

## The Third-Person Singular Object Pronoun in the Ìlàjẹ Dialect of Yoruba

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### Abstract

*This paper provides a simple descriptive account of the covert use of the third-person singular object pronoun in the Ìlàjẹ dialect of Yoruba. The paper identifies the operation of the covert object and justifies its recovery through the verbal tone. The lowering of the last tone on the verb denotes the presence of a covert third-person singular pronoun in the dialect.*

**Keywords:** covert pronoun, object pronoun, third-person singular pronoun, Yoruba, Ìlàjẹ

### 1.0 Introduction

Ìlàjẹ is a South-eastern Yoruba dialect spoken in Ìlàjẹ Local Government Area of Ondo State (Awobuluyi, 1998, Japhet, 2009; Akinkugbe, 1978). Just as it is in standard Yoruba, Ìlàjẹ Yoruba has two sets of pronoun: the long and the short pronouns. Short pronouns may occur as subjects and objects. In Yoruba, pronouns occur in different forms depending on the syntactic environment (Adetugbo, 1967, 1971; Adewole, 1992; Akinlabi, 1985, 2000; Awobuluyi, 1992; Bamgbose, 1967, 1980, 1990; Stahlke, 1974, Taiwo, 2007; Fresco, 1970, Japhet, 2013 a,b). One of the possible forms currently being investigated is the covert realisation of the third-person singular pronoun (Awobuluyi, 1992; 2001 a,b; 2008, 2013) (Japhet, 2013a). The present paper focuses the short object pronouns.

A general descriptive approach is adopted for the paper. The discussion is divided into three major sections. The first section discusses the various forms of the object pronoun in Ìlàjẹ. The next reveals the covert third-person singular object pronoun. The third section discusses the tone being used in recovering the covert pronoun.

### 2.0 The short object of the verb in Ìlàjẹ

Based on the morphological analysis in Awobuluyi (2013:27-28), the short forms of the pronoun are given in figure 1 (at the end of the paper).

In syntax, the long pronoun has a different syntactic distribution from its short counterpart. Two major conditions usually apply in the use of the long pronoun in Ìlàjẹ basic clause<sup>1</sup> as illustrated in the instances given in (1) to (2) below. A long pronoun cannot function as a subject or an object of a verb except in the following conditions. First, the pronoun has to be conjoined to another pronoun or noun. Second, the pronoun has to be modified by a noun or another long pronoun.

- 1 (a) ùwọ òghun-ún gbà  
2sg 3sg-SHT<sup>2</sup> agree  
'He and you agreed'
- (b) ùwọ èyí mà-á gbà  
2sg who know-SHT agree  
'You, who were aware, accepted the term'
- (c) \*ùwọ-ọ gbà  
2sg-SHT agree  
Intended meaning: 'You agreed'
- (d) \*òghun-ún gbà  
3sg-SHT agree  
Intended meaning: 'He agreed.'

The same rule occurs when a long pronoun functions as object of verb. The objects of *rí* in (24a) - (24c) are complex DPs within which long pronouns can occur.

- 2 (a) Ige-é rí èmi ùwọ  
Ige see me you  
'Ige saw you and me'
- (b) Olọjà-á rí èmi Ìgè  
Olọ jà SHT see me Ige  
'Olọ jà saw me and Ige'
- (c) Olọ jàá rí èmi èyí lọ  
Olọ jà SHT see me which go

<sup>1</sup> This, in traditional terms as applied in Japhet (2012), implies a simple sentence without multi-clausal transformations. In actual sense, short pronouns are restricted to some syntactic positions. A short pronoun cannot be structurally focused.

<sup>2</sup> A floating subject-marking *subject high tone syllable* (SHT) usually occurs immediately after the long subject pronouns. The occurrence of a floating high tone on the last syllable of the NP or a long pronoun that functions as a subject in a clause is a syntactic norm in Yoruba. This may result in the lengthening of the last vowel of that subject (Yusuf, 1998:74; Japhet, 2009:284).

'Qlò'jà saw mewho went (there).'

- (d) \*Ige-é rí èmi  
Ige-SHT see me  
Intended meaning: 'Ige saw me'
- (e) \*Ige-é rí ùwọ  
Ige-SHT sees you  
Intended meaning: 'Ige saw you'

Short object pronouns display tonal change depending on the tones of the verbs that select them. High-toned object pronouns co-occur with verbs having low or mid tones, while mid-toned object pronouns co-occur with verbs having high tones. A list of short object pronouns showing this tonal distinction is provided in figure 2 (at the end of the paper). Between a high-toned object and its mid-toned alternative, the native speakers will ordinarily accept a change in tone rather than believing in choosing from a set of pronouns<sup>3</sup> in the lexicon. This is evident in 3(b), 4(b), 5(b) and 6 (b) below. The native speakers do not recognise the high-toned 'alternatives' as pronoun except when preceded by a non-high-toned verb.

- 3 (a) [mi] 'me'  
(b) [mí] \*'me'  
(c) [mí] 'breathe',
- 4 (a) [rẹ] 'you'  
(b) [rẹ́] \*'you'  
(c) [rẹ́] 'to cut',
- 5 (a) [wa] 'us'  
(b) [wá] \*'us'  
(c) [wá] 'come'
- 6 (a) [ghan] 'them'  
(b) [ghán] \*'them'  
(c) [ghán] 'be scarce', be expensive'

1. Ó ghò mí  
he look-at 1sg  
'He looked at me'
2. Ó yẹ mí  
It fit 1sg  
'It fits me'
3. Wo fẹ mí  
You want 1sg  
'You wanted me'

Based on tone, the analysis reveals two types of short object pronoun: the mid-toned objects and the high-toned objects. More data are given below. For the mid-toned short object pronouns, see (4)-(7); for the high-toned object pronouns selected by low-toned verbs, see (8) – (11) and for those for the high-toned object pronouns selected by the mid-toned verbs, see (12) – (15).

4. Ó rí mi  
he see 1sg  
'He saw me'
5. Tísà-á lé rẹ  
teacher-HTS chase 2sg  
'The teacher sent you away'
6. Qlò ò pá mú wa  
policeman take 1pl  
'A policeman arrested us'
7. Ara-á yọ n ghan  
body-HTS itch 3pl  
'Skin itched them' (They had skin irritation)
8. Ìgè-é pè mí  
Ìgè-HTS call 1sg  
'Ige called me'
9. Òkè-é mà rẹ  
Oke-HTS know you  
'Oke knows you'
10. Ayò-ọ ghò wá  
Ayò-HTS look us  
'Ayo looked at us'
11. Tayò-ọ lùghán  
Tayo-HTS beat 3pl  
'Tayo spanked them'
12. bòbá yẹ mí

<sup>3</sup> Within Minimalist framework, this tone should be in the numeration, either as the tone of the pronoun or as a syntactic object. For the first option, the tone belonging to the pronoun implies that the pronoun has different forms in the lexicon. Each will be selected by the right kind of verb. Native speakers will never refer to those high-toned variants as pronouns except in those sentences.

- buba<sup>4</sup> fit 1sg  
‘I look nice in a buba outfit’
13. Òjò-ó rẹ rẹ  
rain-HTS wet 2sg  
‘You are drenched in the rain’
14. Akin-ín ban wá  
Akin-HTS deceive 3pl  
‘Akin deceived us’
15. Ọpẹ joghán  
Ope resemble 3pl  
‘Ope looks like them’

In the case of the third-person singular object pronoun, the short form does not have overt independent lexical phonetic form. The native speakers know that the object is there, but unlike other pronouns, it does not take a full lexical form. Therefore, it has to be recovered through a change in the tone of the verb preceding it.

As a result of this, a verb that has a lexical low tone will have its tone changed to a low-rising contour tone whenever such a verb selects the covert object pronoun. See this in (16) below.

- 16(a) a pè Ìgè  
We call Ige  
‘We called Ige’
- (b) a pè-é  
we call-3sg  
‘We called him’

A high-toned verb will have its tone changed to mid whenever it selects the short third-person singular object pronoun to go with it. See this in (17) and (18) below.

- 17(a) wo rí Ìgè  
You see ìgè  
‘You saw ige’
- (b) wori  
You see-3sg  
‘You saw him’
- 18(a) mo mí fẹ àkòró  
I PROG want cap  
‘I am looking for a cap’
- (b) mo mí fẹ  
I PROG want-3sg  
‘I am looking for it’

For a mid-toned verb taking the third-person singular short object pronoun, the tone of the verb will be changed to a high tone.

- 19(a) mo bẹ isun  
I peel yam  
‘I peeled yam’
- (b) mo bẹ  
I peel-3sg  
‘I peeled it’

### 3.0 The Third-Person Singular Covert Pronoun and Its Recovery Strategy

The *pro* drop analysis differs from optional transitivity, a situation where a verb can allow both transitive and intransitive constructions. In Ìlàje, there is a way to distinguish intransitive verbs from those taking the third-person singular covert object pronoun. A change in the tone of the verb is a necessary condition whenever it takes object *pro*; however, its tone remains unchanged in intransitive construction. Compare the intransitive verb in (20) with the transitive one taking a covert object in (21).

- 20(a) mo mà  
I know  
‘I am aware’
- (b) a gbà  
We accept  
‘We agreed’
- 21(a) mo màá  
I know-him  
‘I know him’
- (b) a gbàá  
We accept-it  
‘We accept it’

Those sentences having covert objects in (16), (17), and (18) above can still recover the meaning of the covert pronouns.

<sup>4</sup> Bùbá is a Yoruba kind of wears sown differently for each sex. It is sown from the same piece of cloth with a wrapper for the females and pair of trousers for the males.

This simply implies that the covert pronoun is semantically represented though it lacks independent phonological form. The syntactic position occupied by the covert pronoun can, therefore, be represented by the abstract pronominal form: *pro*.

The covert pronoun, Covert representation of the pronoun is not restricted to the subject position. In Chichewa cited in (24) below, *pro* occurs in the object position, but its semantic content is recovered through the object agreement affix *-zi-* prefixed to the verb *thamangits* ‘chase’ in the same way Italian uses verbal suffixes in recovering the semantic content of covert subjects.

CHICHEWA (Malawi)

- 24(a) Mikango yanu i- na- zi- thamangits -ambuzi Zathu  
 Lions your AgrS-PAST-AgrO- chase -Aspgoats our  
 ‘Your lions chased our goats’  
 (b) Mikango yanu i- na- zi- thamangits -*apro*

Lions your AgrS-PAST-AgrO- chase -Asp  
 ‘Your lions chased them (our goats)’

Adapted from Ouhalla (1994:58-59).

#### 4.0 The Object High Tone (OHT) as Pro Recovery Strategy

The covert third-person singular object pronouns attested in the Ilàjẹ data (in (16) – (19)) can be recovered through the verbal tones. Tone being a nonlinear item cannot be linearly analysed like linear affixes in Chichewa in (24) above. However, the object recovery tone can be placed by the verb as object high tone (OHT) as shown in (25) – (27) below.

- 25(a) a pè ìgè  
 We call ige  
 ‘We called Ige’  
 (b) a pèé *pro*  
 wecall-OHT 3sg  
 ‘We called him’

- 26(a) mo bẹ isun  
 I peel yam  
 ‘I peeled yam’

- (b) mo bẹ  
 I peel-3sg  
 ‘I peeled it’

- 27(a) mo mí fẹ àkòró  
 I PROG want cap  
 ‘I am looking for a cap’

- (b) mo mí fẹ  
 I PROG want-3sg  
 ‘I am looking for it’

#### 5.0 Summary

This paper has thus far shown in Ilàjẹ the evidence of the covert representation of the third-person singular object pronoun. It has also revealed the interaction of syntax and phonology in licensing the covert object through a tone change process. This is the grammatical tone realised in verb-object juncture through which surfaces whenever a verb selects a covert third-person singular pronoun.

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**Figures**

**Fig. 1. A table of Ìlàjẹ pronouns.**

| Long forms  | Short subjects    | Short objects   |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| èmi (1sg)   | mi 'I'            | mi 'me'         |
| ùwọ (2sg)   | wọ 'you'          | wọ 'you'        |
| òghun (3sg) | un +ó 'he/she/it' | un 'him/her/it' |
| àwa (1pl)   | wa 'we'           | wa 'us'         |
| àghan (2pl) | ghan 'you(pl)'    | ghan 'you(pl)'  |
| àghan (3pl) | ghan 'they'       | ghan 'them'     |

**Fig. 2. The short object pronouns in Ìlàjẹ.**

| Short objects selected by verbs ending in mid or high tone | Short objects selected by verbs ending with a low tone              |
|--|---|
| mi 'me'  | mí 'me'   |
| rẹ 'you'   | rẹ́ 'you'   |
| pro (with tonal modification of the verb) 'him/her/it'     | pro (with tonal modification of the verb) <sup>1</sup> 'him/her/it' |
| wa 'us'  | wá 'us'   |
| ghan 'you(pl)'   | ghán 'you(pl)'  |
| ghan 'them'  | ghán 'them'   |