffer for does not last in hand

Rel.

someone

'Anything that one does not suffer for will not last.'

- (iii) Ọmọ **tí** a kò kó; òun nì yí ó gbé ilé **tí** a kọ tà.
child that we not train he/she will take house that we build sell
Rel. **Rel.**
‘A child that was not properly trained, will eventually sell the property of his/her parents.’
- (iv) ẹni **tí** ó n retí àtisùn akàn; á pẹ ní etí omi.
one who he/she Prog. expect to sleep crab he/she last in the bank river
Rel.
‘One who is expecting the time a crab will sleep, will stay at the bank of a river for long.’
- (v) kòkòrò **tí** ó n jẹ ẹfọ; ara ẹfọ l’ówà.
insect that is prog eat vegetable body vegetable be/exist
Rel.
‘The enemy that is attacking someone/something is within the vicinity of that someone or something.’
- (vi) àgbàlagbà **tí** ó gbi nèbù-ikà; ọmọ rẹ á jẹ nìbẹ.
elderly person that he/she sowed poisonous seed child he/she will eat
Rel.
on it
‘An elderly person that sowed a poisonous seed his/her own child will eat out of it.’
- (vii) ajá **tí** ó sọ̀nù; kì í gbọ fẹ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀dẹ.
dog that will lost does not hear whistle hunter
Rel.
‘A dog that will get lost, will never listen to the whistle of the hunter’ (i.e. someone who will go astray will never heed advice).
- (viii) ilé **tí** a fí itọ mọ; èrì ní ó wó o.
house that will **Instr.** saliva built dew that will destroy it
Rel.
‘A house that is built with the use of saliva; will be destroyed by ordinary dew’. (i.e. anything that has no good foundation will not last).
- (ix) Ẹni **tí** a fí orí i rẹ fọ àgbọ̀n; kì í jẹ nìbẹ.
person **Rel.** we Instr. Head Poss.his/her break coconut Neg. eat in it.
‘A person whose head is used in breaking a coconut, does not eat out of it.’

3.1.2 Yorùbá Proverbs that are Derivatives of Focus Constructions

Earlier research on Yorùbá has confirmed that the focus construction, as a movement transformation, is quite productive in the language (see Awobuluyi (1992)). All categories of NPs, including nominalised verbs, can be focused in Yorùbá. For Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of focus constructions, it is the subject-NP of the first clause that is normally focused. Consider the example in (4):

- (4) ònà **ni** ó jìnnà; ẹ́rú ní baba.
road it's it far slave has father

Foc.

‘It’s a matter of far distance, a slave also has a father.’

The first clause of the proverb in (4) has its D-Structure and S-Structure in (5a) and (5b) respectively.

(5a) The D-Structure

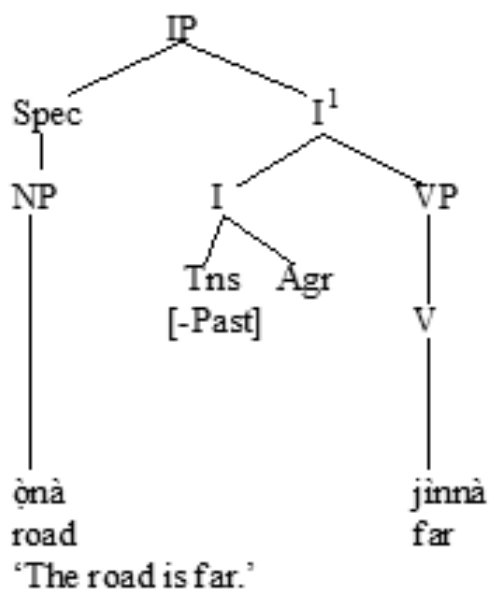
ònà jìnnà
road far
‘The distance is far’.

(5b) The S-Structure

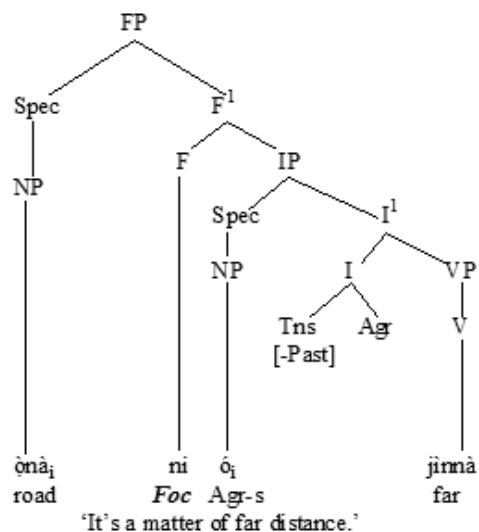
ònà_i ni ó_i jìnnà
road ***Foc*** Agr-s far
‘It’s a matter of far distance’.

Both the D-Structure and the S-Structure of the first clause, as shown in (5a) and (5b) above, can be phrase-marked as in figures (3) and (4) respectively.

(Fig. 3) The D-Structure



(Fig. 4) The S-Structure



Other examples of Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of focus constructions are presented in (6) below:

(6)

- (i) ọjọ gbogbo **ni** ti olè; ọjọ kan **ni** ti olóhun.
day all it's poss. thief day one **Foc.** Poss. owner
Foc.

‘Every day is for the thief, but one day is for the owner.’

- (ii) pipe **ni** yí ò pé; akólòlò á pe baba.
The act of being late it's will be late stammerer will call
father **Foc.**

‘It may be late, a stammerer will eventually be able to call “baba” (father).’

- (iii) ilé **ni** à á wò; kí á tó s’omọ lórúkọ.
house it's we habitual look **Comp.** we before give child name
Foc.

‘A child’s name should reflect the parent’s home/background.’

- (iv) ẹyinkù lé **ni** ọtá wà; inúilé **ni** aṣeni n gbé.
back yard it's enemy be inside house **Foc.** evil doer prog. inhabit
Foc.

‘The enemy resides outside, while the evil doer lives within.’

- (v) àbá **ni** ikán n dá; ikán kò le jẹ òkúta.
attempt it's termite Prog. plan termite not can eat stone/rock
Foc.

‘Termite is only making an attempt, it cannot eat/devour a rock.’

- (vi) ọlẹ nikan **ni** ààyè kò gbà; ibi gbogbo ni ó gba alágbára.
a lazy person only it's space not occupy place all **Foc** it occupy
Foc. hardworking person

‘It’s only a lazy person that will not have an opportunity, a hardworking person is acceptable everywhere.’

- Foc.*

Foc.

the same way

Following Awobuluyi (1978:125), every negative sentence in Yorùbá contains at least one negative word, and negative words in the language come from the classes of **verbs**, **introducers** and **modifiers**. As can be observed in (10) below, the pre-verbal adverb “**kò**” is used as a negative marker in most Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of negative constructions. In such constructions, the negative marker “**kò**” negates the

verb or **verb phrase**. As shown in (7) below, the ‘verb phrase’ of the first clause is negated by the use of the negative marker – “**kò**”.

- (7) èbiti **kò** pa èèrà; ará ilé ɛni ní í ɕeni.
 trap **Neg.** kill ant relation house someone that harm someone
 ‘A trap cannot kill an ant, it is one’s relation that causes one’s downfall.’

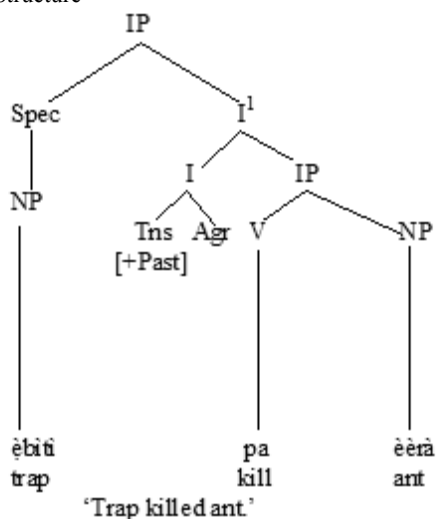
The D-Structure and the S-Structure of the first clause can be shown as in (8) and (9) respectively.

- (8) **The D-Structure**
 [_{IP}èbiti [_{VP} pa èèrà]]
 trap kill ant
 ‘Trap killed ant’.

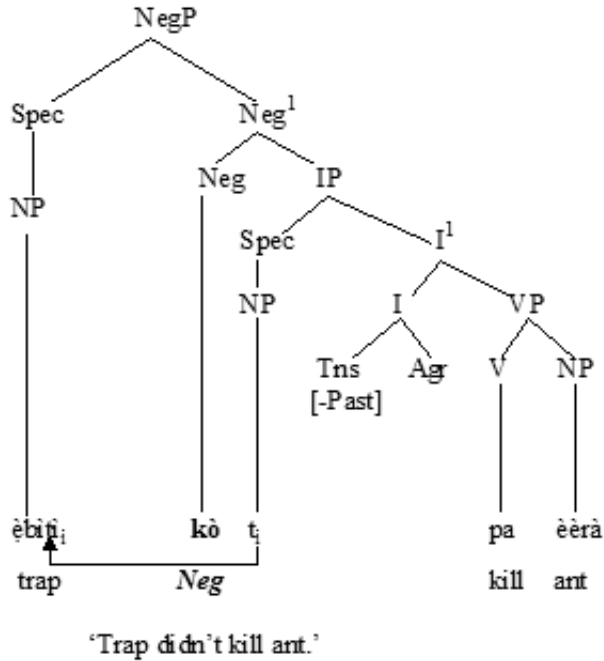
- (9) **The S-Structure**
 [_{IP}èbiti **kò** [_{VP} pa èèrà]]
 trap **Neg** kill ant
 ‘Trap didn’t kill ant’.

Both the D-Structure in (8) and the S-Structure in (9) can be phrase-marked as in figures (5) and (6) respectively.

(Fig. 5) The D-Structure



(Fig.6) The S-Structure



Other examples of Yorùbá proverbs that are derivatives of negative constructions are presented in (10) below.

(10)

- (i) àjọje **kò** dùn; bí ẹnìkán **kò** ní.
 eating together **Neg.** sweet if another person **Neg.** have
 ‘Eating together is not sweet if the other person has none.’
- (ii) **kò** sí ewu ní egbèrún ẹkọ; ǎfí àidùn ọbẹ.
Neg. danger in one thousand corn meal except not sweet soup
 ‘There is no problem in eating one thousand corn meals
 except the soup is not sweet.’
- (iii) àgbà **kò** sí ilú bàjé; baálé ilé kú, ilé di ahoro.
 elder **Neg.** town damaged landlord house die house become
 desolate house
 ‘Where there are no good elders, a town is not properly run,
 and where there is no landlord a house becomes desolate.’

- (iv) ọwọ ọmọdé **kò** tó pẹpẹ; ti àgbàlagbà **kò** wọ akèrègbè.
 hand child **Neg.** reach altar that of an elder **Neg.** enter calabash
 for carrying water
 ‘What a child cannot do an elderly person can do, what an elderly person cannot do a child can do.’
- (v) idòbálẹ̀ **kò** ra kẹ̀kẹ̀; eyín funfun **kò** dé ilé àna.
 prostration **Neg.** buy bicycle teeth white **Neg.** reach house in-law
 ‘As prostration cannot buy a bicycle, so also having a white set of teeth cannot substitute for one’s expenses at one’s in-laws’ house.’
- (vi) tàgíri **kòsí**; awọ **kò** hu.
 fruit of a creeper **Neg.** hides **Neg.** tanning.
 ‘Without the fruit of a creeper (tàgíri), tanning of hides and skins cannot be possible.’
 (i.e. a necessary condition must be present before a process can manifest.)
- (vii) asaré tete **kò** ní kojá ilé; aringbẹ̀rẹ̀ **kò** ní
 a runner fast **Neg.** run past house one who walks slowly **Neg.**
 sùn s’ónà.
 sleep on the road.
 ‘It is advisable not to be in a hurry.’
- (viii) àní obinrin **kò** ẹ́ é dákẹ̀; bí a bá ní i tán
 not having a wife **Neg.** be keep quiet when we have it finish
 ẹnu ní yoni.
 mouth Foc.trouble one
 ‘One is anxious to get married, but marriage will later become a burden.’
- (ix) èniyàn **kò** rí ibi sùn; ajá n han oorun.
 person **Neg.** see place sleep dog Prog. snore sleep
 ‘A human being cannot find a place to sleep; while a dog sleeps and snores.’
 (i.e. An important personality cannot be standing, in a place where a less important person is sitting down comfortably).

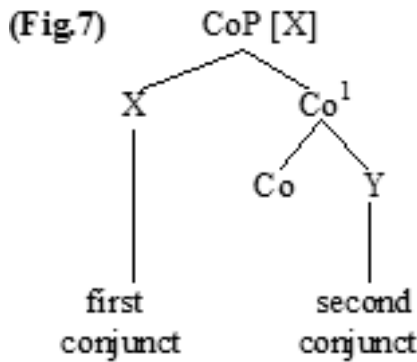
4 On the Relevance of Semi-colons

As is evident in the data presented in (3.1.1) – (3.1.3) above, there is a semantic interdependence between the first clause and second clause in a Yorùbá proverb; this interdependence requires a semi-colon (rather than a comma) to conjoin the two complementary clauses making up the proverb.

The grammatical function of the semi-colon is as an instrument for linking two clauses, where the idea expressed in the second clause balances that which is expressed in the first (Lamb 1964:104); this function justifies our proposal in this paper, that a semi-colon rather than a comma, is required to mark off the first clause from the second clause. This is because the meaning of such a proverb is jointly determined by the two co-ordinate clauses involved.

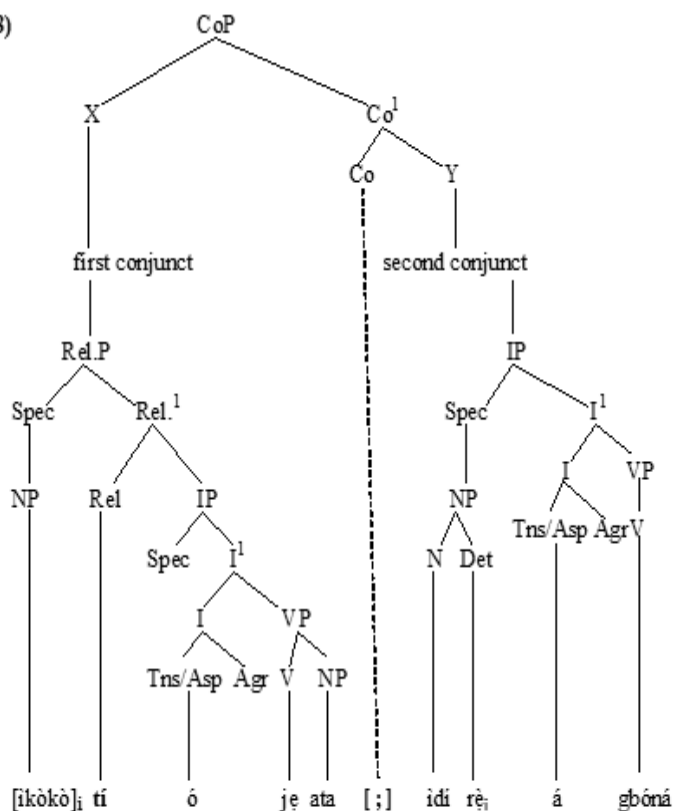
Given the idea expressed by Lamb (1964), it could be said that only the use of semi-colons can explain the semantic interrelationship between the first clause and the second clause in the above given Yorùbá proverbs. Thus the semi-colon serves as a conjunction between the two conjuncts.

Using the idea of a ‘conjunction phrase’ (CoP), as suggested by Johannssen (1998:109), we have adopted the suggested phrase-marker as in Figure 7 and adapted it for our analysis as in Figure 8 below.



According to Johannssen, “The conjuncts are attached to [Spec, CoP] and [complement, CoP], respectively”. Based on this suggestion, and for the purpose of visual impression, we can show diagrammatically how a semi-colon conjoins the two conjuncts in a given Yorùbá proverb, as depicted in Figure 8 below.

(Fig8)



[ikòkò]_i ti ó je ata [;] idí rè; á gbóná
 clay pot that will eat pepper bottom its will be hot
 Rel

‘A pot that will enjoy the sweetness of the soup will have its bottom properly heated’.

(i.e. whoever wants to enjoy, must be ready to endure hardship).

5 Conclusion

We have shown in this paper, through copious and illuminating data, that many Yorùbá proverbs can be described as having a ‘complementary, bi-clausal pattern’, in which the meaning of the first clause depends on the meaning of the second clause. Thus, we refer to them as co-ordinate

clauses. Consequently, the meaning of a Yorùbá proverb is considered to be jointly determined by the two clauses. Considering the semantic interrelationship between the two clauses, we, therefore, proposed in this paper that the first clause should be marked off from the second clause by the use of a semi-colon rather than a comma, where the semi-colon functions as a coordinating conjunction. The study has also revealed that most Yorùbá proverbs can be considered as derivatives of some grammatical transformations. In other words, Yorùbá proverbs rarely appear as basic sentences. Johannssen's (1998) 'Conjunction Phrase' (CoP) was adopted for the analysis of our data, as presented in Figures 7-8 above. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate other research in the aspects of the syntax of Yorùbá proverbs.

Endnotes

¹ This is a literal translation. The idiomatic meaning is contextually determined. Every Yorùbá proverb has both literal and idiomatic meanings.

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