

# GBÓDỌ 'MUST': ANALYSIS OF A YORUBA MODAL VERB

Fẹmi Adéwolé

Obáfẹmi Awólọwọ University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

This paper examines the meanings of a Yorùbá modal verb, **gbódọ** 'must'. A clear distinction is made between **gbódọ** 'must' and **ní láti-** 'have to' which some scholars regard as its stylistic variant. There follows a systematic semantic analysis of **gbódọ** 'must'. Examples are taken from a narrative text to avoid, as much as possible, a subjective interpretation of modal syntax and semantics.

Cette étude examine les sens d'un verbe modal Yorùbá, **gbódọ** 'falloir'. D'abord, une distinction nette est faite entre **gbódọ** 'falloir' et **ní láti-** 'avoir à/devoir' qui est considéré comme une variante stylistique par certains. Ensuite une analyse sémantique est proposée pour **gbódọ** 'falloir'. Les exemples sont tirés d'un texte narratif afin d'éviter, autant que possible, une interprétation subjective de la syntaxe et la sémantique modales.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modality is taken in this paper<sup>1</sup> as a semantic label for notions like possibility, permission, obligation etc., that alter in some way the neutral semantic value of a clause or sentence. Modals are auxiliary verbs which denote different kinds of modality. They are used to modify declarative and factual statements. Modal meanings have to do with the speaker's attitude towards what he says or the degree of commitment to his utterances. A modal sentence or utterance, therefore, is one in which the truth of the prediction is subject to some contingency or modification. The modal verb we shall be concerned with here is **gbódọ** 'must'<sup>2</sup>. In our analysis we shall make extensive use of a corpus of data taken from *Atótó Arére*, a fictional prose narrative by *Ọládẹjọ Okédiji* based on some social shortcomings of the Nigerian society. Page numbers of the examples are enclosed in brackets.

## 2. SOME COMMENTS ON **ní láti-** 'HAVE TO'

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that **ní láti-** 'have to' is a modal verb (Oyelaran 1982:17) and that it is a stylistic variant of **gbódọ** 'must' (Welmers 1973:341-42). In this section we shall take a critical look at these two suggestions and show, first that the differences in meaning between periphrastic **ní láti-** 'have to' and **gbódọ** 'must' are considerable and, second, that the periphrastic item is not a modal verb.

### 2.2 THE PERIPHRASTIC **ní láti-** 'HAVE TO'

Welmers quotes Elimelech (in a footnote) as saying that while 'elderly people, whose contact with English has been minimal' use **gbódọ** 'must', other Yorùbá speakers use **ní láti-** 'have to'. We understand from Elimelech's claim that both **gbódọ** 'must' and **ní láti-** 'have to' have the same semantic interpretation, the only difference between the two being that **ní láti-** 'have to', in addition to sharing the basic meaning with **gbódọ** 'must', also reflects a quantity of formal education which the speaker/writer wants to show. To test Elimelech's claim, we examine the use of **ní láti-** 'have to' in *Atótó Arére*. Taken from a prose narrative written by someone of considerable contact with

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer and the editor for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The English gloss given for this modal is not quite accurate because, according to Afọlayan (1968:350), 'there is a many-one relationship between the modal forms in English and those in Yorùbá: for example **can**, **could**, **may** and **might** are matched by Yorùbá **lẹ**'.

English, one would expect **ní láti-** 'have to' to occur more than **gbòdò** 'must'. We find the contrary, however, as shown below:

1.	Total Sample	
<b>ní láti-</b> 'have to' and <b>gbòdò</b> 'must'	117	100%
<b>gbòdò</b> 'must'	92	79%
<b>ní láti-</b> 'have to'	25	21%

An interview independently carried out by Oyetade (1989:9-11) supports this. He asked 43 undergraduate Yorùbá students at Obáfẹmi Awólòwọ University to translate the following sentences into Yorùbá

You must go  
You must not go

Forty-one students translated 'must' into **gbòdò**, one student translated it as **dòndon** 'compulsory' and only one as **ní láti-**. Since these students are undergraduates, if Elimelech's claim is valid, one would expect more students to use **ní láti-** in their translation, but the reverse is the case.

In addition, we note that whereas **gbòdò** 'must' signals a commitment of the speaker to the truth of the proposition in which it occurs, the periphrastic item signals absence of such commitment. Thus, whereas **gbòdò** 'must' in 2 expresses the speaker's commitment to the necessity or possibility of an action, **ní láti-** 'have to' in 3 occurs in a categorical statement to indicate that something is necessary or possible.

2. **ó gbòdò ẹ ẹ** 'He is required/obliged to do it'  
3. **ó ní láti-ẹ ẹ** 'It is necessary/possible that he does it'

Witness that both **ní láti-** 'have to' and **gbòdò** 'must' occur in the same frame in 2 and 3. The importance of this is that any difference in meaning between the two sentences is taken as the difference between the meaning contributed by each of the two items to the sentence in which it occurs.

Using the same process of substitution, we also note that the meaning negation adds to **gbòdò** 'must' is quite different from that of **ní láti-** 'have to'. Negation with **gbòdò** 'must' always bears on the semantic content of the proposition being negated. The meaning of **gbòdò** 'must' itself is not altered. This means that **kò gbòdò lọ** (NEG must go) is an 'obligation not to go' hence a 'prohibition to go'. It also negates the existence of a permission, for, if one is 'forbidden to go' one is at the same time 'not permitted to go'. The negative of **ní láti-lọ** ie. **kò ní láti-lọ** (NEG have to go) is, on the other hand, not found in the areas of 'obligation not to go', rather, it expresses 'absence of necessity to go'.

### 2.3 A LOOK AT **ní láti-** + VP.

Examining **ní láti-** 'have to' and the following VP, one may be able to suggest its true status. The composition of **ní láti-** 'have to' is quite different from the modals. It is made up of three elements - (i) a verb **ní** 'have', (ii) a preposition **ní**<sup>3</sup> 'in' and (iii) a nominalizing prefix **àti** (see Fágborún 1985:14 n.3). The verb **ní** 'have' has a great deal in common with such verbs as **ẹ** 'want', **tó** 'enough' and **şoro**

<sup>3</sup> The reason **ní ní àti-** is realized as **ní láti-** here, is a n/l alternation rule in the language. The rule states that '...l occurs with oral vowels only (while)...n occurs with nasal vowels only' (Awobuluyi 1978:149). So, when the nasal vowel l ie. /i/ is elided from the preposition **ní** ie. /ní/ in **níní àti-**, the stranded n changes to l before the oral vowel à ie. /à/ and **ní ní àti-** is then realized as **ní láti-**.

‘difficult’. This class of verbs is categorized by Awóyalé (1974:12-13) as factive verbs which often take ‘infinitive without overt complementizers’. For instance, taking the VP *ṣe iṣẹ* ‘do work’, the prefix *àtí* can be used to nominalize the VP to become *àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ* ‘manner/fact of doing work’. This nominal, like all nominals in the language, can in turn be preceded by the preposition *ní* ‘in’ as in *ní àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ* ‘in the manner/fact of doing work’. Yusuf (1985:333) posits that this *ní* ‘in’ is ‘empty of any semantic content. Any meaning attributed to it is nothing inherent but derives from our knowledge of the NPs that follow it’. This PP or ‘*ní*-PP construction’ (to use Yusuf’s terms) can serve as object to the class of factive verbs mentioned above. Hence we can have 4.

- 4a. *ó ní ní àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ* (ie. *ó ní láti-ṣiṣẹ*)  
 he has in the manner/fact of working  
 ‘He has to work’
- b. *ó fẹ ní àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ* (ie. *ó fẹ láti-ṣiṣẹ*)  
 he want in the manner/fact or working  
 ‘He wants to work’

The two sentences are relativized in the same manner, eg.

- 5a. *iṣẹ tí ó ní ní àtí-ṣe* (ie. *iṣẹ tó ní láti-ṣe*)  
 work REL he has in manner/fact do  
 ‘The work he has to do’
- b. *iṣẹ tí ó fẹ ní àtí-ṣe* (ie. *iṣẹ tó fẹ láti-ṣe*)  
 work REL he want in manner/fact do

They are also negated in the same way.

- 6a. *kò ní ní àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ* (*kò ní láti-ṣiṣẹ*)  
 NEG has in manner/fact do work  
 ‘He is not duty bound to do (a given) work’
- b. *kò fẹ ní àtí-ṣe-iṣẹ*  
 NEG want in manner/fact do work  
 ‘He does not want to work’

It will be noted that it is the factive verbs that are being negated in 6.

#### 2.4 WHERE THE CONFUSION LIES

Abraham (1958:438,7b) classifies *ní* ‘have’ as a verb but translates the combination of *ní láti-* as ‘must’. His example (numbering is ours) is:

7. *mo ní láti lọ*  
 ‘I must go’

Thus, it seems, from Abraham’s classification, that when *ní* ‘have’ precedes *láti-*, it ceases to be a verb. Abraham also classifies *fẹ* ‘want’ as a verb which it remains when it combines with *láti-*.

8. *ó fẹ láti lọ*  
 ‘He wants to go’ (Abraham 1958:207)

What is not clear to us is why Abraham gives different analyses to *ní láti-* and *fẹ láti-* when, as we have shown above, they have a great deal in common. It may be that Abraham believes that the first *ní* ‘have’ in *ní láti-* has developed from the lexical verb *ní* ‘have’ and that the construction *ní láti-* now behaves like a modal verb. The

argument is possible because it looks as if the reading given to *ní* 'have' when it precedes *ní láti-* is quite distinct from the one given to it in such sentences as *mo ní owó* 'I have (some) money'. But *ní* 'have' owes its different readings in *ní owó* 'have money' and *ní láti-* to the different lexical contexts in these two sentences showing that an argument along this line is not tenable. Hermeren (1978:70-71) has warned that the meaning of a given item should not be confused 'with the meaning of the units surrounding it. In such a description one would have assigned... (to an item) as many meanings as there are contexts in which it occurs' (our brackets).

Note that the meanings of *fẹ* 'want' in *fẹ iyàwó* 'got married', *fẹ Olú* 'loves/likes Olú' and *mo n fẹ owó* 'I need some/lot of money' are quite different from that of *fẹ* 'want' in examples 5, 6 and 8 yet *fẹ* 'want' is treated as the same verb in all the constructions. This means that Abraham gives *fẹ* 'want' what Naegman (1983:8-9) calls a unified treatment whereby the basic meaning of *fẹ* 'want' is taken to be comprehensive, other meanings being derived from it. In the same manner we suggest that *ní* 'have' should also be given a unified treatment whereby all the derived meanings ie. to have, to occupy, to obtain, to possess, to get, to load (as a ship or canoe) etc. (CMS 1913:162) come from a single comprehensive meaning. While the semantic interpretation of *ní* 'have' as in *mo ní ilé* 'have a house' can be regarded as one end of a continuum, *ní* 'have' in *ní láti-* can be taken as the other end.

In conclusion, as both *ní láti-* 'have to' and *gbòdò* 'must' do not share the same core meaning, we conclude that they are distinct items which should not be classified as variants. Having clearly distinguished between *ní láti-* 'have to' and *gbòdò* 'must', we shall now concentrate the discussion on the modal meanings<sup>4</sup> of *gbòdò* 'must' which is our major concern in this paper.

### 3. THE MODAL MEANINGS OF *gbòdò* 'MUST'

#### 3.1 NECESSITY

This has the sense 'the only possible conclusion from the evidence available is that...', or, to use Chung and Timberlake's terms (1985:242), 'in all alternative worlds that one could imagine at this time, x is...', eg.

9. *léèsì tó wò sọ̀rùn tí kóbó, ojú rẹ̀ tí gbòdò rí ǹ̀kan* (p.5)  
lace that he wear in neck has fade, eye his has must see something  
'The lace garment he is wearing has faded, he must have suffered'
10. *ó sá ní oye èniyàn tí òun ganan tí fowó pa.*  
it have number people that he even has use hand kill.  
*bí kò bá to ogún, yòò fẹ̀rẹ̀ tó bẹ̀-*. *O tilẹ̀ gbòdò jù bẹ̀ lọ* (p.222)  
If NEG up to twenty, will almost up to that. It even must more that go  
'At least he has also killed a number of people. If the number of those killed by him is not up to 20, it will be nearing that. In fact, they must be more.'

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'meaning', 'use' and 'sense' will be used in the rest of the paper with almost the same meaning.

In 9, the speaker's confidence is overtly expressed and the reason for his confidence is given (the condition of the lace garment). In 10, the speaker starts with an unsubstantiated assertion *yòò fẹ́fẹ́* 'they will almost' but replaces this with a substantiated one, *gbòdò jù bẹ̀ẹ̀* 'must be more'. The harmonic modifying verb *tilẹ̀* 'even' overtly expresses the speaker's confidence. The 'necessity' use of *gbòdò* 'must' applies to state and activity either in the past or in the present, but this does not mean that it cannot be used to indicate the speaker's confidence in a future state or activity, eg.

11. *ẹ́ ó mò pé ìyàtò gbòdò wà* (p.14)  
 you(pl) will know say different must be  
 'You will know that there must be some changes'

Here the main predication refers to the future. The harmonic phrase *Ẹ́ ó mò pé* 'you will know that' also indicates that the statement is subjective. 12, on the other hand, is an objective use of *gbòdò* 'must' based on pure logical necessity without any element of speaker-involvement.

12. *ó pé ni, ó yá ni, ọmọṣẹ́ gbòdò yaṣẹ́ lóddò ọ̀gá* (p.75)  
 it late FOC, it early FOC, apprentice must separate work in place master

'Sooner or later, an apprentice must complete his period of apprenticeship and start practising his craft.'

### 3.1.1 Syntactic cooccurrence

**Perfect marker:** In 9, the perfect marker precedes *gbòdò* 'must' but as shown in 13, the perfect marker can follow *gbòdò* 'must'. *Gbòdò* 'must', while occurring with the perfect marker, can refer to a past state or activity stretching up to the moment of speaking as in 9, or it may refer to a future state or activity contemplated from the present as in 13.

13. *kí ó tóó dé, owó àwọn gbòdò tí búrẹ́kẹ́* (p.50)  
 COMP he before come, money their must have grow considerably  
 'Before he comes back, their money must have increased considerably.'

**Stative:** see examples 9 and 12.

**Progressive aspect:** There is no example of a progressive aspect alone cooccurring with *gbòdò* 'must' in the text. The invented one (14) includes the occurrence of the perfect marker and the sentence is given the reading in which the time he starts grinding precedes the time of speaking.

14. *ó tí gbòdò máa lẹ́ ọ́ lẹ́wọ́*  
 he has must PROG grind it in hand  
 'He must have started grinding it'

### 3.1.2 Harmonic combination

In 11 and 12 *gbòdò* 'must' expresses the same degree of modality with the harmonic clauses *ẹ́ ó mò pé* 'you will know that' and *ó pé ni ó yá ni* 'sooner or later' respectively. In such cases the harmonic forms are said to be 'mutually reinforcing' (Coates 1983:77). There are no examples of phrases with hedging quality co-occurring with *gbòdò* 'must' in the text but an invented example follows.

15. *mo lérò pé ó gbòdò tí dé*  
 I have think say he must have come  
 'I think he must have come'

15 is subjective in that it shows the speaker's attitude to the proposition in the main predicate.

### 3.2 OBLIGATION OR COMPULSION

The use of **gbòdò** 'must' here involves the authority of the speaker. It is the speaker who states that an event must hold 'in all subsequent worlds' (Chung and Timberlake 1985:246), eg.

16. **ẹ gbòdò ẹ náírà méjì kù** (p.43)  
 you (pl) must break naira two left  
 'You must leave a two naira balance'

In 16, the speaker is the one in authority telling the addressees that they are obliged to leave a two naira balance. There are cases where the speaker exerts power over himself. Leech (1981:72) refers to such cases as self-compulsion in which some power is exerted on oneself through a 'sense of duty, through self-discipline, or merely through a sense of expediency', eg.

17. **òní tí o wolé mi yí, mo gbòdò wẹ ẹ** (p.53)  
 today that you enter house mine this, I must wash it  
 'Today you enter my house, and I must celebrate it'

18. **mo gbòdò dé ilé Miloníà kí n kí wọn níbẹ** (p.65)  
 I must reach house Millionaire let I greet them in there  
 'I must go to Millionaire's house to say hello to them there'

In 17 and 18, the reasons for the self-imposed compulsion are explicitly stated. The use of **gbòdò** 'must' for an obligation also has the following characteristics: (i) the subject is normally animate and (ii) it also excludes the occurrence of the perfect marker.

### 4. EPISTEMIC AND DEONTIC MODES

Both philosophers and linguists have recognized two distinct kinds of modals, commonly called 'epistemic' and 'deontic'. Chung and Timberlake (1985:242) define epistemic modality in terms of actual and alternative worlds. 'Epistemic mode characterizes the event with respect to the actual world and its possible alternatives. If the event belongs to the actual world, it is actual, if it belongs to some alternative world (although not necessarily to the actual world), it is possible; and so on.' They also define the deontic as characterizing 'an event as non-actual by virtue of the fact that it is imposed on a given situation. Given the actual world at any point in time, there are a number of worlds that could conceivably develop out of that world. The deontic...restricts these subsequent worlds with respect to an event, such that the event has to belong to some or all of the subsequent worlds' (Chung and Timberlake 1985:246). For example, **ó gbòdò ní ìyàwó** can mean

19. I (confidently) infer that he is married.  
 20. He is obliged to be married.

The first meaning is called the epistemic while the second is called the deontic (Lyons 1977:791). Note that the relationship between the deontic and epistemic modes is non-arbitrary. For example, the same modal used to convey a deontic meaning under 'necessity' in 19 is used to convey epistemic meaning under 'obligation' in 20. According to Lyons (1977:792-93), logicians would gloss 19 as 21 and 20 as 22.

21. In the light of what is known, it is necessarily the case that he is married.  
 22. I (hereby) oblige him to be married.

In addition, both deontic and epistemic modality can be given either a subjective or an objective interpretation. While a subjective modalized utterance is a statement of opinion, an objectively modalized utterance contains 'an unqualified or categorical, I-say-so component' (Lyons 1977:799). In the latter, the speaker is committed to the factuality of the information. For example, **ẹ gbòdò lọ** 'you must go' can be given an objective interpretation, meaning that the addressee is expected to go because this is what everybody does. What the speaker says to be the cause of an objectively modalized utterance can be denied or questioned, accepted or referred to by the complement of a factive predication (Lyons 1983:86).

23. <b>ẹ gbòdò lọ</b>	<b>irọ ni</b>	'That is not true'
you(pl) must go	<b>lódótó?</b>	'Is that true?'
'You must go'	<b>n ò gbà</b>	'I don't agree'
	<b>mo gbọ</b>	'I agree'
	<b>mo mọ</b>	'I know'

If the above utterance is given a subjective interpretation, it means that the speaker is subjectively qualifying his commitment to the possibility of the addressee going to the said place. An appropriate clause **mo rò pé** 'I think that' can be added to the utterance to show the speaker's commitment. Subjectively modalized statements are not statements of fact, hence in reporting 23, we have

24. <b>ó ní òun rò pé a gbòdò lọ</b>
he say he think that we must go
'He says he thinks we must go'

To report the objectively modalized version of 23, we have

25. <b>ó ní a gbòdò lọ</b>
he say we must go
'He says we must go'

Given the parallelism just mentioned, we should note the differences between the two modal meanings. Two of the differences between deontic and epistemic modalities noted by Lyons (1977:823-25) are 'that there is an intrinsic connection between deontic modality and futurity' and that 'deontic necessity typically proceeds, or derives, from some source or cause'. Another major difference is that while a deontic modal normally excludes the presence of the perfect marker, the epistemic modal goes well with it, eg.

26. <u>Obligation:</u>	<b>*ó ti gbòdò lọ siré ní ìta</b>
	'He has to have gone and played outside'
27. <u>Necessity:</u>	<b>O ti gbòdò lọ siré ní ìta</b>
	'He must have gone out to play'

## 5. MODAL NEGATION

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Both the event and the modality (Palmer 1979:26) can be negated in a sentence containing a modal verb in Yorùbá. When the event in **mo lè bá a lọ** 'I can go with him' or 'I may go with him' is negated as in 28, the scope of negation is said to be external, but when the modality is negated as in 29, the scope of negation is internal

28. <b>n kò lè bá a lọ</b>
I NEG can accompany him go
'I can't go with him'

29. **mo lè má ba a lọ**  
I can/may NEG accompany him go  
'I may not go with him'

## 5.2 EPISTEMIC MODE

Epistemic **gbòdò** 'must' is outside the scope of both internal and external negation. That is, neither the event nor the modality can be negated by combining the negative verb with the epistemic **gbòdò** 'must'. Hence, neither 31 nor 32 is the negation of 30. While 31, which is grammatical, is the negation of the deontic **gbòdò** 'must', 32 is ungrammatical and unacceptable. Even in verbal 'crossing out' (Halliday 1970:33) where a previous 'must' is specifically denied (and thus 'mustn't' is possible in English), the use of the negative plus **gbòdò** 'must' is still not acceptable. So, whereas 33 is possible in English, 34 is unacceptable in Yorùbá.

30. **ó gbòdò wà nílẹ̀**  
he must be in house  
'He must be in' (ie. I confidently infer that he is at home)
31. **kò gbòdò sí nílẹ̀**  
NEG must be in house  
'He must not be in' (ie. it is necessary/important that he is not in)
32. **\*ó gbòdò má sí nílẹ̀**  
he must NEG be in house
33. He must be in - oh no, he mustn't
34. **ó gbòdò wà nílẹ̀ - \*rará, kò gbòdò**  
he must be in house - No, NEG must  
'He must be in - No, he must not'

This is not to say that 30 cannot be negated. To negate it, we use **lè** 'can/may'. This means that the difference between epistemic **gbòdò** 'must' and **lè** 'can/may' neutralizes in negation. Just as in 28 and 29, 30 can be given either an internal or external negation with the use of **lè** 'can/may' as in 35 and 36.

35. **kò lè sí nílẹ̀**  
NEG can be in house  
'He cannot be in'
36. **ó lè má sí nílẹ̀**  
he may NEG be in house  
'He may not be in'

35 is the external negation of 28, and 34 is its internal negation.

## 5.3 DEONTIC MODE

Only the event can be negated in a sentence containing the deontic **gbòdò** 'must'. **O ò gbòdò se é** means 'You are required not to do it' or 'I order you not to do it'. The meaning of deontic **gbòdò** 'must' is captured in the following conversation where X tells Y what he must not do.



37.

X: o ò gbòdò wí òkan kan nípa ògá rẹ fún ẹni kan kan  
 you NEG must say thing one about master you for person one one  
 'You must not say anything about your master to anyone'

Y: kín ló ẹ ògá mi sà?  
 Q FOC it do master me sir  
 'What happened to my master, sir?'

X: o ò gbòdò sọ pé ó fara pa  
 you NEG must say say he take body cut  
 'You mustn't say he was wounded'

Y: ògá mi kò fara pa sà  
 master me NEG take body cut sir  
 'My master was not wounded, sir'

X: o ò gbòdò sọ pé a gbe e wá síhìn-ín lórú  
 you NEG must say say we carry him come to here late in the night  
 'You must not say we brought him here late in the night'

Y: ẹ ẹ gbé e wá síhìn-ín lórú sà  
 you(pl) NEG carry him come to here late in the night sir  
 'You didn't bring him here late in the night sir' (p.142)

## 6. MODAL COMBINATION

It is possible to combine either gbòdò 'must' or yòò 'will' with lè 'can'. When this happens, lè 'can' always follows the other modals eg.

38. ó gbòdò lè ẹ é  
 he must can do it  
 'He must be able to do it'

39. n ó (yòò) lè ẹ é  
 I will can do it  
 'I will be able to do it'

## 7. CONCLUSION

We have presented in this paper a straightforward semantic analysis of the modal verb gbòdò 'must'.

The 'internal complexity' of modality, according to Chung and Timberlake (1985:241), is great. Because of this, examples have been taken from a narrative text to avoid, as much as possible, a subjective interpretation of the modal verb gbòdò 'must'.

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