



The Philological and Morpho-Semantic Analysis of “Òranyàn”, “Àjèsára” and “Òmólúàbí”

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Abstract. Studies have shown that a lots of modifications and changes occurring in the Yorùbá language in the course of history. Some of the basic needed linguistics information have therefore lost in transition in diachronic overview of Yorùbá Studies. This paper uses grammaticalization theory and descriptive analysis to highlight the basic morpho-syntactic decomposition of three derived nouns viz: “Òranyàn, Àjèsára” and “Òmólúàbí”. Adopting the four major parameters proposed by Bernd and Heiko (2012) as in: Extension, Desemanticization, Decategorialization and Erosion, the study argued that the basic intuitive knowledge in the memory of many Yoruba speakers seems erroneous. Our findings revealed that the three (3) words under the study –“Òranyàn, Àjèsára” and “Òmólúàbí” have the basic morpho-syntactic formation in the following sequences as in: (i) oranyàn “òran yíyàn”, (ii) “Àjèsára – À-je-sé-ara” and (iii) “Òmólúàbí – Òmò-o-ní-ìwà ìbilè”. Also, “oran yíyàn” which basically simply means “something one has an option for” has been accorded a new meaning as in: “obligatory matter”. The paper therefore aimed at correcting the age-longed misconception and misinterpretation of the three words. We believe further studies could be done to challenge some erroneous intuitive knowhow of the basic formation of some other Yorùbá words in the contemporary usage.

Keywords: Psycho-linguistic intuition, etymo-semantic, grammaticalisation, desemanticization, decategorisation, erosion.

1. Introduction

It is evident that a lot of modifications and changes do occur to language in the course of history. This, of course, affects all the linguistic tiers in the

contemporary usage of Yorùbá language. Yorùbá linguists do not attempt to match the morpho-semantic analysis of the literary established positions on the “Òranyàn, Àjèsára” and “Òmólúàbí” in the underlying formation with the contemporary semantic interpretation in the phonetic level. This paper tries to look into the basic morphological formation of the aforesaid words and identifies the need to pronounce them correctly. For example, many scholars in Yorùbá decompose “Òmólúàbí” as “Òmò ti Olú iwà bí” (the child that Olú iwà “the creator” gives birth to) – tracing the source of their morphological decomposition to Ifá text. However, there are enough evidence to debunk such an agedlonged morphological misconception, as will be fully explained hereunder in this paper. The cases of “Òranyàn” and “Àjèsára” emerged on the course of my Ph.D. Thesis writing Adékúnlé, (2018) when I tried to intimate my supervisor of the need to correct the wrong established morphological decomposition positions. I was therefore advised to present a paper on the new morpho-semantic analysis of “Àjèsára and Òranyàn” after the completion of my Ph.D. in 2018. Guided by the expansive explanations that are needed to drive home our position convincingly, we decide to adopt descriptive grammar of Chomskyan theories, which allows the impact of the intuitive knowledge of the native speakers of any language in explaining some linguistic puzzlings via the basic knowledge of the grammar of the language. The native speaker competence has caused many changes in the presentation and analysis of Chomskyan theories right from the generative model to the minimalist programme. This intuitive knowhow of the native speakers allows psycho-linguistic modeling of different transformations in Chomskyan theories. Also, the paper uses grammaticalisation theory as proposed and expanded by Traugott (2012)

and Bernd and Heiko (2012) to discuss the lexico-semantic interpretation of the three words – “Òranyàn, Àjèsára” and Òmólúábí”. Adoption of descriptive grammar in this paper, allows us to delve into philology and etymology of these words: “Òranyàn, Àjèsára and Òmólúábí” distinctively and sequentially in this study. We shall like to follow this order in our explanations for certain reasons and clarity purpose.

2. Analysis

2.1 Òranyàn

This word entered into the Yorùbá lexicon sometimes around late 1960's. According to Elder Àrẹ̀mú Fólórúnṣọ (during interview on 4th of May, 2017), the word basically was “Òràn yíyàn”. The word at its inception was a comic noun phrase from a sentence: “Dandan ni owó orí, òràn yíyàn ní asọ ìbora” (Tax payment is obligatory; having or possessing cloth to cover oneself in the night is optional). The contextual implication of such a psychological thought is that the Yorùbá believes and tradition eulogies the significance of “Asọ Ìbora” (the covering cloth at night), the issue of tax payment during the colonial period in our big cities, most especially, Ìbàdàn, becomes much more important than any other things in which “Asọ Ìbora” is inclusive. Based on this social notion around “Òjà-Òba, Bẹ̀rẹ̀, Mòlété” areas in Ìbàdàn at that time, people jokingly warned their friends and relations to avoid passing by along Mápó axis to avoid being detained by “Òyìnbó Ajélè” (British Tax Officer). Hence, they use to make such a statement as in:

Òrẹ̀, o jẹ́ má gba àdúgbò Mápó kojá. Àwọn ajélè n bẹ̀ nìbẹ̀ tí yòd sọkọ́ fún ọ. Dandan ni owó orí nìlẹ̀ Ìbàdàn bá yí, òràn yíyàn mò lasọ ìbora.

(Friend, you should try to avoid passing along Mápó. The British Tax Officers are there hunting to detain you. Payment of Tax is obligatory in Ìbàdàn community presently, even, much more important than procuring covering cloth at night).

At that time, the headquarters of the British Tax Officers in Ìbàdàn was at Mápó. No defaulter of tax payment can pass through the Mápó axis without being apprehended and convicted by the British Tax Collector Officers in Mápó Area. The British Tax Collector Officers used to inflict dehumanized punishments for any culprit against tax payment. They can be delayed for hours, brutalized thorough beating and flogging as well imprisoned for few days. The inferences we deduce from the latest except is that the basic meaning of “òràn yíyàn” which eventually grammaticalised into “Òranyàn” through a

lots of transformation and modification, as in. “Òràn yíyàn → Òràn – í – yàn → Òràn – án – yàn → Òranyàn”, have been forgotten. Yule (2010: 67) attributes lexical modification to the occurrence of phonological processes, such as: deletion, assimilation, vowel epenthesis and vowel harmony. The etymosemantic interpretation of “Òranyàn” in the diachronic study of Yorùbá language is optionality – something that is not obligatory, it depends on man's choice. Therefore, the word “Òranyàn” should be used to remind man of opportunity to make a choice of an action between or among two or more options

However, the semantic interpretation in the contemporary usage of “Òranyàn” means that man has to observe certain thing obligatorily as reflected in the following contemporary excerpts:

i. “Òranyàn” ni fún àwọn ọdọ láti ẹ̀ igbéyàwó (it is compulsory for the youths to marry)

ii. “Òranyàn” ni ó jẹ́ fún àwọn ọ̀bí láti ran àwọn ọmọ wọn lọ si ilé-iwé nítorí ojó ọ̀là (it is compulsory for the parents to send their children to school to incur better future).

Evidence abound that “Òranyàn” is even more productive in usage as “obligatory than ‘Dandan’ “which has the basic interpretation” in the contemporary statements among the Yorùbá. “Òranyàn” is mostly use by the Yorùbá literary writers or authors. Our major concern on “Òranyàn” in this paper is that a different meaning has been assigned or designated to “Òranyàn” in the contemporary literature. Traugott (2012: 20) hints that language change serves as the basis for grammaticalization theory. She summarizes her submissions on grammaticalization in the following definition of the term as thus:

Grammaticalization theory is concerned with regularities in language use as they can be observed in spoken and written linguistic discourse on the one hand and in language change on the other.

Guided by this observation, it is evident that irregularity has set in via the contemporary usage of “Òranyàn” in the contemporary conversations. It is also apparent that the four major parameters listed in the works of Bernd and Heiko (2012 : 401 – 423) convincingly account for the process of grammaticalization of “Òranyàn” as a lexicon in Yorùbá language as follow:

2. i. Extension i.e. the rise of new grammatical meanings; when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts (context – induced reinterpretation) “Òranyàn” has rise to obtain new grammatical meaning (that is from being “optional to obligatory”.

ii. Desemanticization (or semantic bleaching) i.e. loss (or generalization) in meaning content. The basic meaning of “*Òranyàn*” is completely eroding. The basic meaning has been twisted to another connotation entirely in usage.

iii. Decategorialization i.e. loss in morphosyntactic properties. “*Òràn yiyàn*” which was the basic formation is noun phrase with “*òràn*” as the head but “*Òranyàn*” stands for Noun phrase as well as the head of the phrase.

iv. Erosion (phonetic reduction) i.e. loss in phonetic substance.

Phonologically “*Òràn yiyàn*” which have four basic syllabic structure is phonetically is hereby reduced to three syllables. The four latest parameters vividly describe the transformational process which through “*Òràn yiyàn*” changes to “*Òranyàn*” in the contemporary usage. Some phonological processes such as deletion, assimilation and compounding (phono-morphological processes) were duly involved in the transformational processes that grammaticalized into “*Òranyàn*” in the contemporary usage. Based on the foregoing explanations via grammaticalization theory in the works of Traugott (2012), and Bernd and Heiko (2012), it is evident that “*Òranyàn*” enters into Yorùbá lexicology through grammaticalization in the diachronic overview.

2.2 Àjẹsára

“*Àjẹsára*” is one of the basic lexicon in Yorùbá language which has turned to be expanded in usage during colonial and post-colonial era most especially in the health sector. It was a word frequent among the herbalists (Babalówo) and traditional medicine man (Oníṣẹ̀gùn). Without minding the morphological decomposition, the aforementioned professional people used the word “*Àjẹsára*” for medical incisions, herbal substance, herbs and concoctions meant to prevent the body against any bad occurrence that may be inflicted on the person by enemies. It serves as personal traditional immunization for people that took it. So that when enemies attempt to inflict evil, the immunization will protect the people that have “*Àjẹsára*”.

Ordinarily, to the best of our knowledge, scholars have not attempted to decompose “*Àjẹsára*” morphologically, despite being known that it is polymorphemic word. The only established claim of many Yorùbá linguists is that “*Àjẹsára*” is a polymorphemic word derive from a simple sentence – “*Àjẹ sí ára*” simply translates as “something we eat into the body or something that enters into our body”. It should be noted however that every items of food and drinks are expected to be entering into the body

for nutrition and body edification. That is, every food or drink that are taken should be tagged as “*Àjẹsára*”.

However, “*Àjẹsára*”, in its contextual meaning, in the present use, (mostly in health section), connotes something that enters into our body for prevention against specific malnutrition ailment. “*Àjẹsára*” is meant to prevent some diseases or infection from entering into our body system. Guided by this psycho-linguistic intuition, the word “*Àjẹsára*” ought to be decomposed morphologically as “*Àjẹ sé ara*”. That is, the verbal element in the basic statement should be “*sé*” (prevent or protect) not “*sí*” (enter or inject) as previously connotes in the native intuition. Adéwoḷé (2014 : 69) defines *sé* as

3 “*Sé*” (i) to block; “*wón sé fẹ̀rẹ̀sẹ̀ nàà*”

(They locked the window)...

There are few examples of noun that are formed from “*sé*” as reflected in Adékúnlé (2018 and 2020a) as in:

4 (i) {è-} + *sé* → *èsé* (blocking in the hole of rabbit to prevent external incursion).

(ii) {à-} + *sé* → *àsé* (unintelligible word).

(iii) {ò-} + *sé* → *òsé* (sign of regret / hiss).

(iv) {i-} + *sé* + *ilé* → *ìṣélé* (act of reduction of freedom).

The derived nouns in examples 4i – iv occur in sequence order in the following sentences;

5 (i) *Esé pọ̀ nínú ihò òkété nàà* (Many blockings were inside the hole of the rabbit).

(ii) *Asé pọ̀ nínú òrò ọ̀kúnrin yí* (This man speech is full of unintelligible words).

(iii) *Òsé ni yóò gbẹ̀yìn òrò nàà* (The matter will turn to regret).

(iv) *Aṣẹ ìṣélé tí ìjọba pa yóò parí ní ọ̀la* (The restrictional order which government ordered will end tomorrow).

Based on the aforestated examples, “*sé*” has a basic negative semantic interpretation. This claim is self-evident when the nouns that contain “*sé*”, as enumerated in examples 4^{i-iv}, are used with negator in simple sentences as follow:

6 (i) *Emi “kì í” sọ àṣé* (I always speak intelligible word)

(ii) *Òṣé “kò” ni gbẹ̀yìn igbẹ̀sẹ̀ nàà* (Our action will be prosperous)

(iii) “*Kò*” *sí ìṣélé fún àwa ní ilú yí* (We have freedom of movement in this town).

(iv) “*kò*” *sí àṣẹ ìṣélé mó* (the restrictional order has stooped)

The inferences we are trying to make from the latest statements is that the negator (*kò*/*kì* *i*) does not make those statement to be negated. Adékúnlé (2020b) identifies this criterion as one of the features of Nouns with negative verb basic formation. Bamgbose (1990) informs that when a negator is inserted into

the structure of simple sentence, it usually change the meaning of the sentence to negative sentence as reflected in the following examples;

7 (i) Olú “kò” wá (Olu didn’t come)

(ii) Kẹmi “kì í” sùn ní alẹ (Kẹmi do not sleep in the night)

(iii) Aláso “kò” gba owó (The cloth seller did not accept money or price)

(iv) Ògá wa kì í gba àbẹ̀tẹ̀lẹ̀ (Our boss do not take bribe)

(v) Òṣẹ̀ “kò” tì í parí (The week has not end)

The foregoing sentences in examples 7^{i-v} are negative statements. Arising from all these aforesaid explanations therefore, it is evident that “Àjẹsára” should be morphologically decomposed as “Àjẹ sé ara” not “Àjẹ sí ara”.

2.2.1 Theoretical Explanation of “Àjẹsára”

Arising from examples 6ⁱ⁻ⁱⁱⁱ and 7^{i-iv}, it is evident that “Àjẹsára” should be morphologically decomposed as “Àjẹ sé ara” not “Àjẹ sí ara”. The parameters of Grammaticalization as enumerated in Bernd and Heiko (2012: 401 – 423) can be summarise as follow:

- i. Extension i.e. the rise of new grammatical meanings; when linguistic expressions are extended to form or create new context. (Context – induced reinterpretation).
- ii. Desemanticization (or semantic bleaching) i.e. loss (or generalization) in meaning of content.
- iii. Decategorialization i.e. loss in morphosyntatic properties.
- iv. Erosion (phonetic reduction) i.e. loss in phonetic substance.

The first two aforesaid parameters are duly involved in the psycho-linguistic transformational explanations that guided the misrepresentation of the basic intuition of “Àjẹ sé ara” which turns to be “Àjẹ sí ara” in the modern contemporary usage. That is “Àjẹ sé ara” has turned to be misconstrued as “Àjẹ sí ara”. “Àjẹ sí ara” therefore becomes the new grammatical meaning. Only psycholinguistics intuition can help to retrace the basic morphological properties of the compound word “Àjẹsára” in the Yorùbá lexicography. This of course, serves as “context-induced reinterpretation” as enumerated in Bernd and Heiko (2012).

Furthermore, there is verb desemanticization in the process of formation of “Àjẹsára”. The semantic bleaching (as noted by Bernd and Heiko [Ibid]) has changed “sé” to “sí” in the contemporary basic intuition of many speakers of Yoruba language. That is “ṣé” which means “blocking” is misinterpreted as “sí” which literally means “enter into”. Although,

“sé” and “sí” are basic verbs, but semantically different from each other. The difference between them can only be noted due to morphological decomposition of “Àjẹsára”. Decategorialization and Erosion do not occur on the psycholinguistic clarifications as explained in this sub-section. The two parameters remain literally inactive in the transformation process of “Àjẹsára”.

Now we wish to expand upon the ambiguities that surround the established position on the basic morphological formation of “Ọmọlúàbí”.

2.3. The Morpho-Semantic Analysis of the Concept of “Ọmọlúàbí”

Ajibade, G. O. (2013) discusses the concept of “Ọmọlúàbí” using the literary perspective of every Yorùbá child who behaves himself or herself in line with the acceptable norms of Yorùbá culture. His discussion supports the age longed perception that “Ọmọlúàbí” means “Ọmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí”. He cited many examples of good character as portray in *Qdunjo’s Akójopò Ewì Aládùn*. He argued that “Ọmọlúàbí” is any child that God endows with good virtues. To our own assessment, the piece is good and literally acceptable. However, this study looks into the basic morpho-semantic analysis of “Ọmọlúàbí” against the backdrop of the age-longed established position of “Ọmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí”. This paper tries to consider the etymology and culture of “Ọmọlúàbí” as one of the two principal aspects of language functions as informs in Ogunwale (2016:19) as in:

...that every language has two aspects:

One, its role as an agent that enables us to communicate with one another in our struggle to establish different factors for our existence and struggles. The other aspect of language function is its role as a carrier of history and culture built into the process of communication over the ages.

Also Ogunwale (2013) hints on the highlights of dynamics that have effect on Yorùbá Personal Names. He highlight some evidence of language change which have affected the pronunciation of Yorùbá Personal Names. Taking cognizance of these aforesaid psycho-linguistic claims, this paper expresses some elements of incoherence in the assumption that “Ọmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí” (literarily the child that is born by ‘Olú-ìwà’) is the “Ọmọlúàbí”. The Yorùbá refer to God as ‘Olú-ìwà’, Metaphorically, “Ọmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí” means – a child that is well created by God. Such a child is blessed to behave very well in the society.

2.3.1 Reasons for our Skepticism with the Age-Longed Basic Morphological Intuition on “Qmólúàbí”

The under listed reasons weakened the age-longed basic morphological intuition that “Qmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí” is the basic formation of “Qmólúàbí” as in:

- i. God creates every child either bad or good behaved.
- ii. Differs attitude of the concept of “Qmólúàbí” prevail in different ethnics or tribal groups.
- iii. The concept “Qmólúàbí” is dynamic in the course of history and cultural development. Our arguments and discussions would be centred towards the three (3) aforestated reasons.

2.3.2 Argument and Discussions on “Qmólúàbí”

First and foremost, since it is generally accepted that God creates everybody, it is therefore seems improper to attribute special creativity status to few people we designate as “Qmólúàbí”. Also, if the attribute of “Qmólúàbí” is basically ascribes to some few well-behaved people then, there would have been generally acceptable norms in the universe to qualify people as “Qmólúàbí” without minding different ethnic or country. Our findings have shown that the acceptable norms that qualify people to be “Qmólúàbí” differ from one ethnic group to another in the same country. For instance, a tribe called Irigire speaking Regime language from Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in the Bassa Local Government in the Western Part of Jos practice polyandry. Based on this, a woman can decide to marry many husbands and procure children for each man as she wants. Although, this practice was abolished in 1968 by their Leasing Council but before 1968, it was accepted as an acceptable norms for their “Qmólúàbí” woman.

Also, the Mandi tribe in Bangladesh, in the olden days allow bestowment of daughter to her biological father in marriage from the tender age of 2 – 3 years. At that particular period, the Mandi tribe did not consider it wrong for father to marry his daughter. Any father that marries his daughter may be called an “Qmólúàbí”. The aforestated examples were never accepted as approved norms for “Qmólúàbí” in the course of history among the Yorùbá people (just to mentioned few examples).

Based on the foregoing examples, it is evident that the acceptable virtues that make an “Qmólúàbí” are dynamic in the course of history and cultural development. Each ethnic has its acceptable virtues embedded in their customs and traditions. Customs and traditions of each tribe group shapes an

individual’s way of life to the acceptable virtues that qualify individual to become “Qmólúàbí”. For instance, an “Qmólúàbí” young boy in eastern part of Nigeria “Igbo” do not need to prostrate as a sign of respect, to greet his parent or elderly one. However, the Yorùbá in the south west will expect an “Qmólúàbí” boy to greet his parents or elderly person with prostration. Sequel to these explanations, “Qmólúàbí” as a nomenclature is design for any child or person that adhere strictly to the acceptable norms of the culture and tradition of its immediate society or tribe. The Yorùbá refers to ethnic group as “ìbílẹ̀”. Therefore, we would succinctly conclude that “Qmólúàbí” is a coined name from “Qmọ-ó-ní-ùwà/ìwà-ìbílẹ̀”.

“Qmọ-o-ní-ùwà-ìbílẹ̀” could be proved as the basic formation of “Qmólúàbí” through grammaticalisation process as exemplified in the works of Trangott (2012), and Bernd and Heiko (2012).

2.3.3 Theoretical Explanation of Grammaticalization of Qmọ-ó-ní-ìwà-ìbílẹ̀ (the child that has approved virtues of tis immediate environment).

The four parameters of grammaticalisation as expanded by Bernd and Heiko (2012:401-423) reiteratively metioned in this study, as in; extension, desemanticization, decategorilisation and erosion were duly involved in the transformation processes that produce “qmólúwàbí”. First and foremost, desemanticization occurs when “qmólúwàbí” was translated to be (qmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí). ‘Olú iwà’ that is ‘God’, creates every human being, how could we erroneously narrowed the tag “qmọ-tí-olú-ìwà-bí” to only good virtue people in the society; that results into desemanticization-semantic bleaching, which is one of the four main parameters in grammaticalization theory.

Furthermore, the occurrence of semantic bleaching is advently leads to extension,-the rise of new grammatical meaning; The basic interpretation has been twisted and restricted. The word “qmólúwàbí” surfers “context induced reinterpretation”. Evidently, decategorilization-loss in morphosyntatic properties permeates in the process. That is qmọ-o-ní-ùwà-ìbílẹ̀ qmọ-ní-ùwà-ìbílẹ̀. Which means is ‘o’ is deleted. The next step is compounding; through compounding which initially produces “omo-ni-iwa-ibile (see Owolabi 2011), the word changes to “qmólúwà-ìbílẹ̀”, “Ìbílẹ̀” is chipping to “bí” (Yule 2010:56). The compounding of “qmólúwà + bí” produces “qmólúàbí/qmólúwàbí”. Notice that, Bamgbose (1990:68) hints that some Yorùbá dialects use ‘uwa’

(character) while standard Yorùbá uses “iwà” (character). Guided by the latest explanation, it shows that “erosion”-phonetic reduction, occur in the transformation processes. For instance ‘o’ is deleted, while ‘omọ-o-ní-iwà-ìbílẹ̀’ which basically contains nine (09) syllables is reduced to “omọ̀lúàbí/omọ̀lúwàbí” which has five (05) syllables.

3. Summary and Conclusions

This paper tries to look into the basic formation of three derived Norms “Òranyàn, Àjẹsára and Omọ̀lúàbí” in Yorùbá language. These three words are derived through a lots of transformational processes. The paper explained the transformational processes that permeate in the process through grammaticalisation theory as proposed in the works of Trangoth (2012) and Bernd and Heiko (2012). Most especially, we adopted the four parameters listed in Bernd and Heiko (2012) as in: Extension, Desemanticization, Decategorisation and Erosion to expand upon the basic morpho syntactic processes through which “Oranyàn, Àjẹsára” and “Omọ̀lúàbí” emerged. The study also uses psycho-linguistics intuitive knowledge to reject the wrong basic intuitive notion about the three lexical items; Our findings revealed that “À-jẹ-sé-ara” seems more appropriate to be the basic formation of “Àjẹsára” not “À-jẹ-sí-ara” as it is erroneously established in the mind of some Yorùbá native speaker. Also, it is claimed in this paper that “Òran yiyàn” (Noun phrase) grammaticalises into “Òranyàn” and that the basic semantic intuition which means “a matter of choice” has turned to be interpreted as “an obligatory”. Desemanticization has affected the basic interpretation. The paper rejects the age-longed basic decomposition of “Omọ̀lúàbí” as “Omọ-tí-olú-iwà-bí”, instead, we present “Omọ-o-ní-ùwà-ìbílẹ̀” as the basic morpho-syntactic component of “Omọ̀lúàbí”. We believe this paper has contributed in no means to the linguistic overview Yorùbá studies.

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