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Tense - Aspect and Negation in Mòbà

Abstract. According to Trudgill (1994), the common focus of dialectologist is to expose the grammatical rules and systems that are ‘typical’ of a particular dialect. The main thrust of this study is to shed light on the grammatical rules and system that are typical of Mòbà dialect with reference to tense/aspect and negation. This study shows that Mòbà has one future tense marker and the occurrence of tense/aspect markers in the dialect and standard Yorùbá resembles each other. The study identifies four negation markers in Mòbà and posit that **òkó**, one of the negation markers in the dialect is probably the origin of negation marker **kó** in standard Yorùbá. The use of the negation marker **rì** in the dialect require that **àì** be analyzed as non-unitary morphemes in standard Yorùbá.

Introduction

Various aspects of the phonology and syntax of the Yorùbá language have been examined in many studies, such as Adéwólé (1988), Akinlabí (1985), Awóbùlúyì (1967, 1978, 2008), Bámgbósé (1966, 1990), Ìlòrí (2010), Oḍúntan (2000), Oḷa (1990), Owólabí (1976, 1989) and Oyèláran (1971) among others. These studies have thrown more light on what is permitted or prohibited in Standard Yoruba. However, very few scholarly works exists on Yorùbá dialects, which are numerous and structurally diverse. These works include Bámiṣilẹ̀ (1986), Ajíbóyè (1990), Sàláwù (1998) and Madeleire (2004). Most of these works focus more on phonology than other areas of linguistics like morphology, syntax, and semantics. The inadequate attention paid to the study of these dialects probably informs Awobuluyi’s (1992, 1998) appeal to Yorùbá

linguistics to research into Yorùbá dialects. Such study, according to him, will provide some grammatical expositions that may teach us new things that will help in reappraising the grammar of Yorùbá language. Olúmúyiwá (2006) and the present study respond to that call as we are also of the view that such study of the Yorùbá dialects has immediate and long term benefits for Yorùbá language studies.

The main thrust of this study is to show the grammatical rules and systems that are typical of the dialect with reference to tense/aspect and negation. The approach in this descriptive analysis affords us the opportunity to identify and describe the forms and functions of these items in Mòbà.

Mòbà Linguistic Area

Mòbà is spoken in all the towns and villages of the Mòbà Local Government Area and some towns in Ilejemeje Local Government area of Èkìtì State. These towns include Ọ̀tùn, Igógo, Osùn-ún, Èpẹ̀, Ọ̀sàn, Ìkùn, Ìsáòyè, Iṣàn and Iyè. Mòbà is also spoken in the following towns in Kwara State of Nigeria: Osí, Ìlọfà, Ayédùn, Èkàn and Ìlálẹ̀. In each of these towns a variant of Mòbà is spoken. Mòbà belongs to the Central Yorùba (CY) dialect group. Other dialects in this group are Èkìtì, Ìjẹ̀sà and Ifẹ̀.

Tense and Aspect Markers in Mòbà

Like Yorùbá language, tense in Mòbà polarizes future and non-future: being present and past. Future tense covers only future tense. Unlike Yorùbá, which has three future tense markers, **yòò**, **máa** and **á**, the only phonetically visible element that marks future tense in Mòbà is **éè**, as it occurs in the following expressions:

1. **Ọ̀tún**

- | | | | | |
|----|-----|------|-------------|------------------------|
| i. | Olú | éè | kọlé | |
| | Olú | will | build-house | “Olu will build house” |

- ii. Ayò **éè** lọ
Ayò will go “Ayò will go”
- iii. Ayò **éè** gbe
Ayò will carry (it) “Ayò will carry it”
- iv. Olú **éè** momi
Olú will drink-water “Olu will drink water”

As shown in (1) above, the future tense marker in Mòbà occurs between the subject noun phrase and the verb (phrase). However, the future tense marker changes form when it occurs with short pronouns as exemplified below in (2).

2. **Ọ̀tun**

- i. àá **éè** lọ → À **è** lọ
We will go ‘We will go.’
- ii. àá **éè** gbe → À **è** gbe
We will carry (it) ‘We will carry it’
- iii. mǐ **éè** dide → Me **è** dide
I will stand (up) ‘I will stand up.’
- iv. ọ̀ọ́ **éè** á → ọ̀ **è** á
you will come ‘You will come.’

As observed in (2) above, the form of the future tense marker has undergone the phonological processes of deletion in (2:i-ii,iv) and deletion/assimilation in (2:iii). The choice of either **éè** or **éè** in (1) and (2) above is dependent on the advanced tongue root (ATR) feature of the vowel of the verb that follows it.

The non-future tense is marked only by high tone syllable **é**, which also manifest itself between the noun phrase and the verb as shown in (3):

3. **Ọ̀sàn**

- i. Ayò **é** ga → Ayò **ó** ga
Ayò HTS tall Ayò HTS tall ‘Ayò is tall’
- ii. Dadá **é** gbe → Dàda **á** gbe
Dada HTS carry (it) Dàda HTS carry it ‘Dada carried it’

iii.	Ayò é lọ	→	Ayò ọ́ lọ	
	Ayò HTS go		Ayò HTS go	‘Ayò went’
iv.	Alè é gbe	→	Alè ẹ́ gbe	
	ground HTS dry		ground HTS dry	‘The ground is dry’
v.	mìí é lọ	→	mìí í lọ	
	1sg HTS go		I HTS go	‘I went’
vi.	àá é gbe	→	àá á gbe	
	3pl HTS carry		we HTS carry	‘we carried it’

As shown in (3) above, the HTS noticeably and regularly assimilates the properties of the vowel of the preceding subject NP. Utterances in (3) with HTS are exclusively interpreted as either present or past in Mòbà

Aspect

Aspect is one of the most studied functional items in Yorùbá due to its prominence in Yorùbá sentences, Ọdúntan (2000:134-135). Aspect denotes the duration of event described by the verb in a given clause to show whether such an event is on going (progressive) or have been completed (perfective), Ìlòrí (2010:150). Like Yorùbá, there are three different types of aspects which are functionally lexicalized in Mòbà. These are **í** (progressive), **mọ́ọ́ í** (habitual) and **tí** (perfective). These are exemplified below in (4).

4. (a) Igógo

i.	À í sọ̀ràn	
	3pl prog talk	‘We are talking’
ii.	Ayò í juṣu	
 Prog eat-yam	‘Ayo is eating yam’
iii.	Olú í lọ	
 prog go	‘Olu is going’

(b) Ìlọfà

i.	Olú mọ́ọ́ í gbẹ̀bùn	
 dur prog receive-gift	‘Olu habitually receives gift’

- ii. Ayò **mọ́ọ́ í** yúnbè
 dur. Prog the-place 'Ayò habitually goes there.'
- iii. Ìṣọn ẹyẹ **mọ́ọ́ í** pario
 3pl bird dur prog make-noise 'The birds habitually make noise.'

(c) **Ìkùn**

- i. Délé **tí** rí a
 perf see 3pl 'Dele has seen us.'
- ii. **Şé** ọ́ọ́ **tí** gbọ́?
 Have 2sg perf hear 'Have you heard?'
- iii. Bàbá ọ́hún **tí** kú
 father the perf die 'The father is dead.'

The progressive marker **í** in 4 (a) refers to action or state in progress at the time of speech/utterance or at a time in the past which serves as a kind of reference point for the speech/utterance. Structures containing progressive markers are factive in Mọ̀bà. The habitual marker in 4(b) shows that the action in such types of utterances in Mọ̀bà is marked as being in progress and incomplete. However, the action in 4(c) has been performed/completed at the time of reference. The perfective aspect marker **tí** in Mọ̀bà, shows that the action or state as shown in 4(c) above is the same with **tí** (perfective marker) in Standard Yorùbá.

Like Yorùbá, two or more aspect markers may occur in a cluster in Mọ̀bà. This can be seen in (5).

5. **Osùn-ún**

- i. Ìhan akọrin **tí í** kọrin
 3pl chorister perf prog sing-song 'The choristers have started singing'
- ii. Olú **tí í** sùşé
 ... perf prog do-work 'Olú has started working'

Thus far, we have investigated tense and aspect situation in Mọ̀bà. We have shown that: (i) tense markers are very few in the dialect and (ii) the occurrence of aspect markers in

syntactic constructions in the dialect resembles that of Yorùbá.

Negation

Negation is a construction in grammatical and semantic analysis that typically exposes the contradiction of some or all of the sentence meaning, Crystal (1980).

6 Declarative: Olú gbe
 Negative: Olú kè gbe

Scholars such as Jackendoff (1972) and Klima (1964) have differentiated two types of negation, namely, constituent negation and sentence negation. As the name implies, when some or part of a sentence is negated, we talk of constituent negation. But when the whole sentence rather than its part is negated, the reference is sentence negation.

In his attempt to explain vowel harmony in Mòbà dialects, Bámìsilẹ̀ (1986:153-174) identified **kè** ‘not’ as the negation marker in the dialect. Ever since, no Yorùbá linguist has made any effort to investigate further on the occurrence of this and other negation markers in the syntax of Mòbà. In light of this development, we shall examine in this section, the concept of negation together with its structural representation in Mòbà.

Negation formatives in Mòbà

There are four negation markers in Mòbà. These are **kè**, **mọ̀ọ̀**, **ọ̀kọ̀** and **rì**. These items are free morphemes and they occur immediately after the subject NP in the dialect.

The Negative Marker *kè* ‘not’

This negation marker is similar to **kò/ki** ‘not’ in standard Yoruba. While standard Yorùbá optionally permits the full form of this negation marker **kò/ki**, Mòbà obligatorily permits the full form of the negation marker. The negation marker **kè** is used to negate the verb or verb phrase in grammatical formation as shown in (7).

7. **Èkàn**

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| i. | Olú kè gbe
.... neg. carry | ‘Olú did not carry it.’ |
| ii. | Olú kẹ̀ lọ
.... neg go | ‘Olú did not go.’ |
| iii. | Olè kè <i>í</i> rìn lọ̀sọ̀n-ọ̀n
thief neg prog walk afternoon | ‘The thief would not walk in the afternoon’ |
| iv. | Kè <i>í</i> sẹ̀ rírà ní Olú rà á
neg prog do buying foc. Olú buy it | ‘It is not that Olú bought it.’ |
| v. | Kẹ̀ páàsì bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní kè fẹ̀lì
neg pass yet foc not fail | ‘s/he neither pass nor fail.’ |

Examples 7 (i-iii) show that no element can intervene between the subject NP and the negation marker in Mòbà. So also, example 7 (iii-iv) show that the negation marker **kè**, can occur before progressive aspect marker *í* in the dialect. The choice of either **kè/kẹ̀** depends on the advanced tongue root feature of the vowel of the verb that follows it.

The Negation marker mọ̀ọ̀ ‘not’.

Like **máà** ‘not’ in standard Yorùbá and **mọ̀ọ̀** ‘not’ in Èkìtì dialects, this negation marker is used mostly to negate imperatives in Mòbà as evident in the following constructions.

8. **Osí**

- | | | |
|------|---|------------------------|
| i. | mọ̀ọ̀ jà
neg fight | ‘Don’t fight’ |
| ii. | mọ̀ọ̀ gbe
neg carry | ‘Don’t carry it.’ |
| iii. | mọ̀ọ̀ ké mọ̀
neg cry stop | ‘Don’t cry’ |
| iv. | mọ̀ọ̀ jẹ̀ dùn mi
neg let pain leg | ‘Don’t let it pain me’ |

In contrast to Èkìtì dialects where **mọ̀ọ̀** has **móò** as a variant and the choice between the two variants depend on the tongue height of the following vowel, i.e. when the vowel of the verb that

follow it is half close, **móò** is used. The alternant **mòṛ** is used when the vowel of the verb that follows it is open or half open as in (9) below.

9. Adó

móò gbe	móò ki
mòṛ lọ	mòṛ jà

In Mòbà, **mòṛ** has no variants, hence its occurrence does not depend on the tongue height of the verb that follows it. This explains why the form remains constant in (8) despite being followed by verbs with different advanced tongue root features. This brings to question the claim made in Bámisilè (1986) that Mòbà exhibits full vowel harmony system in negative constructions in Mòbà.

Another important thing to note about **kè** and **mòṛ** in Mòbà is that only the negation marker **kè**, can precede and negate a modal while **mòṛ** follows it as shown in (10) below:

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 10. | Olú kè yòṛ mòṛ á | |
| | Neg model neg come | ‘Olú may not come’ |
| | Kè yòṛ mòṛ gbe | |
| | Neg model neg carry-it | ‘H/She may not carry it.’ |

The Negation Marker **òkó** ‘not’

Mòbà uses the negation marker **òkó** to negate a constituent, namely, nouns/noun phrases only.

The negation marker regularly follows the noun it negates in the dialect, as in (11).

11. Ìṛfà

- | | | |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| i. | Èmi òkó | |
| | Isg neg | ‘I wasn’t the one.’ |
| ii. | Olú àti Ayò òkó | |
| | Olú and Ayò neg | ‘It is not Olú and Ayò’ |
| iii. | Olú òkó e gbe | |
| | Olú neg that carry | ‘It is not Olu that carried it.’ |

Like Mòbà, which uses **òkó**, the standard Yoruba uses **kó** ‘not’ to negate nouns/noun phrases.

We want to posit here that **òkó** is probably the origin of **kó** in standard Yorùbá as no other Yorùbá dialects is known to use **òkó** to negate nouns/noun phrases.

The Negation Marker **rì/ì** ‘not’

The negation marker **rì/ì** is used to negate verb phrase in nominalizations in Mòbà and other Central Yorùbá dialects. The example of its usage is shown in (12):

12. Èpẹ̀

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| i. | À-jẹ-rì-jẹ-tán | |
| | prefix eat neg eat-finish | ‘eating without finishin.’ |
| ii. | À -bù- rì- bù- tán | |
| | prefix cut neg cut-finish | ‘cutting without finishing’ |
| iii. | A- rì - lọ | |
| | prefix neg go | ‘failure to go’ |
| iv. | À-rì-gbe | |
| | prefix neg carry | ‘failure to carry it’ |

Sàláwù (1998:43; 2001:112) believes that this negation marker has the form **àrì** in Èkìtí dialects. According to him, **àrì** is a unitary morpheme used to negate verbs. His reasoning is based on the premise that **rì** is not found in Èkìtí lexemes. Our findings show, however, that **rì** does appear in the lexicon of Èkìtí as shown below in (13).

13. Qyẹ̀/Ìkọ̀lé

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| rì ‘sink’ | ulé rì | ‘The house sank’ |
| rì ‘spoil’ | kòkó rì | ‘Cocoa has spoilt’ |
| rì ‘negator’ | ká sẹ e kọ ọ rì jẹ tín | ‘Why is it that you did not finish eating it.’ |

The negator marker **rì** as used in (12) above shows that (a) **àrì** is not a unitary morpheme in Mòbà. Therefore, it should be analyzed as **à**-prefix and **rì** negation marker; (b) the so-called negative prefix **àì**, which some Yorùbá scholars believe to be a single morpheme in Yorùbá

(Bámgbósé (1990:106), Owólabí (1995:92, 108) and Táíwò (2006)) is actually the nominalizing prefix **à-** followed by the negation marker **ì** as shown in (14) below:

14. **Yorùbá**

à - jẹ - ì - jẹ - tán

prefix eat neg eat finish

‘eating without finishing’

à - ì - gbe

prefix neg carry

‘failure to carry it.’

Conclusion

Our attempt at a grammatical exposition with reference to tense/aspect and negation in Mòbà has given us the opportunity to explore the functions and structural occurrence of these grammatical items in the dialect. We observed that the occurrence of tense and aspect markers in the dialect and standard Yorùbá resemble each other. In addition, we identified four negation markers in Mòbà. The negation system in the dialect differs slightly from standard Yorùbá. For instance, where standard Yorùbá optionally deletes the consonant of the negation **kò**, Mòbà permits the full form of **kè**. The use of negation marker **rì** in Mòbà requires that **àì**, which some Yorùbá linguists believe is a unitary morpheme, be analyzed as two distinct morphemes.

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