

SHOULD *níláti* REMAIN LEXICALISED IN YORUBA?

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Some scholars have argued that *níláti* 'must' (a Yoruba modal particle) should be written as *ní láti* or *ní láti*-VP, without realising that this word-division system has distorted its syntactic category and function. This note contends that if *níláti* remains lexicalised, its status will be crystal clear.

Quelques chercheurs soutiennent que *níláti* 'devoir' (particule modale en Yoruba) devrait être écrit comme *ní láti* ou *ní láti*-SV, sans se rendre compte que la division du mot en change la catégorie syntaxique et la fonction. Nous affirmons ici que, si *níláti* reste lexicalisé, son statut sera clair.

0. INTRODUCTION

This exposition responds to Adewøle (1990) who opens up further the view of some scholars, including Oduyoye (1969) referred to by Fagbørun (1986:25) and Fagbørun (1985) referred to by Adewøle (1990:74) about the morphology, syntax and semantics of *níláti* 'must'. Oyelaran (1982:17) classifies this item with *gbòdò* 'must' [+M(odal)], although Adewøle does not support this classification. The reason for his disagreement is not far to seek: he has declared on p.75 that 'what is not clear to us is why Abraham gives different analyses to *ní láti*- and *fẹ láti*-' (my underlining).

This note will attempt to justify what Abraham has done, and also throw some light on why *níláti* should be written as one word, regardless of its morphology. Semantically, I have argued that since there is no difference between must and have or has to, it may not be tenable to reject *gbòdò* and *níláti* as alternants.

1. SOME BASIC PROBLEMS

One major problem which Adewøle fails to look at has to do with the orthographic representation of *níláti*. The two examples used by Abraham, which Adewøle refers to in his own paper, are in our 1a and b.

- 1a. **Mo *ní láti* lọ** 'I must go'
b. **ó *fẹ láti* lọ** 'He wants to go'. (Abraham, 1958:207, my underlining)

Abraham himself has created a problem when he writes the item as two words, and any analysis that follows this WORD-DIVISION APPROACH will likely run into one problem or another.

The question remains to be answered as to whether it is reasonable to write *níláti* as two words, when it has been lexicalised (i.e. written as a 'unit of vocabulary' (Crystal, 1985:179)) and translated as 'must' over the years. My contention here is that the combination of *ní* and *láti* in 1a is [+M], while *fẹ láti* in 1b is V+INF(itive). This will become clear in what follows.

2. LEXICALISATION OF *níláti*

Whether *níláti* is written as a single word or divided as *ní láti*, its foreign usage still remains with it, since *láti* 'to/from' itself is not morphologically 'analysable' (Awobuluyi 1970:37). One argument of this present note is that the morphology of *níláti* 'must' does not count, because the item was originally loan-translated from English when Yoruba began its written tradition. As we know, a loan-translation (or calque) may not respect the morphological or syntactic structure of its host language. The process of

loan-translation involves a word-for-word translation of items in one language into another (Crystal 1985:40).

Like Fagbørun (1986:24f), Adewole (1990:74ff) seems to agree that *níláti* is from *ní láti*-VP (or from *ní ní àti*-VP, e.g. *ní ní àtilọ* > *ní látilọ* 'must go' or 'have to go'). We shall come back to this issue of must and have to in Sect.4, meanwhile I will be using 'must' to translate *níláti* and *gbòdò*. Although Fagbørun (1986) observes that the spelling of *níláti* is to be attributed to the effect of English translation, he still maintains, for morphological reasons, that it is wrong to regard *níláti* or *láti* as an orthographic word. He does not consider the syntax and semantics of the item, which have led to its lexicalisation in the first instance, as argued here.

2.1 A NEW APPROACH TO *níláti*

This present note would like to explore a fresh avenue which supports the lexicalisation of *níláti*, and throws some light on its syntax and semantics. I will not concern myself with its morphology, which does not help us understand its grammatical status.

The LEXICALISATION APPROACH seems to be more plausible than a word-division approach, since it will attempt to explain why Yoruba users have been writing (and should continue to write) *níláti* and not *ní láti*-VP which is rather too prescriptive. The old spelling, which I support here, is considerable not only because it is historically well established but for its syntactic relation that will become much more obscure if the item is reformed.

We must not forget that syntactic borrowing in terms of loan-translation has evolved in Yoruba through a written tradition, starting with Crowther (1843), although this phenomenon has not been well investigated by scholars. As a result, many foreign structures (most of these unnoticed) which are inexplicable by merely looking at their orthography have emerged in the language. Orthographic reformation has only mixed up the syntax of most of these loan-translated items, to the extent that two or more words are now used in some expressions in which only one used to feature, as instanced in *ní ìgbà tí* (in-time-COMP) 'at the time that' or *nígbà tí* formerly written as *nígbàti* 'when/while'.

By probing the morphology of *níláti* (and others like it) its syntax becomes difficult to explain. It is my view here that *níláti* should remain lexicalised as it has been from the time when Yoruba was first reduced to writing, and still recommended by the Joint Consultative Committee on Education in 1974.

We may, at least for the purpose of this exposition, assume that we do not know the origin of *níláti*, and just regard it as a FUNCTION WORD or a PARTICLE. This will rank it with *ṣùgbón* 'but' and *tàbí* 'or', whose morphology nobody has ever queried.

When Adewole (passim—and some others who support the word-division approach) writes *ní láti*-VP, it seems as if he would like the item to be reformed. Although he is silent about this issue, he writes *láti*- which implies that he wants *láti* with its complement to be written as one word, as suggested by Fagbørun (1986:24f). It will look odd to most Yoruba writers to see *ní látilọ* in print, whatever the grammatical reasons we may proffer.

Inasmuch as it is possible to explain the possibility of *níláti*, using a loan-translation approach which encourages the lexicalisation of the item in question, it will be unnecessary, and rather too bewildering, to reform its spelling. Pedagogically, what will

interest a language teacher is how to categorise *níláti* and assign it a feature value. This becomes much easier if the item is retained as a unit. For example, if *ní* is separated from *ní láti-VP*, to what category shall we assign *láti-VP*, and what will be its syntactic relation in a sentence?

2.2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *níláti*

There was a time in the past when some early Yoruba writers were inconsistent about the spelling of *níláti* ‘must’ and *láti* ‘to/from’. Since 1900, when *Bibeli Mimọ* (the Holy Bible in Yoruba) was published in one volume by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), *níláti* has been documented and propagated as a unitary item.

3. *níláti* AND *ní* + INF PHRASES

Since *níláti* is not structurally indigenous to the Yoruba language, it may not be reconstructed internally, though Adewọle (p.74) thought that the word-division approach would help us to account for the ‘true status’ of the item. By grouping of the *ní* of *níláti* with the V(erb)FORM *fẹ* ‘want’, Adewọle has confused *ní* + INF with *níláti* [+M] as cited in our 2.

- 2a. *ó ní láti-şişẹ* 3sg-has-to-work ‘He has to work’.
 b. *ó fẹ láti-şişẹ* 3sg-want-to-work ‘He wants to work’.
 (Extracted from Adewọle (1990: exs. 4a and b.)

If *ní* in 2a and *fẹ* in 2b were of the same status, as claimed by Adewọle, it would have been possible to replace *láti-* in both sentences with a ‘high tone syllable í’ (HTS-í) or with its ‘assimilated forms’ a common feature in the Yoruba language, as illustrated in 3.

- 3a. **ó ní í şişẹ* ‘He wants to work’.
 b. *ó fẹ í şişẹ*
 3sg-want-INF-work
 c. *ó fẹẹ şişẹ* ‘He wants to work’.
 3sg-want INF-work

Adewọle assumes (74-75) that ‘The verb *ní* ‘have’ has a great deal in common with such verbs as *fẹ* ‘want’, *tó* ‘enough’ and *şòro* ‘difficult’.’ I admit that the VFORM *fẹ* in 2 can be replaced with some verbs that take an Infinitival Complement, as cited by Adewọle, but the syllable *ní* in *níláti* [+M] cannot be used in that position. If we separate *ní* from *níláti*, its semantics will change (as explained later in 5a and d). For the purpose of this exposition, I will regard the *ní* of *níláti* as a syllable with no specific syntactic value, since *níláti* itself is assumed to be a monomorphemic word. As illustrated in 4, *fẹ* ‘want’ [+V] is equated with *şòro* ‘difficult’, *mọ* ‘know’ while *níláti* [+M] goes with *gbọdọ* ‘must’ and *lẹ* ‘can’.

- 4a. *ó şòro láti şişẹ* ‘It is difficult to work’.
 3sg-difficult-to-work
 ó mọ láti şişẹ ‘He knows how to work’.
 3sg-know-to-work
 b. *ó níláti şişẹ* ‘S/he must work’.
 3sg-must-work
 ó gbọdọ şişẹ ‘S/he must work’.
 3sg-must-work

ó lè s̄is̄é 'S/he can work'.
3sg-can-work

3.1 THE VFORM ní

There is one VFORM ní which can take an Infinitival Complement as in 5a. This can also take an HTS-í which cannot be replaced with gbòdò 'must' or nílátí 'must'. (The symbol () stands for an empty category in this exposition.)

- 5a. Ifè ní í s̄e () ní Èrunwá
Ifè-has-INF-do-()-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people have something to do at Èrunwa.'
Ifè f̄é í s̄e () ní Èrunwá
Ifè-want-INF-do-()-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people want to do something at Èrunwa.'
- b. Ifè ní n̄nkan í s̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-has-something-INF-do-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people have something to do at Èrunwa.'
Ifè f̄é n̄nkan í s̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-want-something-INF-do-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people want to do something at Èrunwa.'
- c. Ifè ní s̄is̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-has-the doing-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people have something to do at Èrunwa.'
Ifè f̄é s̄is̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-want-the doing-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people want/like to do something at Èrunwa.'
- d. Ifè ní () látí s̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-has-()-INF-do-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people have something to do at Èrunwa.'
Ifè f̄é () látí s̄e ní Èrunwá
Ifè-want-()-INF-do-in-Èrunwá
'The Ifè people want something to do at Èrunwa.'

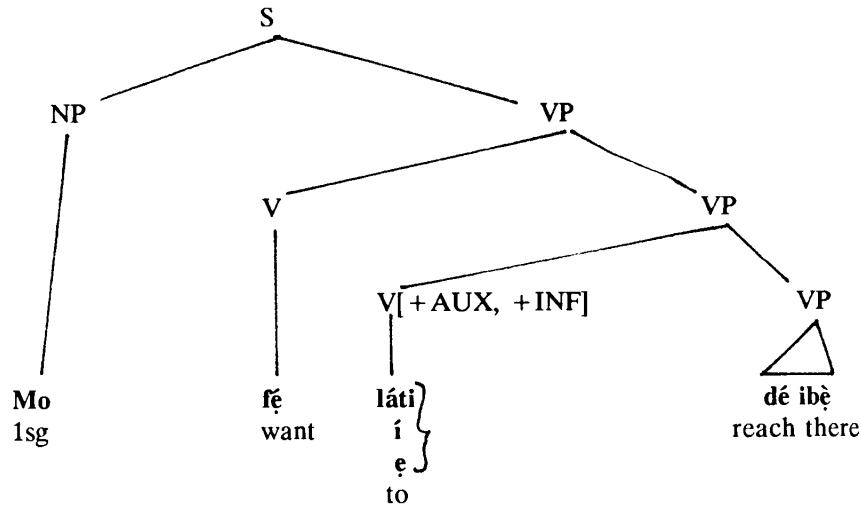
When ní is used as a verb it can take a direct object before the HTS-í as in 5b, and this is not possible for the nílátí = gbòdò 'must' phrase. The ní+INF structure differs from nílátí [+M]. It is this ní+INF that is equivalent to f̄e+INF as in 6.

- 6a. Olúwa ní í f̄i () s̄e () (BFBS 1990, Marku XI:3)
Lord-has-INF-take-()-do-()
'The Lord hath need of it.' (St Mark's original translation)
Olúwa ní látí f̄i () s̄e ()
Lord-has-INF-take-()-do-()
'The Lord has something to do with it.'
- b. Mo ní ìlò r̄è 'I need it'
1sg-has-the use-3sg

Here the INF may be expressed by use of látí, HTS-í (or its assimilated forms) or a cognate noun (e.g. s̄is̄e in 5c). The ní+INF (e.g. ó ní óúnj̄e látí j̄e 'He has food to eat') can be classified with 'the nominal assimilated verbs' (Awobuluyi, 1978) or the 'high-tone-junction-construction verbs' (Bamgboṣe, 1966:77). Látí [+AUX, +INF] can be used in the place of HTS-í. On the other hand, nílátí 'must' is [+AUX, +M], and cannot be

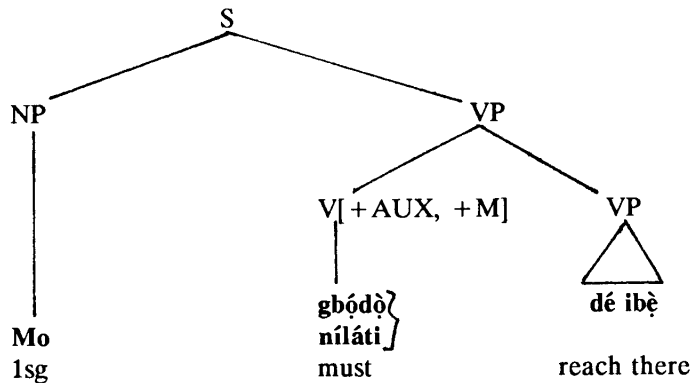
used in the domain of the HTS-*í*. While there are two verbs at least in a sentence in which a VP subcategorises for [+AUX, +INF], a VP [+AUX, +M] has only one, as illustrated in 7a and b respectively.

7a.



'I want to reach there.'

7b.



'I must reach there.'

3.2 WHY *níláti* = *gbòdò* IS [+M]

Adewole would not like to regard *níláti* 'must' as a modal verb, since according to him, it does not share "the same core meaning with *gbòdò* 'must': (p.76). As to whether *níláti* is really [+M], we can look at the sentence in 8.

8. *ó níláti dára* (a common Yoruba song)
 3sg-must-good 'It must be good.'
dandan ní kó dára 'Obligatorily, it will be good.'
 compulsory-FOC-COMP 3sg-good

This use of *níláti* 'must' and *dandan* 'compulsory' indicates that *níláti* expresses 'deontic modality', which is concerned with the 'logic of obligation' (Roberts, 1990:364).

To distinguish what is modal from what is not, Roberts (p.365, note 5) posits that 'an event that is actualised in the real world is non-modal or realis, whereas an event

that is not actualised in the real world is modal or irrealis' (my emphasis). Since there can only be one real world, although non-real worlds can be numerous, Roberts (p.367) goes on to explain that 'non-real worlds are related to the real world by modal concepts which qualify the proposition p such as "it is possible that p", "it is necessary that p" ...'. According to Palmer (1986:33), modality can be expressed by modal verbs, verbal inflections (e.g. an affix such as a subjunctive in Latin), or by particles, as in our *níláti*. Whether we regard *níláti* as a MODAL VERB or a MODAL PARTICLE, its function is to express a modality of obligation. Because of its obscure morphology, it may be difficult to subsume *níláti* into either of these categories. In my own reasoning *níláti* is a modal particle, occupying the same position as any other V [+AUX, +M] in Yoruba (see 7b).

4. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

All the native speakers of English I talked to about the meaning of must and have to (as in 9) did not see any difference between the two terms.

- 9a. We must go there.
b. We have to go there.

I also gave the same sentences to some educated native speakers of Yoruba: eight out of ten came out with the sentence in 10. None of my respondents used *níláti*. One of them translated 9b as *ó yẹ kí a lọ síbẹ* (3sg-necessary-COMP-1pl-go-there). The outcome of this provisional test (based on a telephone discussion) logically suggests that must = have to.

10. a *gbòdò lọ síbẹ* 'We must go there'
1pl-must-go-there

Must is defined in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (1983:1376) as 'expressing necessity ... obliged or required to; have (has) to' (my emphasis). From this definition we see that 'have to', which Adewole (passim) uses as a gloss for *ní láti*-, is one of the meanings of 'must' which he uses to translate *gbòdò*. As cited in 10, both must and have to are translated as *gbòdò* by most of my respondents. How are we sure that *ní láti*-itself is not calqued on have to? After all, have has been glossed as *ní* and to as *láti* in Yoruba dictionaries (e.g. Abraham 1958; Bowen 1858; Crowther 1852). If *níláti* translates both must and have to, it is the case that since have to = must, *níláti* (whether written as one word or two) can be glossed as 'must'. Abraham (1958:438) uses *ní láti* 'must' in a *gbòdò se [é]* (1pl-must-do-3sg). Delano (1958:90) also uses *gbòdò* ADV as an alternant of *níláti*. The sentence in 11 further stresses that must and have to are variants of one expression.

11. The two leaders (i.e. John Major and George Bush) agreed that Iraq has to leave Kuwait completely (BBC Radio News 6.00 AM, 22 December 1990).

5. CONCLUSION

I have observed in my studies of structure and the history of the Yoruba written tradition that scholars have not understood (or agreed on) the 'true status' of some syntactic forms in the Yoruba koine or 'standard' Yoruba. My stand here is that we cannot neglect the effect of the written tradition or foreign culture on Yoruba sentence patterns.

I also doubt whether Yoruba users will agree with the word-division approach

which postulates that *ní* be separated from *níláti* and to join *láti* with a VP, when they have understood *láti* 'to/from' as a unitary item. *Lọ* 'go', on the other hand, is a lexical item which can be used independently, hence, the *ní láti* and *níláti* phrases should not be confused. It will be difficult to subcategorise a *ní láti*-VP structure as observed in this note. If *níláti* has been lexicalised as a modal particle, is it justifiable to 'delexicalise' it for orthographic reasons? This remains an open question for users/scholars of Yoruba.

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