

ISSUES IN THE SYNTAX OF STANDARD YORUBA FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

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This paper shows that, contrary to Yusuf (1990), the Standard Yoruba element *ni* nowhere functions as a copula verb but as a focus marker. It also adduces additional pieces of evidence deriving from case-assignment, acceptability judgments, and number agreement to show that constructions featuring constituent (as opposed to sentence) focus are basically noun phrases rather than sentences, as indicated much earlier in Awobuluyi (1978a).

Cette communication montre que, contrairement à Yusuf (1990), l'élément *ni* en yoruba standard ne fonctionne nulle part comme copule verbale mais plutôt comme marque de mise en relief. Aussi est présenté de l'évidence relevant de l'attribution des cas, des jugements d'acceptabilité et d'accord en nombre pour montrer que les constructions qui manifestent le constituant de mise en relief sont, au fait, fondamentalement des GN plutôt que des P, comme nous l'avons indiqué il y a bien des années (voir Awobuluyi 1978a).

0. INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the unequivocal nature of most of the relevant evidence, several issues concerning Standard Yoruba¹ focus constructions continue to provoke debate in the literature. In one of the latest contributions to that debate, Yusuf (1990) re-echoed Owolabi (1987:59–60) by suggesting, among other things, that the constructions in question feature a copula verb and are, therefore, sentences rather than noun phrases as suggested much earlier in Awobuluyi (1978a, 1987a, b). The present contribution to that debate will mostly report and highlight a number of new considerations and findings which will help to clarify the issues.

The constructions concerned are given in (1)–(6).²

- (1) a. $d\grave{a}d\grave{a}_1$ ni $[t_1]^3$ \acute{o} $j\acute{i}$ $ow\acute{o}$ $\grave{o}j\acute{o}$
Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
Dada is the fellow that stole Ojo's money.
- b. $ow\acute{o}$ $\grave{o}j\acute{o}_1$ ni $d\grave{a}d\grave{a}$ \acute{a} $j\acute{i}$ $[t_1]$
money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
Ojo's money is what Dada stole.
- c. $\grave{o}j\acute{o}_1$ ni $d\grave{a}d\grave{a}$ \acute{a} $j\acute{i}$ $ow\acute{o}$ $r\acute{e}_1$
Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal money PRO
Ojo is the fellow whose money Dada stole.

¹ Examples are cited in Standard Yoruba orthography, where syllable-final *n* indicates nasalization on the preceding vowel, ['] and [ˊ] stand for high tone and low tone respectively (the mid tone being unmarked), and graphemes have their corresponding IPA phonetic values, with the exception of *e*, *o*, *ɕ*, *j*, and *y* which stand for [ɛ ɔ ʃ dʒ j] respectively. The writer is grateful to the JWAL referee whose suggestions are reflected in this paper.

² Yusuf (1990:87), re-echoing Owolabi (1987), is under the impression that the writer's research on Standard Yoruba focus constructions is limited to utterances exemplified by (1) and (2) only. In actual fact, with the sole exception of (5), all the utterance types exemplified here were discussed individually in considerable detail in Awobuluyi (1967:199–248; see also (1978a:41, 116, 131). Certain common syntactic traits displayed by the utterances exemplified in (5) and (6) suggest that they are utterances from which the verb *jé* 'be' has been deleted, as shown specifically for (6) in Awobuluyi (1967:240–46). For lack of space, only (6a) will actually be discussed here.

³ Contrary to the view which holds that a focused subject NP is invariably replaced by a pronoun, Awobuluyi (forthcoming a) suggests that the position of such a noun phrase is actually left vacant, just as happens in the case of object NPs. Nothing in the present paper hinges crucially on that suggestion.

- (2) a. **jí₁ ni dàda á jí owó òjó**
stealing FOC Dada INFL steal money Ojo
What Dada actually did is that he stole Ojo's money.
- b. **ńṣe/ṣe₁ ni dàda á jí₁ owó òjó**
doing FOC Dada INFL steal money Ojo
What Dada actually did is that he stole Ojo's money.
- (3) a. **ìyẹn ni dàda á bá mú owó òjó**
that FOC Dada INFL happen take money Ojo
Thereupon, Dada took Ojo's money.
- b. **òun ni dàda á bá mú owó òjó**
3s FOC Dada INFL happen take money Ojo
Thereupon, Dada took Ojo's money.
- (4) a. **ta₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó**
who FOC INFL steal money Ojo
Who stole Ojo's money?
- b. **kí₁ ni dàda á jí [t₁]**
what FOC Dada INFL steal
What did Dada steal?
- (5) a. **dàda á jí owó òjó ni**
Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
What happened is that Dada stole Ojo's money.
- b. **dá a padà ni**
send 3s back FOC
The order is for you to return it.
- (6) a. **olè ni dàda**
rogue FOC Dada
Dada is a rogue.
- b. **o ti yára dé ni ìyẹn**
you already quickly arrive FOC that
You are back so soon?

1. THE CATEGORIAL STATUS OF THE ELEMENT *ni*

1.1 As indicated in Awobuluyi (1967:204–5), some Yoruba linguists feel that the element *ni* in (1)–(6) is a verb, while others consider it to be some marker, particle, or expletive. Those who hold this latter view do so for two reasons. First, the element excludes the INFL node,⁴ as shown by the ill-formedness of (7)–(8) as contrasted with the well-formedness of (9) and (10).

- (7) ***dàda₁ á ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó**
Dada INFL FOC INFL steal money Ojo
Dada is the fellow who stole Ojo's money.
- (8) ***dàda jí owó òjó**
Dada steal money Ojo
Dada stole Ojo's money.
- (9) **dàda₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó**
Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
Dada is the fellow who stole Ojo's money.

⁴ This is the position taken by Abraham (1958:435) and Delano (1958:144).

- (10) *dàda á jí owó òjó*
 Dada INFL steal money Ojo
 Dada stole Ojo's money.

Second (and perhaps more important),⁵ the element occurs when and only when some syntactic element has been emphasized by being structurally brought into focus, a fact which clearly suggests that it has more to do with focusing or emphasis than with anything else in the language.⁶

1.2 Yusuf (1990) represents something of a cross between those who hold that the element in question is some kind of marker, particle, or expletive and those who believe that it is a verb.⁷ For him the element is a focus marker in utterances represented by (1)–(3).⁸ While remaining completely silent on the element's function in (4), he indicates that in (5) it gives "an emphatic reading to the whole event." Finally, he considers the element to be a copula verb in (6).

1.3 Since Yusuf admits that the element *ni* is a focus marker in (1)–(3) and (5), all that remains to be done is to show that it is a focus marker in (4) and (6) as well. In that connection, notice that, other than the fact that (11) and (12) contains *dàda* and *owó òjó* precisely where (13) and (14) contains *ta* 'who' and *kí* 'what', respectively, there is no structural difference at all between the two sets of examples.

- (11) *dàda₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó*
 Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
 Dada is the fellow that stole Ojo's money.
- (12) *owó òjó₁ ni dàda á jí [t₁]*
 money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
 Ojo's money was what Dada stole.
- (13) *ta₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó*
 who FOC INFL steal money Ojo
 Who stole Ojo's money?
- (14) *kí₁ ni dàda á jí [t₁]*
 what FOC Dada INFL steal
 What did Dada steal?

Thus, the structural gaps, marked by $[t_1]$, that occur within (11) and (12) occur in the same locations within (13) and (14) also. Similarly, the element *ni*, which invariably occurs immediately to the right of the focused constituent or item, occurs in (13) and (14) precisely where it occurs in (11) and (12). Under these circumstances, the normal or expected thing to do would be to consider both sets of utterances as tokens of the same construction type, and then leave the differing lexical items in them to account for the semantic contrast found in them. In that case, if the element *ni* is a focus marker in (11) and (12), then it has to be a focus marker in (13) and (14) also.

⁵ The items *dà* 'where is?' and *ńkó* 'where is, how about?', generally considered to be verbs, exclude the INFL node, as shown by

dàda *dà/ńkó* 'Where is Dada?'
 **dàda á* *dà/ńkó* 'Where is Dada?'

This suggests that the INFL node may not actually be of much diagnostic value for verbs in Yoruba.

⁶ Cf. "*ni* is used to emphasize words and this is its special status," by Ogunbowale (1970:46), a traditional grammarian who believes that *ni* is a verb.

⁷ The vast majority of those who say that the element *ni* is a verb are traditional grammarians who have been influenced by the fact that the element can very often be conveniently translated by 'to be' in English. Bamgboṣe (1966:36), who previously called the element a verb, now (1990:205) calls it a particle.

⁸ Yusuf (1990) did not actually discuss utterances like (3). For this reason, one is here actually only guessing that he would consider the element *ni* to be a focus marker, as he seems to do, albeit implicitly for (4).

It is well known that (15), which Yusuf feels contains a copula verb *ni*, is an elliptical utterance whose full form is in (16).⁹

(15) olè ni dàda
rogue FOC Dada
Dada is a rogue.

(16) olè₁ ni dàda á jé-ń se [t₁]
rogue FOC Dada INFL be-ing be
A rogue is what Dada is.

(16) has both the meaning and the structure of a focus construction in which the element *ni* is very clearly not a predicator, and therefore a verb, but a focus marker. Any careful account of Yoruba grammar must relate (15) and (16), and in doing so, the normal and expected thing would be to let the element *ni* carry its focus marker status over from (16) to (15). In other words, it makes for a much simpler grammar to analyze the element *ni* as a focus marker in (15), just as it clearly is in (16).

1.4 The only problem one can think of with this view of the element *ni* in (15) is that it appears to case-mark noun phrases occurring immediately to its right in such examples (cf. Owolabi 1987:58–60), as shown very clearly by the objective form of the personal pronouns *é* ‘you (sg)’ in (17) and *yín* ‘you (pl)’ in (18).

(17) òpùró ni é
liar FOC 2s-OBJ
You are a liar.

(18) òpùró ni yín
liar FOC 2p-OBJ
You are liars.

If *ni* is not a verb in (17) and (18), why is it able to case-mark elements precisely as the undisputed transitive verb *bi* ‘ask’ does in (19) and (20).

(19) dàda á bi é
Dada INFL ask 2s-OBJ
Dada asked you.

(20) dàda á bi yín
Dada INFL ask 2p-OBJ
Dada asked you (pl).

Notice that the utterances in (17) and (18) are reduced forms of (21) and (22).

(21) òpùró₁ ni [s_o jé-ń se [t₁]]
liar FOC 2s-SUBJ+INFL be-ing be
A liar is what you are.

(22) òpùró₁ ni [s_e jé-ń se [t₁]]
liar FOC 2p-SUBJ+INFL be-ing be
Liars, that’s what you (pl) are.

The element *ni* is definitely not a case-assigner in these latter utterances, presumably because the NPs occurring immediately to its right are already case-marked subjective by an adjacent INFL node. (Sentence boundary may or may not also have to do with it.) This being the case, one possible way to account for the assignment of

⁹ On this, see de Gaye and Beecroft 1922:39; Ward 1952:135; Abraham 1958:435; Bamgboṣe 1966:156, 1990:208; and Awobuluyi 1967:241–2, 1978b:115–6, 131.

objective case to *é* and *yín* in (17) and (18) would be to say that, in the absence of properly licensed case-assigners, *ni* contextually acquires ability to assign objective case to any NP occurring immediately to its right. In this view, it is not an inherent case-assigner, but rather acquires that property contextually.¹⁰ But since no element, whether lexical or phonological, can be properly categorized on the basis of a property not inherent to it, no acceptable syntactic categorization of *ni* can be based on its apparent or non-inherent ability to case-mark NPs in elliptical utterances like (15)–(18).

Another way to account for the assignment of objective case to *é* and *yín* in (17) and (18) would be to say that the case is automatically assigned inherently at D-structure to NPs directly following *ni* in all elliptical utterances like (15)–(18). In this second view, *ni* has no case function whatsoever to discharge in Standard Yoruba. This is the view preferred in this paper, and like the view first explored above, it provides no support for the claim that *ni* is a (copula) verb.

1.5 With this last conclusion it can be seen that the element *ni* is a focus marker in (1)–(6). Since those examples exhaustively illustrate its occurrence in the language, it follows that the element is not a copula verb in any context, but rather a focus marker, particle, or expletive.

2. THE DERIVED STRUCTURE AND CATEGORIAL STATUS OF FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

2.1 It was Yusuf's (1990:87) strategy to prove that Standard Yoruba focus constructions are sentences by showing that the element *ni* that invariably occurs in them is a copula verb. However, now that the element has been shown to be actually a focus marker and not a copula verb, it is clear that the objective of that strategy cannot be attained. This is to be expected, given the many independent considerations already raised in Awobuluyi (1978a, 1987a, b) which either directly or indirectly show that focus constructions in the language are noun phrases rather than sentences. The constructions can and do regularly function as complement to the verb *şe* 'be', a verb which subcategorizes for PPs and NPs only, as shown by (23)–(26).

- (23) *kì í şe* [_{NP} *òlẹ*]
not -ing be lazy person
He is not a lazy fellow.
- (24) *kì í şe* [_{PP} *ní ibí*]
not -ing be in here
It is not here.
- (25) **kì í şe* [_S *dàda á jí owó òjó*]
not -ing be Dada INFL steal money Ojo
- (26) *kì í şe* [_{NP} *owó òjó ni dàda á jí*]
not -ing be money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
Ojo's money wasn't what Dada stole.

(25) is ill-formed solely because (10) is made to function as complement to the verb *şe* 'be', in gross violation of the verb's subcategorization frame. (26), by contrast, is well-formed, a fact which shows that (12) functions as a NP rather than as a sentence.

This conclusion, reached by Awobuluyi (1978a), has since received much critical attention. Thus, Owolabi (1987:47–8) claimed, without offering any supporting evidence, that the verb *şe* 'to be' subcategorizes not only for NPs and PPs but also for DERIVED

¹⁰ Awoyale (1990) terms 'exceptional' the element's ability to assign objective case in the context under discussion.

SENTENCES, and that focus constructions are the only derived sentences in the Yoruba language! In making that claim he overlooked the powerful counterexample of (27), a focus construction and therefore, for him, a derived sentence par excellence which, however, cannot function as complement to the verb *ṣe*, as shown by his own example (28).

(27) *bólá ra iwé ni*
 Bola buy book FOC
 The fact is that Bola bought a book.

(28) **kì í ṣe bólá ra iwé ni*

The ill-formedness of utterances like (28) is explained in §2.3.

Yusuf (1990), who expected to contest the conclusion in view of his declared objective of showing that Standard Yoruba focus constructions are sentences and sentences only, declined to do so. Instead, he declared himself in agreement with Owolabi's premise (1983, 1987, 1989), which had been shown in Awobuluyi (1987a, b) to be flawed.

Awoyale's (1990) approach, which is a refined version of Owolabi's premise, involves expanding the subcategorization frame of the verb *ṣe* 'to be', such that it would now admit NPs, PPs, and "focus sentences", to the exclusion of other sentence types in the language. However, no independent motivation is provided for his proposal, nor is any attempt made to reconcile it with documented facts and considerations in the language (see Awobuluyi 1978a, 1987b) which would appear to argue strongly against it. The proposal also overlooks the counterexample pointed out in connection with Owolabi's (1987:47-8) premise.

The latest reaction to the conclusion is from the JWAL referee who commented as follows:

... most of the arguments about the NP status of focus constructions revolve around their occurrence as complement to the verb *ṣe*. The justification for this unique environment has nowhere been given nor have the counterexamples of focus constructions which fail the test of occurrence in this environment been satisfactorily explained.

The referee's remark is in fact highly supportive of the present writer's position regarding many of the points at issue. The referee does not tinker with the subcategorization frame of the verb *ṣe* 'to be' merely to avoid having to admit that focus constructions function as NPs when they occur as complement to that verb. Nor does the referee consider utterances like (26), on which this writer relies heavily (but not exclusively) for the validity of his main claim, to be either fake or ill-formed. He appears to agree that such utterances are tokens of contemporary Standard Yoruba, and qualify as evidence for the current syntactic structure of that language. The referee, also does not consider the conclusion drawn from the NP utterances with a status of focus constructions after the verb *ṣe* to be a non sequitur and, therefore, unacceptable.

The referee's only objection is that the author uses the utterances of the kind in question, seeing that they are the only ones of their kind that can be cited in support of the claim that focus constructions have NP status in contemporary Standard Yoruba. This is as a reformulation of an old argument shown to be untenable (Awobuluyi 1978a:108-10).

The so-called counterexamples are exemplified by (29) where an interrogative focus construction (in *italic*) that is not used as a quoted or echo utterance is made to function as complement to the verb *ṣe*. Ill-formed sentences like this start out as statements but end up as direct questions; in other words, they are anacoluthic in character. It was suggested in Awobuluyi (1978a:86) that they are ill-formed for

semantic reasons only, but perhaps it would be better to say that they are ill-formed for both structural and semantic reasons.

- (29) *kì í ɕe ta ni ó ra iwé
It is not who bought the books?

The referee may be right in being skeptical about this explanation, but the fact is that ill-formed examples of the kind under consideration are as much a problem (if that is what they really are) for the view urged in this paper as they are for the traditional view that all Standard Yoruba focus constructions are sentences and sentences only, a point that remains until now completely lost on critics.

2.2 Considerations of case and case assignment provide further support for the NP status of Standard Yoruba focus constructions. According to case theory, each language features case-assigners, whose function is to assign cases to noun phrases in construction with them. A case-filter operates specifically to weed out as ill-formed any sentences containing a phonetically realized noun phrase with no case assigned to it:

CASE FILTER

Any sentence containing an overt (i.e., phonetically non-null) NP is ill-formed if the NP has no case-marking. (Radford 1981:323)

With these provisions of case theory in mind, now consider (30).

- (30) òpùró ni é
liar FOC 2s-OBJ
You are a liar.

Awoyale (1990) is of the opinion that the element *ni* is actually a case-assigner, and that it assigns FOCUS CASE to each noun phrase occurring immediately to its left. This view is at variance with the suggestion made in §1.3 to the effect that the element has no case function of any kind to discharge in Standard Yoruba. But suppose for the sake of argument that this view is correct. In that case, notice that *ni* appears to assign objective case to the pronoun *é* in (30). Having assigned case to *é*,¹¹ that same *ni* surely cannot also assign case to the NP *òpùró*, since case-assigners are not known to be capable of assigning cases in opposite directions simultaneously. Under Awoyale's proposal, therefore, the NP *òpùró* 'liar' must be seen as having no case assigned to it, and the case-filter should accordingly automatically mark (30) as ill-formed. But (30) is actually not ill-formed, which can only mean, not that case theory is wrong, but that it is not a sentence but a noun phrase. Consider (31) in which a whole sentence has been brought into focus.

- (31) dàda á jí owó òjó ni
Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
What happened is that Dada stole Ojo's money.

Anyone who considers *ni* to be a focus case-assigner would be compelled to accept either that unnominalized sentences could receive case-assignment or that this utterance is ill-formed by reason of the inability of *ni* to discharge its case function there. Since

¹¹ Recall from footnote 10 that Awoyale (1990) believes that the element *ni* case-marks pronouns in utterances of the kind under consideration.

¹² The accompanying expressions in brackets render it rather improbable that *kí o ló* as a sentence could be successfully shown to be elliptical in form.

neither of these alternatives is true, it is clear that the element *ni* cannot be a focus case-assigner.¹³ This further reinforces the earlier conclusion regarding the caselessness of the NP *òpùrò* in (30).

It is no accident that the NP *òpùrò* has no case in (30). For reasons of principle, it must not have case in that utterance, as otherwise there would be incidents of case-conflict in the language. To see this, consider the verb *şe* 'to be' once again. The verb is a case-assigner (Awobuluyi 1967:233), as clearly shown by the objective form of the pronoun following it in (33) uttered excitedly by the same speaker.

- (32) *mi ì şe òrẹ rẹ rí*
 1s not be friend 3s before
 I've never been a friend of his.

- (33) *rárá mi ì şe é rí*
 no 1s not be 3s before
 No way! I've never been it before.

Furthermore, sentences in which the verb is unable to discharge its case function are, as is to be expected under case theory, ill-formed as in (34) and (35).

- (34) **kì í şe*
 not -ing be
 It is not.

- (35) **kì í şe [s dāda á jí owó òjò]*
 not -ing be Dada INFL steal money Ojo.
 *It is not Dada stole Ojo's money.

With these properties of the verb *şe* in mind, consider the sentence in (36).

- (36) *kì í şe òpùrò ni é*
 not -ing be liar FOC 2s-OBJ
 You are not a liar.

This sentence is well-formed which is a clear indication, first, that the verb has been able to discharge its case function there, and second, that no S-bar or sentence boundary occurs between it and the NP case-marked by it, viz, *òpùrò*.

- (37) *òpùrò ni é*
 liar FOC 2s
 You are a liar.

If the NP *òpùrò* were in the subjective case in (37) as Yusuf (1989) suggests, or in the focus case as Awoyale (1990) believes, it is clear that it would be "multiply marked" for conflicting cases in (36). It would be assigned objective case by the verb *şe*, and either subjective or focus case depending on whether one adopts Yusuf's or Awoyale's view. But since no NP ever has more than one case assigned to it in natural language (Radford 1981:318), it is clear that the NP *òpùrò* in (37) cannot and must not have case. And what holds for that NP holds also for all other noun phrases occurring immediately to the left of the focus marker *ni* in all self-standing or unembedded focus constructions in Standard Yoruba, such as (38)–(41).

¹³ The author assumes an approach that (1) eschews the expedient of regarding *ni* as a case-assigner just in case the element occurring immediately to its left is a NP, but not a case-assigner when that element happens to be a whole sentence, and (2) conceives of focusing as effected in all cases by placing the focused item (or its replica or substitute) immediately to the left of the focus marker *ni*.

- (38) **dàda ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó**
 Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
 Dada is the fellow that stole Ojo's money.
- (39) **jíjì₁ ni dàda á jí₁ owó òjó**
 stealing FOC Dada INFL steal money Ojo
 What Dada actually did is that he stole Ojo's money.
- (40) **olè ni dàda**
 rogue FOC Dada
 Dada is a rogue.
- (41) **òpùrò ni o jé**
 liar FOC 2s be
 You are a liar. *or* A liar is what you are.

If case theory is correct (and there are indications from many different languages, including Standard Yoruba, that it is), constructions such as these are not sentences, as they should otherwise fall completely foul of the case-filter. They must be noun phrases, that being the only other possibility.

2.3 Additional evidence, of an indirect kind, for the derived structure and categorial status of Standard Yoruba focus constructions can be found in (42)–(46).

- (42) a. **kì í ɕe [NPdàda₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó]**
 not -ing be Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
 Dada is not the fellow that stole Ojo's money.
 b. **kì í ɕe [NPPé [Sdàda₁ ni [t₁] ó jí owó òjó]]**
 not -ing be COMP Dada FOC INFL steal money Ojo
 It is not the case that Dada is the fellow that stole Ojo's money.
- (43) a. **kì í ɕe [NPowó òjó₁ ni dàda á jí [t₁]]**
 not -ing be money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
 It is not Ojo's money that Dada stole.
 b. **kì í ɕe [NPPé [Sowó òjó₁ ni dàda á jí [t₁]]]**
 not -ing be COMP money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
 It is not the case that Ojo's money is what Dada stole.
- (44) a. **kì í ɕe [NPjíjì₁ ni dàda á jí₁ owó òjó]**
 not -ing be stealing FOC Dada INFL steal money Ojo.
 It is not that Dada actually stole Ojo's money.
 b. **kì í ɕe [NPPé [Sjíjì₁ ni dàda á jí₁ owó òjó]]**
 not -ing be COMP stealing FOC Dada INFL steal money Ojo
 It is not the case that what Dada actually did is that he stole Ojo's money.
- (45) a. ***kì í ɕe [Sdàda á jí owó òjó ni]**
 not -ing be Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
 It is not that Dada actually stole Ojo's money.
 b. **kì í ɕe [NPPé [Sdàda á jí owó òjó ni]]**
 not -ing be COMP Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
 It is not the case that Dada actually stole Ojo's money.
- (46) a. ***kì í ɕe [Sdà a padà ni]**
 not -ing be send 3s back FOC
 It is not that you should return it.

- b. *kì í ɕe* [_{NP}*pé* [_S*kí o dá a padà ni*]]
 not -ing be COMP COMP 2s send 3s back FOC
 It is not the case that you (sg) should return it.

Examples (42)–(44) contain focus constructions featuring subject, object, and verb focus, respectively, while those in (45)–(46) feature sentence focus. Thus, within (45) is a declarative sentence *dàda á jí owó òjó ni* ‘what happened is that Dada stole Ojo’s money’ that has been focused, while within (46) is an imperative sentence *dà a padà ni* ‘the order is for you (sg) to return it’ that has also been focused.

Whereas focus constructions in which individual sentences constituents have been focused readily permit the contrast seen in (42)–(44), constructions in which whole sentences (whether declarative or imperative) have been focused appear to prohibit such contrasts. This is a fact of Standard Yoruba focus constructions which must be explained, and the only principled explanation one can readily see is that each focus construction assumes the categorial status of the item in focus, that is, the constituent immediately preceding the focus marker *ni* in (42)–(46). In other words, a focus construction is an endocentric construction, and as such, when the head (or item in focus) is a NP as in (42)–(44), the entire construction is a NP also, and when the head is a sentence, as in (45)–(46), the whole construction is correspondingly a sentence. Under this view, the ill-formedness of (45a) and (46a) follows as an automatic consequence of the fact, indicated earlier in §2.1, that the verb *ɕe* ‘be’ does not subcategorize for (unnominalized) sentences.

2.4 While the consideration raised in the preceding subsection suggests that most focus constructions are endocentric constructions with NP heads, the semantic and syntactic properties of the demonstrative *yí* ‘this’ show that such NP heads are accompanied by qualifiers.

As a qualifier, which by definition occurs with nouns and noun phrase only, the demonstrative *yí* occurs with nouns and noun phrases as in (47).

- (47) [_{NP}*òjò*] *yí*
 rain this
- (48) [_{NP}*òjò*₁ *tí* [_t₁] *ó ñ rọ*] *yí*
 rain REL INFL -ing fall this
 this rain that is falling

As Bamgboḡe (1986:5–6) observes, this same demonstrative *yí* occurs with focus constructions, as in (49) but never with undisputed sentences; witness the ill-formedness of (50).

- (49) *òjò*₁ *ni* [_t₁] *ó ñ rọ* *yí*
 rain FOC INFL -ing fall this
 this is rain that is falling
- (50) *_S[*òjò ñ rọ*] *yí*
 rain -ing fall this

It would seem clear from (47)–(49) that focus constructions pattern with noun phrases, and must therefore be in their class or category, rather than in that of sentences.

The careful observer will no doubt have noticed that the conclusion just reached assumes that the element *yí* is indeed a demonstrative qualifier. Since that is by no means self-evident, it is necessary to prove it, particularly as Bamgboḡe, apparently

having reconsidered his earlier stand, now feels (1990:210, 214) that the element is an emphasis marker in (49), while Awoyale (1990) calls it a modifier meaning 'now'.

To begin with, the element *yíí* is neither an emphasis marker nor a modifier, since it does not commute with either element, as shown by the sentences in (51).

- (51) a. *dàda á jí owó òjó ni sé*
Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
I maintain that Dada stole Ojo's money.
- b. *dàda á jí owó òjó ni oo*
Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC
The truth is that Dada stole Ojo's money.
- c. **dàda á jí owó òjó ni yíí*
Dada INFL steal money Ojo FOC this
(uninterpretable with c. as sentence focus)
- (52) a. *dàda n jí owó òjó ni tẹ̀lẹ̀*
Dada -ing steal money Ojo FOC
Dada actually used to steal Ojo's money.
- b. *dàda n jí owó òjó ni wáyíí*
Dada -ing steal money Ojo FOC
Dada now steadily steals Ojo's money.
- c. **dàda n jí owó òjó ni yíí*
Dada -ing steal money Ojo FOC this
(uninterpretable with c. as sentence focus)

The items *sé* and *oo* in (51) are among the elements Bamgboṣe calls 'emphasis markers', while *tẹ̀lẹ̀* 'previously' and *wá yíí* 'now, at this moment', in (52) are among the known modifiers in the language.

Consider once again the two utterances (49) and (50). Now that *yíí* has been shown to be neither an emphasis marker nor a modifier, the only other possibility in the language is that it is a demonstrative qualifier. That this is indeed the case is strongly suggested by the fact that this view of the element makes it possible for the acceptability judgment seen here to be explained in principled fashion: as a demonstrative qualifier, *yíí* is by definition expected to be able to occur with NPs, as in (49), but not with sentences, as in (50).

Another piece of evidence for the status of the element *yíí* 'this' as a demonstrative qualifier is that the element very readily commutes with *yen* 'that', as can be seen by comparing (47)–(50) with (53)–(56).

- (53) [_{NP} òjò] yẹn
rain that
that rain
- (54) [_{NP} òjò₁ tí [t₁] ó n rọ] yẹn
rain REL INFL -ing fall that
that rain that is/was falling
- (55) [_{NP} òjò₁ ni [t₁] ó n rọ] yẹn
rain FOC INFL -ing fall that
That is rain that is falling.
- (56) **[_S òjò n rọ] yẹn*
rain -ing fall that
(uninterpretable)

No one has yet shown that *yen* 'that' is no longer a demonstrative qualifier in the language. (Every additional observation made about *yii* 'this' holds true for *yen* 'that' also, *mutatis mutandis*.)

Consider the examples (57)–(59).

- (57) *tíṣà yǐi*
teacher this
this teacher
- (58) *tíṣà₁ tí [t₁] ó ñ bọ yǐi*
teacher REL INFL -ing come this
this teacher that is coming
- (59) *tíṣà₁ ni [t₁] ó ñ bọ yǐi*
teacher FOC INFL -ing come this
This is a teacher that is coming.

Thanks solely to the presence of the element *yii* in these utterances, each of them, like its English equivalent, presupposes that the teacher concerned has either already been mentioned in previous discourse known to both speaker and hearer, or is somewhere nearby where he or she is visible to both speaker and hearer alike. This presupposition would appear to be consistent with the view that *yii* is indeed a demonstrative.

Finally, as already shown in Awobuluyi (forthcoming a), the disputed element *yii* is sensitive to number agreement, as shown by the examples in (60)–(65).

- (60) *iṣu yǐi/wọnyǐi*
yam this/these
this/these yam(s)
- (61) a. *iṣu₁ tí mò ñ wò [t₁] yǐi/wọnyǐi*
yam REL 1s -ing look^at this/these
this/these yam(s) that I am looking at
b. *iṣu₁ ni mò ñ wò [t₁] yǐi/wọnyǐi*
yam FOC 1s -ing look^at this/these
This is a/these are yam(s) that I am looking at.
- (62) *òjọ ọrẹ rẹ yǐi/*wọnyǐi*
Ojo friend yours this/these
this friend of yours, named Ojo *or* *these friend of yours, named Ojo
- (63) a. *òjọ ọrẹ rẹ₁ tí mò ñ wò [t₁] yǐi/*wọnyǐi*
Ojo friend yoursREL 1s -ing look^at this/these
This/*these friend of yours, named Ojo, that I am looking at.
b. *òjọ ọrẹ rẹ₁ ni mò ñ wò [t₁] yǐi/*wọnyǐi*
Ojo friend yoursFOC 1s -ing look^at this/these
This/*these is your friend, named Ojo, that I am looking at.
- (64) *iṣu kan yǐi/*wọnyǐi*
yam one this/these
this/*these single yam
- (65) a. *iṣu kan₁ tí mò ñ wò [t₁] yǐi/*wọnyǐi*
yamr one REL 1s -ing look^at this/these
this/*these single yam that I am looking at

- b. *iṣu kan₁ ni mò n wò [t₁] yĩ/*wònyĩ*
 yam one FOC 1s -ing looks^at this/these
 This/*these is a yam that I am looking at.

All the examples under (60)–(61) are well-formed because the first item in each of them, the head of its construction, is [\pm plural]. A [$-$ plural] head requires *yĩ* ‘this’, while a [$+$ plural] head requires *wònyĩ* ‘these’, in careful speech or writing. In (62)–(63), the leading item *òjó*, a personal name, is [$-$ plural], which is why it excludes *wònyĩ*, an item marked [$+$ plural]. Finally, in (64)–(65), *iṣu* ‘yam’ is explicitly marked [$-$ plural] by *kan* ‘one, single, a’. It, therefore, consistently excludes *wònyĩ* which is marked [$+$ plural].

Several related conclusions follow from the pattern of number agreement just illustrated. First, *yĩ* and *wònyĩ* are either pronouns or demonstratives, since only these two classes of elements display number agreement in the current form of Standard Yoruba. Second, because *yĩ* and *wònyĩ* do not occur in subject or object positions in (60)–(65), positions associated with nouns and pronouns only, they are not pronouns (whether reflexive or non-reflexive) and must therefore be demonstrated qualifiers. Third, any two linguistic elements that enter into agreement must be in construction, and because the two elements under consideration are in number agreement with the utterance-initial nouns in (60)–(65), it follows that they are demonstrative qualifiers in construction with those nouns. Fourth, since only other qualifiers can come between nouns and any lexical (as opposed to clausal) qualifiers in constructions with them, it must be that (66) contains two qualifiers, marked by Q, just as (67) contains two qualifiers.

- (66) *iṣu₁ ni mò n wò [t₁] yĩ/wònyĩ*
 NP Q Q

This is a yam that I am looking at. *or* These are yams that I am looking at.

- (67) *iṣu₁ tí mò n wò [t₁] yĩ/*wònyĩ*
 Q Q

this yam that I am looking at *or* these yams that I am looking at

This being the case, it follows, finally, that (66) and (67) are constructions of the same order, viz. noun phrases with head-and-qualifier structure.

The JWAL referee observes that

nouns are inherently [\pm plural]. It is only the occurrence of qualifiers that can transfer the appropriate feature to . . . nouns.

This observation proceeds solely from the standpoint of the hearer/decoder who indeed often relies on any accompanying number-sensitive elements, including verbs and qualifiers, or the discourse context for clues to the number specification of NPs. But notice that it does not disturb or detract from the conclusion that *yĩ* and *wònyĩ* and the utterance-initial NPs in (60)–(65) are in number agreement. At best, it reveals what is no more than partial divergence between the rules of sentence interpretation and those of sentence production. As far as the latter are concerned, everyday practical experience shows that speakers and writers must first either visually or mentally ascertain the number specification of qualifiers and not the other way round.

Divergence between the rules of sentence production and interpretation is only partial because of utterances like (68) which many speakers (not the author) say, seemingly without any concern for number agreement.

- (68) *àwọn ni mò n wò yĩ*
 they FOC 1s -ing look^at this
 They are the ones I am looking at here.

Yoruba grammarians agree that the NP *àwọn* is [+plural]. Contrary to what the referee's comments would lead one to expect, the number specification of this NP does not change in the above utterance even though the NP itself is accompanied by a demonstrative qualifier which appears on the face of it to be singular. Instead, it is the latter that must be understood and interpreted as plural in number simply because of the plural NP that it accompanies. In other words, as far as the interpretation of the above utterance is concerned, the NP determines the number specification of the qualifier.

It may well be that *yí* is actually [\pm plural] for speakers who produce sentences like the one above. In that case, it would mean that, for them, no number conflict of any kind actually occurs in such examples. It would also mean that, as far as number agreement is concerned, the rules of production and interpretation coincide in such examples.

3. NOUN PHRASES USED AS SENTENCES

3.1 Notwithstanding that most Standard Yoruba focus constructions are basically noun phrases as shown in the preceding section and elsewhere, they also regularly function as sentences, as shown by the fact that they can occur as complete utterances and can also be nominalized with the complementizer *pé*, as only happens to sentences (Awobuluyi 1978a:100–1).

- (69) **owó òjò ní dàdà á jí**
 money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
 Ojo's money is what Dada stole.
- (70) **kì í ɕe [NP pé [S owó òjò ní dàdà á jí]]**
 not -ing be COMP money Ojo FOC Dada INFL steal
 It is not the case that Ojo's money is what Dada stole.

3.2 As it turns out, focus constructions are by no means the only kind of noun phrases that can be used as sentences in contemporary Standard Yoruba. To see this, consider the sentence in (71).

- (71) **o lọ**
 2s go
 You went.

This sentence can be very easily turned into a nominalization with the complementizer *kí* 'that ... (should)', as in (72).

- (72) **[S [NP kí [S^o lọ]]]**
 COMP 2s go
 You should go *or* that you should go

That (72) is indeed a nominalization is shown by the fact that it can function as either a subject or an object NP, as in (73)–(75) and (76)–(78), respectively.

- (73) **[NP ìwé náà] dára**
 book the be^good
 The book is good.
- (74) **[NP kí [S^o lọ]] dára**
 COMP 2s go be^good
 That you should go is good.

- (75) *_So lọ́ dára
 2s go be^good
- (76) ó gba [_{NP}èrò]
 3s accept thought
 It requires careful consideration.
- (77) ó gba [_{NP}kí [_So lọ́]]
 3s accept COMP 2s go
 It requires that you (should) go.
- (78) *ó gba [_So lọ́]
 3s accept 2s go

3.3 The same utterance in (72) can, however, also be used as an imperative or optative sentence, as in (79).

- (79) (kò burú) kí o lọ́ (kí èmi dúró)¹⁴
 not bad that you go that 1s wait
 All right! You (should) go, while I stay behind.

There are at least three clear indications that (72) is also a sentence in Standard Yoruba. First, when it has the second meaning indicated, the meaning in (79), it can stand by itself as a complete utterance. One further example is seen in (80).

- (80) kí¹⁵ o pèlú wa
 that 2s be^with 3p
 Stay/be with us! (as an ordinary utterance) or May it please thee to be with us.
 (as a prayer)

Second, it can be nominalized with the complementizer *pé*, a complementizer used with sentences only (Awobuluyi 1978a:101; 1978b:90; Owolabi 1987:60; Bamgboṣe 1990:101).

- (81) èbè pé kí o lọ́ ni a bè ó
 entreaty that that 2s go FOC 3p make 2s
 The entreaty we have made is that you should go.

Third, it is treated as a bare or plain sentence by some verbs in the language. One such verb is *sọ* 'say', which subcategorizes only for NPs that are mostly [+narrative], among them being sentences nominalized with the complementizer *pé*, as in (82)–(84).

¹⁴ The accompanying expressions in brackets render it rather improbable that *kí o lo* as a sentence could be successfully shown to be elliptical in form.

¹⁵ The difference between the meanings of (72) as a nominalization and as a sentence is not due to the existence of two complementizers *kí* in the language, as some people might be tempted to think. That there is only one such complementizer can be easily inferred from the following facts. First, wherever the complementizer occurs in the language, it excludes in the constituent clause the habitual/progressive aspect marker *ní*, the negator *kò*, and all future tense markers, viz *yóò*, *óò*, *máa*, and *á*. Second, in contrast to *pé*, which conveys a declarative meaning, *kí* conveys a non-declarative meaning wherever it occurs. Whether such a non-declarative meaning will specifically be hortative, optative, imperative, etc., however, depends on the verb accompanying the complementizer, and occasionally on the discourse context, as seen in (80).

Bamgboṣe (1966:56, 69, 112, 131) and Rowlands (1969:71–74) each recognize only one element *kí* in the language. Rowlands refers to the element simply as "a word", while Bamgboṣe calls it a "preverb". Furthermore, whereas Rowlands is of the view that *kí* introduces dependent clauses wherever it occurs, Bamgboṣe (1966:56) considers utterances like (72) as "non-imperative clauses" (i.e., sentences) which can be made to function either as NPs (p. 112) or as adjuncts (p. 131). It thus turns out that Bamgboṣe (1966) and the author both agree that (72) can function both as a NP and as sentence, though they approach the issue from different perspectives.

- (82) **ó sọ** [_{NP}òrò]
 3s say word
 He spoke.
- (83) **ó sọ** [_{NP}pé [_So lọ]]
 3s say that 2s go
 He said that you went.
- (84) ***ó sọ** [_So lọ]
 3s say 2s go
 He said you went.

The verb does not accept plain or bare sentences as its complement, which is the sole reason why (84) is ill-formed. Observe in this connection that the verb rejects (72) as its complement, as shown by the ill-formedness of (85).

- (85) ***ó sọ kí o lọ**
 3s say that 2s go
 He said you should go.
- (86) **ó sọ** [_{NP}pé [_Skí o lọ]]
 3s say that that 2s go
 He said (that) you should go.

For (72) to be able to function as complement to the verb *sọ* 'say', it must first of all be nominalized with the complementizer *pé*, as in (86), just as the bare sentence in (71) had to be nominalized to be able to function as in (83). From this it seems clear that, from the standpoint of the verb *sọ*, (72) is as much a bare or plain sentence as (71), hence, the uniform condition it imposes on them.

Another verb that throws light on the categorial status of (72) is *ní* 'say', as in (87)–(90).

- (87) **ó ní o lọ**
 3s say 2s go
 He said you went.
- (88) **ó ní** [_Skí o lọ]
 3s say that 2s go
 He said you should go.
- (89) **ó ní** [_{NP}pé [_So lọ]]
 3s say that 2s go
 He said (that) you went.
- (90) **ó ní** [_{NP}pé [_Skí o lọ]]
 3s say that that 2s go
 He said (that) you should go.

The verb *ní* 'say' normally subcategorizes only for bare sentences, as in (87), and sentences nominalized with the complementizer *pé*, as in (89). That being the case, the well-formedness of (88) and (90) is a clear indication that, for the verb, too, (72) is a bare sentence which qualifies as its complement, with or without nominalization with *pé*, as in (90) and (88), respectively.

Most of the other verbs in the same class as *ní* and *sọ* accept (72) both as a NP and as a sentence that must be nominalized, with or without any attendant semantic contrast, as in (91)–(93).

- (91) **ó gbà** [_{NP}**kí o lọ**]
 3s agree that 2s go
 He agrees that you should go.
- (92) **ó gbà** [_{NP}**pé** [_S**kí o lọ**]]
 3s agree that that 2s go
 He agrees that you should go.
- (93) ***ó gbà** [_S**o lọ**]
 3s agree 2s go

The lack of semantic contrast here is explained by the fact that (94) is synonymous with the first (nominal) meaning of (95).

- (94) [_{NP}**pé** [_S**kí o lọ**]]
 that that 2s go
 that you should go
- (95) [_S[_{NP}**kí** [_S**o lọ**]]]
 that 2s go
 (a) that you should go
 (b) You should go.

3.4 There are a number of benefits to be derived from considering expressions like (72) as noun phrases which also function as sentences. First and foremost, doing so establishes a clear parallel elsewhere in the language for the use of focus constructions as sentences even though they have the structure of noun phrases. Second, it affords us, for the first time, a principled explanation for the ill-formedness of (96).

- (96) ***ó sọ** [_S**kí o lọ**]
 3s say that 2s go
 He said you should go.

Finally, it also enables us to explain the otherwise exceptional and rather puzzling incidence of what appear to be double complementizers at the beginning of some nominalizations in the language, as in (86) and (90).

There has been a suggestion that, instead of viewing *kí o lọ* as a sentence which must first be nominalized with the complementizer *pé* before being made to function as complement to the verb *sọ*, a better way to account for the same fact would be to say that the verb in question obligatorily subcategorizes for the complementizer *pé*.

This suggestion is a mere stipulation and is a lower order than the explanation it seeks to supplant. That it is a stipulation is shown by the fact that it has no answer to the question: why does the verb *sọ* subcategorize for *pé*? The corresponding question under the explanation proposed in the body of this paper is: why does the verb *sọ* subcategorize for NP-complements? And the answer is that the verb is transitive and therefore by definition requires such complements.

Second, the suggestion gives the erroneous impression that occurrence with the complementizer *pé* before *kí o lọ* is a property that is idiosyncratic to the verb *sọ*. In fact, what is true of *sọ* in this regard is true of many other verbs also (see (91)–(95)) as well as of many nouns like *èbè* in (81) and *òrò* in (97).

- (97) **òrò pé kí o lọ kọ yí**
 word that that 2s go not this
 That is not a question of you having to go.

Under the circumstances, it is clear that something more principled and more general is needed.

Linguistic items typically subcategorize for their complements; that is, elements that are required to make their meanings or valence complete. The complementizer *pé* does not make the meaning of the valence of *sọ* complete, as shown by (98).

- (98) **ó sọ pé*
 3s say that
 *he said that

Consequently, it does not appear that *sọ* can rightly be said to subcategorize whether optionally or obligatorily for any complementizer qua complementizer. What it can properly be said to categorize for, as in the body of this paper, are NP-complements, including sentences nominalized with *pé*, as in (97).

4. THE USE OF NPs IN NON-NOMINAL FUNCTIONS

4.1 The way noun phrases appear to metamorphose into sentences under the view of Standard Yoruba focus constructions urged here may look rather puzzling at first, but on closer examination it is not unusual in the language. This is because there are in the language several instances in which nouns and noun phrases are made to function in other syntactic categories. Thus, some nouns can be used as verbs, as in (99) and (100).

- (99) *ó se* [_N*wàhálà*] *púpò*
 3s do trouble much
 He went into much trouble.

- (100) *ó* [_V[_N*wàhálà*]] *mi*
 3s trouble 1s
 He gave me some trouble.

Some others can be made to function as qualifiers, as in (101) and (102).

- (101) *ó ní* [_{NP}*méjì*]
 He has two.

- (102) *ó ní ilé* [_Q[_{NP}*méjì*]]
 3s has house two
 He has two houses.

Still others are made to function almost exclusively as adverbs or adjuncts, as in (103)–(105).

- (103) *ó lọ* [_{ADV}[_{NP}*kíákíá*]]¹⁶
 3s go
 He went quickly/without delay.

- (104) *ó ń se* [_{ADV}[_{NP}*jéjé rẹ̀*]]
 3s -ing act 3s
 He was acting cautiously, as was his habit.

- (105) *ó gbà* [_{ADV}[_{NP}*kí* [_S*o lọ*]]]¹⁷
 3s agree that 2s go
 He agrees that you should go.

¹⁶ On the basic status of words like *kíákíá* and *jéjé* as nouns, see Awobuluyi (1975, 1978b:17–9, and forthcoming b).

¹⁷ Cf. Bamgbose (1966:131) who would consider this a sentence having a clause that is made to function as an adjunct.

Given the above examples of the use of nouns and noun phrases in non-nominal categories, it is clear that the use of focus constructions as noun phrases and sentences is no more than another manifestation of the tendency in the language to employ noun phrases in both nominal and non-nominal grammatical functions. In these circumstances, no special syntactic mechanism of the kind proposed in Awobuluyi (1978a:102–6) is needed to convert focus constructions into sentences. One already exists in the language, and is seen hard at work in (99)–(105)!

5. CONCLUSION

The following ten issues having crucial bearing on the derived structure and categorial status of Standard Yoruba focus constructions have now been raised:

1. why focus constructions occur unnominalized as complement to *ṣe*, a verb that does not subcategorize for sentences;
2. why there is both a structural and semantic contrast between nominalized and unnominalized focus constructions after the same verb *ṣe*;
3. why one variety of focus constructions only occurs nominalized as complement to the same verb *ṣe*;
4. why focus constructions occur unnominalized as complement to the element *àfí*, an element that does not subcategorize for sentences, and there is both structural and semantic contrast between nominalized and unnominalized focus constructions after it, just as in the case of the verb *ṣe*;
5. why the replicas of focused verbs are obligatorily nominalized;
6. why short pronouns in the language do not undergo focusing;
7. why focus constructions and relative clauses have very nearly identical syntactic structures (cf. 61);
8. why the semantic roles of focusing and qualifiers are similar;
9. why focused NPs are not case-marked; and
10. why some focus constructions collocate with demonstrative qualifiers.

It has been shown that principled explanations, as opposed to mere stipulations and ad hoc formulations, can be found for these issues only under an assumption that most focus constructions in the language are basically noun phrases that can be made to function also as sentences. Clear parallels have also been shown to exist elsewhere in the language for this seemingly peculiar syntactic behavior. It is to be hoped that, with these considerations and clarifications, the constructions can now at last be more clearly seen.

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