

**ÀSÀ:
UNIOSUN
JOURNAL
OF
HUMANISTIC
AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**



**ASA: UNIOSUN JOURNAL OF HUMANISTIC AND DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES**

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1, JULY, 2026

ISSN: 2814-0419

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THE STATUS OF ÒWÓRÒ: A DIALECT OF YORÙBÁ

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Abstract

The spark for this study came from a question by a student in my ‘Dialects of Yorùbá’ course: Is Òwóró a Yorùbá dialect? Their curiosity drove me to explore Òwóró place in the Yorùbá linguistic landscape, a speech variety in Lókója Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, to determine its classification as a dialect of Yorùbá. The study aims to examine the syntactic nature of Òwóró, contributing to its preservation and documentation. It further explores the influence of neighbouring languages on Òwóró. The study is grounded in dialectology, sociolinguistics, language contact, and Principles and Parameters theory, which guide the analysis of structural and social features of the variety. Using field-based data collection, including elicitation from native speakers, comparative phonological and lexical analysis, and sociolinguistic observation, the study provides comprehensive insight into the variety. Findings demonstrate that Òwóró, despite being recognized as a dialect of Yorùbá with approximately 80% lexical similarity, has received inadequate scholarly attention and exhibits some unique lexical patterns. It maintainscore Yoruba grammatical structures, operating with a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) word order, confirming its status as a Yorùbá dialect. The study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical documentation of Òwóró, clarifying its relationship within the Yorùbá dialect continuum, and informing efforts in dialect promotion and sociolinguistic research.

Keywords: Dialect, Language documentation, Language preservation, Òwóró

Introduction

Scholars have pointed out the relevance of studying regional dialects with particular reference to the Yorùbá language as studying the regional dialects of the language gives the opportunity of documenting them for posterity (Awóbùlúyì 1992. P. 35). It also gives the opportunity of having a clearer understanding of obscure issues in the standard dialect. The scholar puts it thus:

Dialects deserved to be studied in their own right and thereby preserved in written record for posterity. And when, in addition to being what they are, they have the

further potential of helping to clarify issues or points that are likely otherwise to remain obscure in the standard variety of the language.

Awóbùlúyí's work highlighted the importance of studying Yorùbá dialects, particularly Ọwọ̀rọ̀, which lacks a written orthography. Despite sharing around 80% of lexical items with standard Yorùbá, the dialect's status has been questioned. This study aims to affirm Ọwọ̀rọ̀' s classification as a Yorùbá dialect, influenced by neighboring languages like Ebira Koto, Basange and Nupe. Akińkùnbé (1976), Oyèláràn (1976), Awóbùlúyì (1998), Ajónḡólò (2005). Using the Principle and Parameter Theory (Chomsky 1981), the study analyzes data demonstrating the impact of neighboring communities like Ebira Koto on Ọwọ̀rọ̀, evident in borrowed words like 'àṅgùlú' (vulture), 'gújíyá' (groundnut), 'dàṅgọ' (duck), 'ónu' (salt). The findings support the idea that language borrowing contribute to linguistic development. The study confirms Ọwọ̀rọ̀' s status as a Yorùbá dialect based on mutual intelligibility, SVO word order, tone system, and syntactic markers similar to standard Yorùbá. Additionally, Ọwọ̀rọ̀ exhibits syntactic re-ordering moving focused element to the periphery. These factors will be discussed in detail to support the scholarly classification of Ọwọ̀rọ̀ as a Yorùbá dialect.

Theoretical Framework

Our analysis draws on Dialectology, Sociolinguistics, Language Contact, and Principles and Parameters theories.

Dialectology Theory refers to the body of principles and frameworks within Dialectology that explain how and why language varies across different regions, social groups, and contexts. Sociolinguistic Theory refers to the set of principles and frameworks within Sociolinguistics that explain how language use varies according to social factors and how language both shapes and is shaped by society. Language Contact Theory refers to the set of principles that explain what happens when speakers of different languages or dialects interact regularly, leading to influence, borrowing, and structural changes in their languages. Language contact occurs when two or more linguistic groups interact through trade, migration, intermarriage, education, or politics, resulting in changes in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Principles and Parameters Theory is a framework within Generative Grammar that explains how all human languages share common underlying rules (principles) while differing in specific settings (Chomsky 1991, Haegeman 1991).

With these theories, the study analyzes data demonstrating the impact of neighboring communities like Ebira Koto on Ọwọ̀rọ̀, evident in borrowed words like 'àṅgùlú' (vulture), 'gújíyá' (groundnut), 'dàṅgọ' (duck), 'ónu' (salt) as evident in the analysis of this study.

Data Collection

The study adopts a qualitative research approach aimed at exploring and analyzing the status and realization of marker at the syntactic level of Òwòrò dialect. The research collects, analyses and interpret the data on the status of the Òwòrò dialect. The data for the research will be collected from Karara, the community in the heart of Òwòrò in Kogí State. The choice of the community is borne out of the fact that Karara is a remote area and the speech form of the people in the community has not been influenced by the standard dialect of Yorùbá or by other languages spoken in Kogí state. The researcher selected 5 language consultants who are between the ages of 50-70s. The choice of the age range was borne out of the fact that elderly people use their speech form frequently and have good mastery of it. The sentences were dictated to the speakers in standard Yorùbá, and the equivalent version of each sentence in Òwòrò from the speakers were recorded both in long hand and digital recorders to enhance proper interpretation and ease of reference

Studies in Yorùbá Dialectology

Dialectology, obviously, is the study of dialect and dialects (Chambers and Trudgill 1984). Pei (1966:68) refers to a dialect as:

A specific branch or form of a language spoken in a given geographical area differing sufficiently from the official standard or literary form of the language in one or the levels of the language (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and idiomatic use of words) to be viewed as a distinct entity, yet not sufficiently different from other dialects of the language to be regarded as a separate language.

Chambers and Trudgill (1984:1) also agree that dialects can be regarded as subdivision of a particular language. The definitions given by scholars have opened our mind to understand their views about what is 'dialect', and more importantly that it is erroneous to refer to a dialect as 'impure' or incorrect form of the standard form of language. Various scholars have carried out research work on different and interesting topics on dialects of Yorùbá both at phonological and syntactic levels. Those earlier studies affirmed the usefulness of dialectological studies as it was clearly stated in Awóbùlúyì (1992). It is not an overstatement to add here that studies in Yorùbá dialect have provided solution to some of the issues that have generated argument in the grammar of the Standard dialect. In the light of this, there are various linguists who have worked on grammar and other areas of Yorùbá dialects such as Délàṅò (1958), Akíṅkùṅbẹ́ (1976), Adétùgbò (1967, 1982), Oyèláràn (1976), Chamber and Trudgill (1984), Fresco (1970), Awóbùlúyì (1992,) to mention a few.

On the classification of Yorùbá dialects into different groups, Délàṅò's (1958) work on the classification was based mainly on the names of the dialects in Yorùbá.

His classification goes thus:

- a. Èko-Àwóri Ègbádò
- b. Ègbá-Ìjẹ̀bú Rẹ̀mọ̀
- c. Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde-Ìjẹ̀bú-Rẹ̀mọ̀-Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó-Ìkálẹ̀ (Òkìkìpupa)
- d. Ọ̀yọ̀-Ìbàdàn
- e. Ifẹ̀-Ìjẹ̀sà
- f. Ìjẹ̀sà-Èkìtì
- g. Onḍó-Òkìtìpupa
- h. Ọ̀wọ̀
- i. Itsekiri
- j. Bàdàgìrì-Àjàsẹ̀

Considering the classification of Délànò (1958) above, it is observed that the dialects found in group **b,c,g** and **h** are within the same geographical area of the Southeast Yorùbá (SEY), while **e** and **f** are in the Central Yorùbá (CY). The dialects in group **a** and **e** belong to the Southwest (SWY). The last group **j** was classified among the Southwest (SWY). It is in group **i** that we have the Itsekiri standing in isolation from other groups. Another very important observation from the classification above is that some dialects of Yorùbá were left out from the group especially the Northeast Yorùbá (NEY) such as Ìjùmú, Ìyàgbà, Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ and Owé. The reason for this is not far from the fact that Délànò did not consider the geographical area of those dialects in his grouping. Classification through geographical area criterion would have given him the opportunity to capture all those dialects

On the classification of Yorùbá dialect done by Adétùgbó (1967, 1982), classified into the following three groups:

- Northwest Yorùbá (NWY) includes Ọ̀yọ̀, Ìbàdàn, Ọ̀sun, Ègbá, Ọ̀gbómọ̀sọ̀, Šakí, Ìşeyìn
- Southeast Yorùbá (SEY) contains Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìkálẹ̀, Onḍó, Ọ̀wọ̀, Ọ̀kìtìpupa, Àkókó.
- Central Yorùbá (CY) are; Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà and Èkìtì.

Akínkùnbé (1976) work on Yorùbá dialects and their groupings are on Ìlájẹ̀, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìjọ̀-Àpọ̀ì, Ìjẹ̀sà, Irùn, Ukare (Ìkàré), Yàgbà, Gbẹ̀dẹ̀, Ìjùmú, Ikire, Tsabẹ̀, Ifẹ̀ (Togo) and SY. Her classifications are:

Northeast Yorùbá (NEY): Yàgbà, Ìjùmú, Ikiri, Gbẹ̀dẹ̀, Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀, Ọ̀wọ̀.

- Southwest Yorùbá (SWY): Tsabẹ̀, Ifẹ̀ (Togo), Kétu.
- Central Yorùbá (CY): Ìjẹ̀sà, Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Èkìtì, Mọ̀bà.
- Southeast Yorùbá (SEY): Onḍó, Ọ̀wọ̀, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlájẹ̀.
- Northwest Yorùbá (NWY): Ọ̀yọ̀, Ègbá, Ọ̀sun, Ìbọ̀lọ̀, Àwóri.

In Oyèlárán (1976), Yorùbá dialects are classified into four groups namely:

- Northwest Yorùbá (NWY): Ọ̀yọ̀, Ìbàdàn, Ègbá, Sakí, Ifẹ̀-Togo Ìdàisà, Ijío, Ohori-Ifohin, Manigiri
- Southeast Yorùbá (SEY): Onḍó, Ọ̀wọ̀, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlájẹ̀.
- Central Yorùbá (CY): Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì.

- Northeast Yorùbá (NEY): Ìgbómìnà, Kàkàndà, Ìgbọ̀lọ, Búnú, Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀, Owé, Ègbè, Ìjùmú
Awóbùlúyì (1998) classifies Yorùbá dialects into five groups, based on the geographical area of each of the dialects spoken.
- Northwest Yorùbá (NWY): Èkó, Àwọ̀rì, Ègbádò, Ọ̀yó, Ọ̀ṣun, Òn̄kò, Ìbòlò, Ìgbómìnà
- Northeast Yorùbá (NEY): Iyàgbà, Ìjùmú, Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀, Owé
- Central Yorùbá (CY): Ifè, Ìjèsà, Èkìtì, Mòbà
- Southwest Yorùbá (SWY): Sààbè-Kétu (Ànàgò), Ifè (Tógò)
- Southeast Yorùbá (SEY): Ègbá, Ìjèbú, Ìlájẹ, Ìkálẹ̀, On̄dó, Ọ̀wò, Ọ̀bà-Ìkàré

Linguists have shown that language reflects different structures. A cursory look at the various dialectal grouping done by scholars as enumerated above shows that the differences among the dialects, especially the dialect of Yorùbá, can be found at phonological and syntactic levels. Awóbùlúyì (1998) did not only work on the grouping of the Yorùbá dialects, he went further to analyze the grammar of the grouped dialects. He discussed extensively on the dialects of Yorùbá starting from their names and their geographical areas. He also discussed about what the study of the dialects has thought us about the Standard Yorùbá. As a linguist, he analyzed the grammar of these dialects by comparing them with one another in order to show their linguistic variations and similarities. For instance, in the Southeast Yorùbá, where we have Ègbá, Ìjèbú, Ìkálẹ̀, On̄dó, the nasal vowel /ɛ̃n/ is common in their words. It features in words like:

1. a. Ègbá: ijòrèn. (SY): ijó yèn → ‘that day’
b. Ìkálẹ̀: bẹnrèn-ẹn (SY): bẹ yèn → ‘like that’
c. Ọ̀wò: ọmakùnẹn. (SY): ọmọkùnrin → ‘male child’

It should be noted here that **iyen** is the only existing example of the manifestation of /ɛ̃n/ in Standard Yorùbá, /ɛ̃n/ is not attested in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect Awoláoyè, (2021). The Yorùbá language does not permit /u/ word initial. Awóbùlúyì (1998) in his findings reveals that all the dialects in the area with the exception of Ègbá permits /u/ word initial as against what operates in the standard Yorùbá. This same characteristic is also found in both Northeast Yorùbá (NEY) and Central Yorùbá (CY). The Northeast Yorùbá (NEY) is known for the use of consonant /h/ instead of /s/ used in the other dialects in words like:

2. a. Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀: ẹhìn (SY): ẹsẹ → ‘leg’
b. Ìjùmú: hùn (SY): sùn → ‘sleep’

Awóbùlúyì (1998.) further submits that structural ambiguity is identified in On̄dó, Ìlájẹ and Ìkálẹ̀ which does not exist in standard Yorùbá. It is the non-existence of such structural ambiguity that makes the monosyllabic low tone verbs change their tone from low to mid. For Example:

3. a. Mo fò díẹ̀ → ‘I jumped a little.’
b. Mo fo díẹ̀ → ‘I skipped some.’

In Onòdó, Ìkálẹ̀ and Ìlẹ̀jẹ̀ dialects where such structural ambiguity does not exist, the above pairs of semantically distinct utterances would be phonologically undifferentiated.

What one will hear is:

- c. Mo fò díẹ̀ → I jumped a little.
- d. Mo fò díẹ̀ → I skipped some

The speakers of the two dialects admit that in a situation like the two utterances above, they are forced to rely solely on contextual cues for distinguishing between the intended meanings of pairs of utterances of these kinds (Adétùgbó 1971, Shada 1988).

The issue on determining the syntactic status of focus construction in the standard Yorùbá also came up here. Awóbùlúyì (1998b) affirms that, “is not whether or not they display the features of sentences at all, but whether they behave like noun phrase also”. It said that such constructions regularly function as complement for the verb ‘*ṣe*’ as

- 6. a. Kì í ṣe Olú ní ó pa ajá ọ̀ḍe ní oko
- b. ‘Olú isn’t the one that killed the hunter’s dog on the farm’

However, Bámgbósé (1990) disagrees with the claim that focus construction is a noun phrase as suggested by Awóbùlúyì (1998). He claims that it is a complete sentence because it gives a complete thought.

Another area of discussion on the influence of regional dialect on the standard dialect is on the issue of infinitive phrase. Infinitive phrase is the type of phrase that has two verbs, with a marker between them. It is the verb that follows the marker that is regarded as infinitive verb. Infinitive phrase makes use of the marker ‘to’ in a sentence like:

- 7. a. I want to go Mo fẹ́ ẹ́ lọ
- b. He wants to read Ó fẹ́ ẹ́ kàwé

The sources of infinitive marker in standard dialect had generated a lot of argument among the various linguists over the years. Crowther (1852), Bowen (1858), Bámgbósé (1975), Awóyalé (1983), all agreed that there is infinitive phrase in standard dialect. They also unanimously agreed that there is always a marker linking the two verbs. The high tone syllable (HTS) linking the two verbs are regarded as the infinitive marker. For Examples:

- 8. a. Ọ̀jò fẹ́ é rò Rain wants to fall
- b. Aṣọ sòro ó fọ Cloth is hard to wash
- c. Èrù nira á gbé Load is difficult to carry

The above underlined high tone syllable is regarded as the infinitive markers. Bámgbósé (1975, (1990) states that an infinitive verb is that which has affix, and the affix has been referred to as infinitive marker. Bámgbóse (1975) submits that prefixization may occur between the marker and the verb that follows it to form a word like:

- 9. a. Mo fẹ́ ẹ́ -lọ I want to go
- b. Ó wá á -sùn He came to sleep

Linguists like Marantz (1984), Abíódún (2000), Awóyalé (1983) stressed that scholars like Crowther (1852) and Rowland (1954) were also of the opinion that the marker is derived from gerund through the deletion of the reduplicated consonant and assimilation between [í] and the vowel at the end of the verb in examples such as:

10. a. Ó pé lílọ → Ó pé í lọ → Ó pé é lọ He lates to go
 b. Ó dùn jíjẹ → Ó dùn í jẹ → Ó dùn ún jẹ It's sweet to eat

Linguists like Bowen (1958), Crowther (1852), Awóbúlúyì (1970, 1978) are of the opinion that /i/ is the marker in the deep structure. For Examples:

11. a. Ilé soro í kọ ilé soro ó kọ House is hard to build
 b. Òjò fẹ́ í rò òjò fẹ́ é rò It's about to rain

The truth in the examples above according to the scholars is that it is assimilation that brings about the feature which this marker has at the surface level. However, the linguist failed to explain the source of the /i/ as the basis of the infinitive marker. It was Awóyalé (1983) that explains vividly on /i/ as the basis of the infinitive verb marker. He explained that the marker has its source from the deep structure as /i/, meaning that the marker is not derived but takes the feature of the verb or noun preceding it by way of assimilation. For Examples:

12. a. Mo fẹ́ í lọ mo fẹ́ é lọ I want to go
 b. Ó fẹ́ í kú wón fẹ́ é kú He wants to die

To support this argument, Awóyalé (1983) stated that the marker also features in Kwa language which has relationship with Yorùbá language. He also mentioned other languages where this marker also features like Ìgbò, Ìgalà, Itsekiri, Efik e.tc. The tree diagram below further illustrates the deep structure of example (12a) above

Ó fẹ́ í kú

Akínbòládé (2005) affirmed that /i/ is the basis of infinitive verb marker in Mòbà dialect which is a sub-dialect of Èkìtì. This linguistic variant is identified from that of other Èkìtì dialect where the marker is identified in gerund. Let consider the following examples:

13. a. Uşé re í şe işé wù ú şe He likes to work
 b. Ọmọ nira í bí ọmọ nira á bí It is difficult to bear children
 c. Ulé re Adé í kọ ilé wu Adé é kọ Adé likes to build house

From the examples above, it is clear that /i/ is identified as the infinitive marker in Mòbà dialect and it feature independently as a syllable. This further gives a better understanding of the source of infinitive verb marker as earlier stated by Awóyalé (ibid).

Another interesting finding in the area of syntax is expressed in Fábùnmi (2013) where he examines the various morpho-phonological and syntactic realization of negative markers of sixteen Yorùbá dialects and compare them with the 'Standard Yorùbá'. The study reveals that some dialects of Yorùbá manifest two syllables of

similar segment sound as negative marker contrary to single syllable negative marker like **kò** instandard dialect. A good example as claim by Fábùnmi is in Oṇdó dialect where we have negative marker like **éè** depending on the form of vowel proceeding the NP as in the examples below:

14. a. Èlú wee éè tó
How 2s-much Neg sell
'How much are you not selling it'
- b. Aa mi éè yá
Body my Neg well
'I am not well'

The structure of relative clause in the dialects such as Oṇdó, Ìgbómìnà, Òmùò, Mòpà and standard Yorùbá are identical in the sense that the relativized items are moved to the initial position of the relative clause construction and also accompanied by the relative markers (Akintóyè (2014)). The only difference is that the forms of relative markers in the dialect are different from what is obtainable in the standard dialect. For instance, the relative clause marker **yíí** is found in Oṇdó and Ìgbómìnà dialects (Awoláoyè (2011), Akintóyè (2014)). The example in (17a-b) below is from Oṇdó dialect.

15. a. Olú bí ọma
Olú bears child
'Olú gives birth to a child'
- b. Olú yíí ó bí ọma
Olú Rel Rsp bear child
'Olú that gave birth to a child'

Yíí can be said to be a relative marker because it occupies the position that other relative markers such as **tí** in the standard dialect. The fact that **yíí** is a qualifier in the standard dialect shows the linguistic variations that exist between the standard dialect and the regional dialects of Yorùbá, whereas **yíí** as a qualifier takes the form of **íí** in Oṇdó dialect as in the examples below:

16. a. Ọma íí e jẹun
Child Qual Prog eat
'The child is eating'
- b. Ọma íí mo in in kọ
Child Qual know song sing.
'This child knows how to sing'

A close look at what have been said of various work in Yorùbá dialectology clearly shows that the studies in dialectology has increased our understanding on the linguistic variations and similarities at the phonological and syntactic levels in the dialects of Yorùbá. This further attests to the claim of Awóbúlúyì (1992), Olúmúyìwá (1994) as earlier discussed.

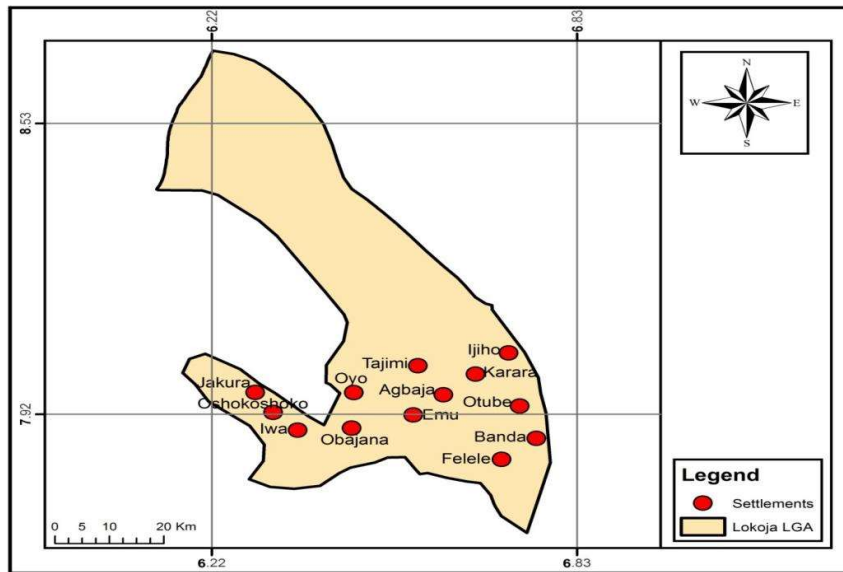
Ọwọ̀rọ̀ and its Speakers

The Ọwọ̀rọ̀ ethnic nationality represents a group of people around the Niger-Benue confluence. They speak a variety of Yorùbá dialect called Ọwọ̀rọ̀, the name by

which the people are also known. They are in Lókója Local Government Area of Kogi State. The research shows that a number of Ọwọ̀rọ̀ communities are on the Àgbajà Plateau. Among the towns and villages that speak Ọwọ̀rọ̀ dialect are: Àgbajà, Ọbajàná, Tájímù, Èmù, Jakùrá, Ọgbàbọ̀n, Ọ̀túnbẹ̀, Àdógbé, Okonobe, Igbónlá, Apomọ̀bà, Ijiho, Karara, Banda, Félẹ̀lẹ̀, Iwa, Oyo, Osokosoko (Ọláwuyì (1983),

Awoláoyè (2011), Àjàyí (2015)). See the figure 1 below:

Fig. 1:



Map of Lókója Local Government showing Ọwọ̀rọ̀ community. (Source: *Local Government Area of Kogi State*, Ọláwuyì, 1983)

Linguistically, Ọwọ̀rọ̀ is a dialect of Yorùbá (Oyèláràn (1976), Awóbùlúyì (1992), Adéníyì (2005), Ajónḡólò (2005)), similar to other dialects of Okun people that include Iyàgbà, Owé, Ijùmú, Bùnù in Kogí state. Virtually all Ọwọ̀rọ̀ speakers can fluently communicate in the standard dialect of Yorùbá. They can as well communicate to a greater extent with speakers of other Okun people. The truth is that Ọwọ̀rọ̀ and Okun are mutually intelligible. Apart from speaking Ọwọ̀rọ̀ dialect, those in the Eastern part like Àdajà, Igbónlá can also speak Igbirà Ọláwuyì, (1983), Awoláoyè, (2011). The reason for this cannot be far from the fact that Ọwọ̀rọ̀ people share boundaries with other people like: Nupé, Èbirà Kòtò, Bassange and Ìgalà. The various differences in the Ọwọ̀rọ̀ dialect and Standard Yorùbá could therefore be traced to borrowing from the aforementioned languages that share boundaries with Ọwọ̀rọ̀ people. Because they share boundaries, they share communal relationship in the area of commerce, culture, religion etc. The

following examples demonstrate the influence of other languages on Ọwọ̀rọ̀. We have the following words in Ọwọ̀rọ̀ and Èbìrà-Kòtò.

17.	Ọwọ̀rọ̀	Èbìrà-Kòtò	Standard Yorùbá	English
a	gújíyá	igúziyá	ẹ̀pà	groundnut
b	àlè mú	àlè mú	ọ̀sàn	orange
c	ẹ̀hìn	àhò	esẹ̀	leg
d	etọ̀	àtẹ̀	itọ̀	saliva
e	àpọ̀	apọ̀kọ̀	ata	pepper
f	ónu	ánú	iyọ̀	salt
g	wíjìyá	òrìjìyá	kànga	well
h	epín	epi	ẹ̀gú sí	mellon
i	hunwà	húsà	dára	good
j	ẹ̀dà	àdàbà	bàtà	shoe

The data in (17) above further prove the linguistic influence that the language of the neighboring communities may have on a particular language or dialect.

The Status of Ọwọ̀rọ̀ Dialect

From the generic relationship point of view and the facts of lexico-syntactic, this study treats Ọwọ̀rọ̀ doubtlessly a dialect of Yorùbá. It is clear that there are near eighty percent lexical matching between Ọwọ̀rọ̀ and Yorùbá. Such lexical items include noun, verb, preposition, conjunction etc.

Àdétùgbọ̀ (1987:207) refers to a dialect as “a subsystem within a language while a language is an aggregate of all the dialects within its specific area”. In this way, Yorùbá can be regarded as a language with different dialects.

Other linguists such as Chamber and Trudgill (1984:6), Awóbùlúyì (1998:1), Abíódún (2005) agree with the definition, that a dialect is “a sub-division or variant of a particular language that has a common characteristic and norms”. Yorùbá language is a language that has several dialects such as Ọ̀yọ̀, Ońdó, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkítì, Ọ̀wọ̀, Àkúrẹ̀, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlájẹ̀, Ifẹ̀, Ègbà, Ìjẹ̀bú, Àkókó, Owé, Yàgbà, Ìgbómìnà, Ìbòlò, Ìlòrin, Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ Adétùgbọ̀, (1967), Awóbùlúyì, (1992). It is interesting to note here that there are linguistic differences among the dialects mentioned above which distinguish one variety from another. The differences could be in form of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or any other combination of these. It is noticed that words like [isu] ‘yam’, [ilé] ‘house’, [isẹ̀] ‘work’ in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ also mean the same thing in the Standard Yorùbá.

We can also talk about mutual intelligibility, where we have some dialects that are intelligible to speakers of other dialects. Chamber and Trudgill (1978:3) submit that the problem of how we can distinguish between a language and dialect is to say that “a language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects”. According to him, the definition has the benefits of characterizing dialect as subparts of a language and of providing a criterion for distinguishing between one language and another. Let us consider some of the words variations as spoken by different

speakers of Yorùbá language to confirm their similarities and differences as mentioned in this study.

See table 1 below:

S/ N	Standar d Yorùbá	Yorùb á Ìkálẹ̀	Yorùb á Okun	Yorùbá Èkìtì	Yorùb á Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀	Yorùb á Oòdó	English Languag e
i.	Wá	bọbe	gha	Á	ghá	bọ bé	Come
ii.	Apá	ọwọ	apá	Aká	abiaka	Aká	Hand
iii.	Ewúré	ikégbe	èdegbe	Idérègb è	ikégbe	ikéègbè	Goat
iv.	Ilẹ̀kùn	ilẹ̀kùn	akùn	Ekù	òkúlẹ	Ilẹ̀kùn	Door
v.	Orí	ori	ówo	Erí	éwo	Ohího	Head
vi.	Ẹ̀rù	erù	àrù	Èrù	àrùbà	Ẹ̀ùù	Fear
vii.	Ẹ̀ní	enì	ánu	Ẹ̀ní	àíbá	Ẹ̀ní	Mat
viii.	Àdá	ùpẹ̀kun	ada	Àdá	èpia	ùpẹ̀kun	Cutlass
ix.	Ìyẹ̀n	iyí	iwọ̀n	Unihìn	tèebà	Ìyẹ̀n	That
x.	Irọ	urọ	obó	Urọ	obó	Uọ	Lie

Considering the data above, some similarities and differences are found in the lexical items presented above. It is noticed that some of the similarities found in the lexical items above further attests to the fact that there exists a sense of understanding among the dialects as presented in the data. But words like [èpia], [aíbá], [òkúlẹ], [éwo] in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect may seems not be intelligible to speakers of other dialects. Such variation like that is considered by Chambers and Trudgill (1984:6) that:

If we travel from village to village, in a particular direction, we notice linguistic differences which distinguish one village from another. Sometimes these differences will be larger, sometimes smaller, but they will be cumulative. The further we get from our starting point, the larger the differences will become. The effect of this may therefore be, if the distance involved is large enough, that (if we arrange villages along our route in geographical order) while speakers from village A understand people from village B very well and those from village F quite well, they may understand village M speech only with considerable difficulty, and that of village Z not at all.

The fact about the submission above is that the geographical area of the town and villages speaking the various dialects has a lot to do with the linguistic differences

and similarities among the people. Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ is considered in this study as a dialect of Yorùbá for the following reasons:

Yorùbá language operates a subject-verb-object (SVO) language, while Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ also belong to a class of SVO and a tone dialect, with three pitch levels, High, Mid and Low (HML). As reported in the literature, most of Africa languages south of the Sahara are tone languages. Welmers (1973:78) notes that languages of Africa south of the Sahara are tonal” A tone language according to Pike (1948:3) “is a language having lexically significant, contrastive, but relative pitch on each syllable”. Like in the Standard Yorùbá, the tone bearing unit in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ is generally the syllable and the syllabic nasal as it is generally obtained in all the tone languages and they are marked thus:

high tone	[/]	as in [é]
low tone	[\]	as in [è]
mid tone	[]	as in [e]

Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect has no written orthography. This is to say that the dialect has not been reduced into writing. But we have in most cases used the orthography based on the Roman Alphabets from which many of the languages that used alphabetic symbols have drawn their orthography. We should also add that we followed the convention of orthography of both English and Yorùbá language to arrive at our graphic representation of Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect.

The existence of syntactic markers in the Standard Yorùbá as it manifests in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect is another fact that further acclaimed Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ as a dialect of Yorùbá. Such syntactic markers include, focus marker, relative clause markers, question markers, negative markers etc. Focus marker for example in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect, focus items are moved to the initial position and the focus marker occurs immediately after the focus items.

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|
| 18. | Ọ́lá ra àtú
Ọ́lá buys a cap
'Ọ́lá bought a cap' | (simple sentence) |
| 19. | Àtú kí Ọ́lá ra
Àtú foc Ọ́lá buy
'It was a cap Ọ́lá bought' | (object focused sentence) |
| 20. | Ọ́lá ra filà
Ọ́lá buys a cap
'Ọ́lá bought a cap' | (simple sentence Yorùbá) |
| 21. | Ọ́lá ni ó ra filà
Ọ́lá foc pron buy cap
'It was Ọ́lá who bought a cap' | (subject focus Yorùbá) |

Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ dialect demonstrates a syntactic re-ordering that move the focus element to the left side. Sentence (18) is a simple sentence with the Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ SVO patterns, while sentence (19) is the focused counterpart of (18), with the focused constituent being the object DP yielding a new OSV word order. The direct object of 'àtú' in (18) is moved to the left of the subject to give a focus interpretation. The Standard Yorùbá focus example in (21) has a similar syntactic process. This study

demonstrates that focus construction in Ọwọ̀rọ̀ has the same structure with that of the Standard Yorùbá.

Conclusion

With reference to the literature (Akínkùnbé 1976), (Oyèláràn 1976), (Awóbùlúyì 1998), (Ajónḡólò 2005), Ọwọ̀rọ̀ is a dialect of Yorùbá language grouped among the North East Yorùbá (NEY), and the Yorùbá language as well as Haúsá and Ìgbò are the major Nigerian languages. As earlier stated, Ọwọ̀rọ̀ speaking communities are located on the western part of the bank of River Niger by the Niger-Benue confluence. This study findings substantiate Ọwọ̀rọ̀' status as a Yorùbá dialect, demonstrating similarities in lexical items, syntactic features, and sentence structure, notably the subject-verb-object configuration.

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