

# VERB – NOMINAL COLLOCATIONS IN YORUBA: A PROBLEM OF SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

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In a grammatical analysis of the predicate in Yoruba, the problem arises whether collocations (or combinations) of verbs and nominals should be structurally described as verbal elements followed by nominal complements. Such a description is usual for similar collocations in many other languages and indeed could be made applicable to a large number of verb-nominal collocations in Yoruba. There are, however, a number of combinations of verbs and nominals which appear to pattern in structure like verbs. Examples of such combinations are:

pàdé	meet
jó.kó	sit
bèrè	start
gbàgbé	forget
dìde	stand
pèlú	be with <sup>1</sup>

They differ from other verb-nominal collocations in one respect, viz. the nominal part is fused with the verbal part and nowhere occurs as a separate item. The presence of a nominal in the combination is, however, indicated by the junction between the verb and the nominal<sup>2</sup> in the case of nominals having an initial low tone, e.g.

- (i) pàdé (The low tone in this example is the initial low tone of the nominal, since verbs having a low tone make a mid tone junction with following nominal complements.)
- (ii) jó.kó (Initial low tone of nominal is assimilated to the preceding high tone of the verb.)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The transcription used for these and other examples is a slightly modified form of the standard orthography.

<sup>2</sup> The junction between a verb and a nominal complement is discussed in Abraham: A DICTIONARY OF MODERN YORUBA, 1958, pp. xv–xvii; Siertsema: 'Stress and Tone in Yoruba Word Composition', LINGUA VIII, 1959, pp. 395–399, and in my Edinburgh doctoral thesis: A STUDY OF STRUCTURES AND CLASSES IN THE GRAMMAR OF MODERN YORUBA, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> The assimilated low tone which is represented by a dot in this example occurs in combination with a high tone on the same syllable in contracted verb-nominal collocations. This assimilated low tone is phonological because a high tone syllable contrasts with a syllable having a high tone with an assimilated low tone, e.g.

UNCONTRACTED	CONTRACTED
(i) rí ífḗ find work	r' ífḗ (second syllable having a high tone)
(ii) rí ìfḗ find poverty	r' í.fḗ (Second syllable having a high tone with an assimilated low tone)

and, in the case of all nominals, by the junction between this nominal and a following consonant initial nominal, e.g.

pàdée bàbá	meet father
gbàgbée wòn	forget them
bèrèè rẹ̀	start it

(There is a junction consisting of an additional mid tone syllable between the nominal in the combination and a following consonant-initial nominal.)

In addition to the above verb-nominal collocations, there are many others whose nominal part can occur as separate items. Examples of these are:

t́s'jú	take care of
gb'ádùn	enjoy
jà'de	go out
rón'tí	remember
ká'.dí	be last
gb'ilẹ̀	take root

These two types of verb-nominal collocations operate in certain structures like verbs. For example, when they occur in a clause, the nominal which follows them can, like a complement, be the initial item of the corresponding emphatic clause. E.g.,

NON-EMPHATIC CLAUSE	EMPHATIC CLAUSE
(a) wón ɟ' <u>ijé</u> (verb) (complement) They worked	<u>ijé</u> ni wón ɟe (initial item) (verb) It was work that they did
(b) wón <u>pàdée bàbá</u>  They met father	<u>bàbá</u> ni wón <u>pàdẹ̀</u> (initial item) It was father that they met

(The verb ɟe and the complement ijé of the non-emphatic clause (a) are separated into the verb and the initial item of the emphatic clause. Similarly, the verb-nominal collocation pàdẹ̀ and the nominal bàbá which follows it in clause (b) are separated into the 'verb' and the initial item respectively of the corresponding emphatic clause.)

On the criterion of the similarity of these verb-nominal collocations to verbs, it is very tempting to analyse them as verbs made up of rankshifted verb-nominal compounds, i.e. verb-complement structures which should occur as groups in clause structures, but which in this case operate as words in verbal group structures.<sup>4</sup>

The implications of such an analysis are as follows:

- (i) There will be two types of verbs which can take complements: monosyllabic verbs such as rà 'buy', je 'eat', ɟe 'do', rí 'see' and verbs of more than one syllable such as pàdẹ̀ 'meet', gbàgbẹ̀ 'forget'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Rank' is a reference to the hierarchy of grammatical units of which each unit consists of one or more members of the unit on the rank next below, e.g. a sentence consists of clause(s), a clause of group(s), a group of word(s), etc. This concept is part of the Structure and System Theory expounded by M. A. K. Halliday in 'Categories of the Theory of Grammar', WORD 17, 1961.

An analysis of verb-nominal collocations as verbs can be found in Ward, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE YORUBA LANGUAGE, 1952, p. 128; C.M.S., A DICTIONARY OF THE YORUBA LANGUAGE, 1959; Delano, ATUMO EDE YORUBA: A SHORT YORUBA GRAMMAR AND DICTIONARY, 1958; and my paper 'The Predicator in Yoruba', ACTES DU SECOND COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL DE LINGUISTIQUE NÉGRO-AFRICAINE, Dakar, 1963.

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(ii) Monosyllabic verbs will make a verb-nominal junction with following complements, whereas verbs of more than one syllable will make a nominal-nominal junction with their complements. E.g.

(a) VERB - NOMINAL JUNCTION

r' éwé        see leaves  
r' í.wé        see books  
rà 'wé        buy books

(b) NOMINAL - NOMINAL JUNCTION

pàdée wòn    meet them  
t́ 'júu bàbá   take care of father

(iii) The structural similarity in certain types of emphatic clauses between nominal qualifiers of complements and nominal qualifiers of the nominal part of the type of verb-nominal collocations under discussion will be ignored.<sup>5</sup>

If, on the other hand, the two types of verb-nominal collocations are analysed as verb-complement structures, greater simplicity in description is achieved because:

- (i) All collocations of verbs and nominals will be described as verb-complement structures.
- (ii) There will only be one type of verb which can take complements, viz. monosyllabic verbs.
- (iii) All verbs will make a verb-nominal junction with their complements.
- (iv) With the exception of the type of emphatic clause in which certain verb-nominal collocations behave like verbs, all verb-nominal collocations will pattern alike in all types of structures.
- (v) The total number of items to be classified as verbs will be considerably reduced. For example, the following items listed as verbs by Delano:

je	do
ɟ' ebo	make a sacrifice
ɟ' èdá	create
ɟ' èfè	ridicule
ɟ' iké	pet
ɟ' òtít́	be truthful
ɟ' òwò	trade
ɟ' òfò	mourn

will be reduced to only one verb in collocation with items already classified as nominals<sup>6</sup> viz.

je do; make	{	ebo	sacrifice
		èdá	creation
		èfè	ridicule
		iké	petting
		òtít́	truth
		òwò	trade
		òfò	mourning

<sup>5</sup> The similarity is illustrated later in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Delano op. cit., p. 186. A Dictionary of the language will, however, contain verb-nominal collocations as separate entries. Cf. Abraham op. cit.

It seems reasonably clear from the above points that whereas a case can be made for an analysis of certain types of verb-nominal collocations as rankshifted verbs,<sup>7</sup> a stronger case can be made for the alternative analysis which ensures a simpler and less complicated overall description of verb-nominal collocations. This alternative analysis is the one preferred in this paper, and it is presented in the overall description of verb-nominal collocations which follows:

Verb-nominal collocations may be divided into two types: (i) Separable and (ii) Fixed.

- (i) A separable verb-nominal collocation is one where the complement can be separated from the verbal element, i.e. the clause in which the complement occurs contrasts with a corresponding emphatic clause which has as its initial item the same item as the complement. E.g.

NON-EMPHATIC CLAUSE	EMPHATIC CLAUSE
ó <u>gb'</u> <u>ódó</u> wá (verb) (complement) She brought a mortar	<u>odó</u> l' ó <u>gbé</u> wá (initial item) (verb) It was a mortar that she brought
a ma <u>ń j'</u> <u>iyón</u> (verb) (complement) We usually eat pounded yam	<u>iyón</u> l' a ma <u>ń jε</u> (initial item) (verb) It is pounded yam that we usually eat

All consonant-initial complements enter into separable verb-nominal collocations with the immediately preceding verbal elements. E.g.

NON-EMPHATIC CLAUSE	EMPHATIC CLAUSE
ó ma <u>ń tε</u> <u>dùrù</u> (verb) (complement) He usually plays the organ	<u>dùrù</u> l' ó ma <u>ń tε</u> (initial item) (verb) It is the organ that he usually plays
ó <u>ra</u> <u>mótò</u> (verb) (complement) He bought a car	<u>mótò</u> l' ó <u>rà</u> (initial item) (verb) It was a car that he bought

A separable verb-nominal collocation having a vowel-initial nominal as complement is usually contracted. But it may be uncontracted as well. E.g.

UNCONTRACTED	CONTRACTED
jí <u>εgba</u> steal a whip	j' <u>εgba</u>
jó <u>ijó</u> dance a dance	j' <u>ijó</u>
di <u>òfèlú</u> become a legislator	d' <u>òfèlú</u>
kó <u>ìwé</u> take books	kó ' <u>wé</u>

<sup>7</sup> Such a case is often misleadingly reinforced by:

- (i) the orthographic convention of writing these verb-nominal collocations as single words,
- (ii) the contextual meaning of the collocations ('the compound, however, conveys a single idea apart from its components', Ward op. cit., p. 188), and
- (iii) the English translation equivalents which are very often verbs in that language.

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- (ii) A fixed verb-nominal collocation is one where the complement cannot be separated from the verbal element, i.e. the complement cannot occur as the initial item of the type of emphatic clause above. A fixed verb-nominal collocation is always contracted.

There are two types of fixed verb-nominal collocations: (a) Non-Unique and (b) Unique.

- (a) A non-unique fixed verb-nominal collocation has a separable collocation counterpart. This counterpart may contrast formally with it. E.g.

VERB	SEPARABLE COLLOCATION	FIXED COLLOCATION
fé	f' 5ròn like cause	fé 'ròn like
gbà	gba 'nó take fire	gb' inó catch fire
gbé	gb' ésè remove foot	gbé 'sè walk briskly

But in most cases, the separable counterpart is homophonous with the fixed verb-nominal collocation. E.g.

VERB	SEPARABLE COLLOCATION	FIXED COLLOCATION
pè	p' olówó call the owner of the money	p' olówó hawk wares
ní	l' ójú has eyes	l' ójú there are
kó	k' ércn collect meat	k' ércn to be done for
là	la 'wó open fist	la 'wó to be generous
bò	b' orí cover head	b' orí to be victorious
nò	nc 'sè stretch legs	nc 'sè take a walk

- (b) A unique fixed verb-nominal collocation has no separable collocation counterpart. E.g.

pàdé	meet
jó.kó	sit
bèrè	start
gbàgbé	forget
dìde	stand
pèlú	be with

Two further contrasts may be observed between a separable and a fixed verb-nominal collocation:

- (1) Whereas the complement in a separable verb-nominal collocation can have any type of qualifier, the complement in a fixed verb-nominal collocation can only have a nominal qualifier. E.g.

- (i) COMPLEMENT IN SEPARABLE COLLOCATION  
 gb' owó afɔ (nominal qualifier)  
 take money for the dress  
 ra 'lé kékeré (adjective qualifier)  
 buy a little house  
 r' εja t' ó tóbi (rankshifted clause qualifier)  
 buy a fish that is large
- (ii) COMPLEMENT IN FIXED COLLOCATION  
 pàdée wɔn (nominal qualifier)  
 meet them  
 p' olówó èkɔ (nominal qualifier)  
 hawk èko  
 bèrɛɛ 'fí (nominal qualifier)  
 start work
- (2) The nominal qualifier of a separable verb-nominal collocation can be the initial item of an emphatic clause only when this initial item is in concord with a third person singular pronoun in the emphatic clause, whereas the nominal qualifier of a fixed verb-nominal collocation can be the initial item of an emphatic clause whether or not it is in concord with a third person singular pronoun in the emphatic clause. E.g.

## (i) SEPARABLE COLLOCATION

## NON-EMPHATIC CLAUSE

wɔn gb' afɔ iyálé  
 (nominal qualifier)

They took the senior wife's  
 dress

## EMPHATIC CLAUSE

iyálé ni wɔn gb' afɔ è  
 (concord between initial item and third person  
 singular pronoun)

It was the senior wife's dress that they  
 took

## (ii) FIXED COLLOCATION

## NON-EMPHATIC CLAUSE

wɔn p' olówó èkɔ  
 (nominal qualifier)

They hawked èko

## EMPHATIC CLAUSE

èkɔ ni wɔn p' olówó è  
 (concord between initial item and third  
 person singular pronoun)

èkɔ ni wɔn p' olówó (no concord)  
 Èko was the food that they hawked

These two contrasts and the structural differences already noted illustrate the need for a distinction between separable verb-nominal collocations on the one hand and fixed verb-nominal collocations on the other. The main point of this paper is that such a distinction is best made by treating both types of collocations as verbal groups on the same rank, and not as verbal groups and verbs respectively on different ranks.