

The Underlying Form of the Third Person Singular Short Subject Pronoun in Standard Yorùbá: A Structural Motivation from some Yorùbá Dialects

Boluwaji Oshodi
Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria
bolu_oshodi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

One very controversial issue in standard Yorùbá language and some of its structurally diverse dialects concern the actual form of the third person singular short subject pronoun in the language. Earlier studies identified the morpheme *ó* with a high tone as the form of the pronoun. However, recent studies have queried this assertion claiming that *ó* is not the form but have equally failed to establish the precise form of the pronoun. This study examined the Yorùbá dialects spoken in Òşogbo, Ìlòrin, Òyó, Àkùngbá and Òwò with focus on the form as well as occurrence of this pronoun in these dialects through a transformational generative approach. Findings revealed that a certain vowel [i] with a high tone which regularly occurs in subject position in some constructions in the five dialects examined appears to be the underlying form of the pronoun in standard Yorùbá. It doesn't show up in the position in standard Yorùbá because of its underspecified nature in the language.

Keywords: 3psg short pronoun; Standard Yorùbá; Yorùbá dialects; High tone syllable; underlying form

INTRODUCTION

Pronouns are lexical items which are attested in all known human languages. Though pronouns are used specifically to replace nouns in a sentence, each pronoun usually has its own distinct form as well as its specific position of occurrence in different languages. For example in the Yorùbá language and all its known dialects, apart from the normal subject and object forms, pronouns are further classified as *short* and long forms (see examples a-f of short and long pronouns under example 36 below). While there is a consensus on the form and position of occurrence of other pronouns in Yorùbá language the precise form as well as the position of occurrence of the third person singular (3psg henceforth) short subject pronoun has been riddled with controversies with different writers proposing different forms and rules guiding its position of occurrence in Yorùbá sentences. Following the proposal of an underlying form for the 3psg singular short subject pronoun based on its form in three Yorùbá dialects of *Ifón*, *Owé* and *Ìyàgbà* by Awóbùlúyì (1992: 2001), supporting the assumption that the underlying and surface forms are meaningfully distinguished, this study attempts to contribute to this debate by looking at the occurrence and form of this particular pronoun in five Yorùbá dialects of *Àkùngbá*, *Òwò*, *Òşogbo*, *Ìlòrin* and *Òyó* with the purpose of identifying the form of the pronoun in these dialects which may help to determine the particular morpheme which represents the actual underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá.

THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE AND ITS DIALECT GROUPS

Yorùbá is the major language spoken in the South-Western part of Nigeria but it is also spoken in other neighbouring West African countries of Benin and Togo (Adétúgbò 1967; Biòbákú 1973). According to Lorena (2009), the language is classified under Kwa sub-family of the Niger Congo language Family. A number of dialects of the standard Yorùbá have been identified and classified into groups, e.g. Délànò (1957), Adétúgbò (1967), Fresco (1970), Akíngùgbé (1976), Awóbùlúyì (1978), Capo (1989) and Adéníyì (2005). According to these Yorùbá scholars “each of the dialects though structurally diverse is believed to have made at least one significant contribution to the overall emergence of the standard form (i.e. standard Yorùbá) be it at the underlying or the surface form, this is why Yorùbá scholars usually resort to the dialects in order to proffer solution to controversial issues which arise in standard Yorùbá particularly in terms of structural analyses”.

It is pertinent to emphasise the fact that there are some disparities in the classifications of the above writers. However, Awóbùlúyì (1998) remains the most basic reference in terms of Yorùbá dialects classification hence, his classification is adopted for this study. He (Awóbùlúyì) classified the dialects into five groups: **South-East Yorùbá** (SEY: *Ègbá*, *Ìjèbú*, *Ilajè*, *Ìkálè*, *Òndó*, *Òwò*, *Òbà-Ìkàré*), **Central Yorùbá** (CY: *Ifè*, *Ìjèşà*, *Èkìtì*, *Mòbà*), **North-West Yorùbá** (NWX: *Èkó*, *Àwòrì*, *Ègbádò*, *Òyó*, *Òşun*, *Ònkò*, *Ìbòlò*, *Ìgbómìnà*), **South-West Yorùbá** (SWY: *Sàbèş-Kétu(Ànàgó)* *Ifè(Togo)*) and **North-East Yorùbá** (NEY: *Ìyàgbà*, *Ìjùmú*, *Òwòrò*, *Owé*). These dialects were classified based on phonological, morphological and syntactic similarities which they share and are peculiar to them. Adéníyì (2005) however points out that Awóbùlúyì’s classification were defective and classified the dialects into seven groups: **North-Western Yorùbá**: *Òyó*, *Ònkò*, *Òşun*, *Ìbòlò*, *Ìgbómìnà*, **Western Yorùbá**: *Ànàgó*, *Kétu*, *Ifè(Togo)*, *Òhòrì*, *Isabe*, (as well as other dialects spoken outside Nigeria), **South-Western Yorùbá**: *Èkó*, *Àwòrì*, *Ègbá*, *Yewa*, **Central Yorùbá**: *Ifè*, *Ìjèşà*, *Àkùré*, *Èkìtì*, *Mòbà*, **North-Eastern Yorùbá**: *Ìyàgbà*,

Bùnù, Ijùmù, Owé, Gbèdè, Àyèré, Eastern Yorùbá: Ìkàré, Òbà, Ìdó-àní, Ào, South-Eastern Yorùbá: Ìjèbù, Oṅdó, Ìkàré, Ilàjè, Òwò, Ìjò(Apor).

At this juncture, it should be made clear that in this study, the focus is not on the classification of Yorùbá dialects but on the structure of those which exhibit the grammatical feature in focus (i.e. the 3ps short subject pronoun) as evidence of its underlying form in Yorùbá language. The five dialects examined in this study fall under two of the dialect groups; Àkùngbá and Òwò are grouped under South–East Yorùbá (Àkùngbá falls under Òbà-Ìkàré) while Òṣogbo, Ìlorin and Òyó fall under North-West Yorùbá (Òṣogbo falls under Òṣun and Ìlorin under Ìgbómìnà).

PREVIOUS CLAIMS ON THE FORM OF THE 3PSG SHORT SUBJECT PRONOUN IN YORÙBÁ

Most writers on Yorùbá language especially the early ones labelled the morpheme (ó) with a high tone as the 3psg singular short subject pronoun. Such scholars include Crowther (1952), Bámbóṣé (1967; 1990) and Oḷádèjì (2003). Their claim is based on the structural position and occurrence of this morpheme in comparison with the position of occurrence of other morphemes which are accepted as short subject pronouns in Yorùbá grammar. Consider examples (1-6) below:

	<i>Basic Sentence</i>		<i>Negative Sentence</i>
1a.	Mo lọ I go “I went”	1b.	Mi ò lọ I NEG go “I did not go”
2a.	O lọ You(sg) go “You(sg) went”	2b.	O ò lọ You(sg) NEG go “You(sg) did not go”
3a.	Ó lọ 3psg go “He/she went”	3b.	[NP⁰] kò lọ NEG go “He/she did not go”
4a.	A lọ we go “We went”	4b.	A ò lọ we NEG go “We did not go”
5a.	E lọ You(pl) go “You(pl) went”	5b.	E ò lọ You(pl) NEG go “You(pl) did not go”
6a.	Wọ̀n lọ they go “They went”	6b.	Wọ̀n ò lọ They NEG go “They did not go”

Based on the sentences in (1-6), scholars like Crowther (1952) and Bámbgbóṣé (1967: 35) identified the forms given below as the Yorùbá short subject pronouns:

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
mi/mo	“I”	a	“we”
o	“you(sg)”	e	“you(pl)”
o	“he/she”	wọ̀n	“they”

Table 1: Yoruba short subject pronouns

Stahlke (1974: 171-204) was the first writer to spark off the debate on the occurrence and form of the 3psg short subject short pronoun in Yorùbá when he observed that:

“the third person singular form of the subject pronoun must be considered morphologically zero, not only in the negative and future, where this conclusion is obvious, but also in those paradigms in which the vowel “o” and a high tone are found”. (Stahlke: 1974: 172)

Below are examples from Stahlke (1974).

7. Kò lọ
 NEG go
 “He/she did not go”

8. Á lọ
 FUT go
 “He/she will go”

9. Ó lọ
 HTS go
 “He/she went”

Example (7) expressed negation while example (8) expressed future tense. As observed by Stahlke, the position of the 3psg short subject pronoun was vacant in (7 and 8). In (9), the “o” with a high tone is what writers like Bámbgbóṣé (1990) and Ọládẹ̀jì (2003) take to be the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá. Stahlke (1974) on his own part believes the “o” with a high tone is not the 3psg short subject pronoun but concluded that the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá has no specific form. Awóbùlúyì (1992, 2001, and 2006) supports the claim of Stahlke that the morpheme ó is not the 3psg subject pronoun in Yorùbá but opined that the 3psg short subject pronoun has as an *underlying* form which is always covert in standard Yorùbá but overt in some Yorùbá dialects. Awóbùlúyì further observed that the ó “erroneously” referred to as the 3psg subject short pronoun is the same as the V-shaped element with a high tone which usually occurs between the subject NP and the verb in Yorùbá declarative sentence, this V-shaped element with a high tone is what is known as HTS (high tone syllable) in standard

Yorùbá and its dialects. Consider the examples below:

	<i>Base Form</i>			→	<i>Surface Form</i>
10.	Bùnmi Bunmi “Bunmi jumped”	í HTS	fo jump		Bùnmí fo
11.	Dàda Dada “Dada went”	á HTS	lọ go		Dàdá lọ
12.	Òwò Òwò “Òwò is beautiful”	ó HTS	dára fine		Òwó dára
13.	Òjó Òjó “Òjo slept”	sùn sleep			Not Applicable
14.	ilẹ̀ ground “The ground is dry”	ẹ̀ HTS	gbẹ̀ dry		ilẹ̀ ẹ̀ gbẹ̀
15.	Ayò Ayò “Ayò came”	ó HTS	wá come		Ayò ó wá
16.	[NP ⁰] “He/she came”	Ó HTS	wá come		Not Applicable

In (10-13), the difference between the base and the surface forms manifests in the high tone which surfaces on the last syllable of the subject NPs in the sentences. For example, in (10 and 11) the mid tone on the last syllable of the NPs (Bùnmi and Dàda) changed to high tone (i.e. Bùnmí and Dàdá) respectively while in (12) the low tone on *Òwò* (the NP) also changed to a high tone (*Òwó*) at the surface level. The rule did not apply in (13) because the last syllable of the subject NP (*Òjó*) originally carries a high tone. In (16), Awóbùlúyì observed that the element *ó* is the same as the one in (3 and 9) and in this type of construction i.e. (16), the subject NP is usually covert and the first overt element is the HTS and not the 3psg short subject pronoun. This explains why the rule did not apply in (13 and 16). In (14 and 15), the case was different as the low tone on the last syllable of the subject NP did not change to a high tone. However, we notice that a reduplicated form of the last syllable with a high tone appeared between the subject NP and the verb. Awóbùlúyì concluded that the HTS is a tense and aspectual marker just like the *á* (future marker) in (8) since they occur in similar position.

Awóbùlúyì (2006: 1-14) proposed “*o*” as the underlying form of the HTS in standard Yorùbá this was based on the works of Awóbùlúyì (1992: 2001:1-8) who studied the form of

the HTS and the 3psg short subject pronoun in the Yorùbá dialects of *Ọ̀wọ̀*, *Ọ̀ndó* and *Ìkálẹ̀*. Awóbùlúyì discovered that the HTS has the distinct form “o” with a high tone in these dialects. Below are examples:

17. Bà i ó à mátò kàn (*Ọ̀ndó*)
 father my HTS buy car one
 “My father bought a car”
18. Olú ó pa kítà ọ̀ḍẹ (*Ìkálẹ̀*)
 Olú HTS kill dog hunter
 “Olú killed the hunter’s dog”
19. Bàbá ó fi dí mi gbà àdúà (*Ọ̀wọ̀*)
 father HTS say that I say prayer
 “Father asked me to pray” (Awóbùlúyì 2001: 4)

Having proposed “o” with a high tone [ó] as the underlying form of the HTS in standard Yorùbá based on its overt form in *Ọ̀ndó*, *Ìkálẹ̀* and *Ọ̀wọ̀* dialects, Awóbùlúyì (1992: 1-79) explained the procedure for the derivation of the surface form in (10-16) above. According to Awóbùlúyì the “o” (HTS) usually assimilates to the last syllable of the preceding NP. Thus, examples (10, 11 and 12) above were derived from the procedure as shown in (20-22) below:

- | <i>Underlying Form</i> | → | <i>Assimilation</i> | → | <i>Surface Form</i> |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 20. Bùnmi ó fò
Bùnmi HTS jump
“Bùnmi jumped” | → | Bùnmi í fò
Bùnmi HTS jump | → | Bùnmi fò |
| 21. Dàda ó lọ
Dàda HTS go
“Dàda went” | → | Dàda á lọ
Dàda HTS go | → | Dàdá lọ |
| 22. Ọ̀wọ̀ ó dára
Ọ̀wọ̀ HTS fine
“Ọ̀wọ̀ is beautiful” | → | Ọ̀wọ̀ ó dára
Ọ̀wọ̀ HTS fine | → | Ọ̀wọ̀ dára |

In (20-22) the HTS assimilates to the last syllable of the preceding NP and then gets deleted. Although the HTS gets deleted its tone is transferred to the last syllable of the preceding NP and the original tones on the last syllables of the NPs changed to a high tone once the HTS was deleted (see the bold forms). The process did not apply in (13) because the original tone on the NP (*Ọ̀jọ̀*) is a high tone. However, in (14 and 15), after the HTS was assimilated to the form of the last syllable of the NPs, the HTS was not deleted instead it assimilates to the form of the last syllable of the subject NP. This is because the output of such deletion would be ungrammatical in Yorùbá due to a tone rule which does not allow a direct tone transfer from the HTS to the last syllable of the preceding subject NP if such a subject NP contains two syllables with a sequence of *mid* and *low* tone combination i.e. the first syllable has a mid-tone and the second syllable has

a low-tone. Consider (23 and 24) below:

	<i>Underlying Form</i>	→	<i>Assimilation/Surface Form</i>	→	<i>Not Applicable</i>
23.	<i>ilẹ̀</i> <i>ó</i> <i>gbẹ̀</i> ground HTS dry “The ground is dry”	→	<i>ilẹ̀</i> <i>ẹ̀</i> <i>gbẹ̀</i> ground HTS dry	→	* <i>ilẹ̀ gbẹ̀</i>
24.	<i>Ayò</i> <i>ó</i> <i>wá</i> <i>Ayò</i> HTS come “Ayò came”	→	<i>Ayò</i> <i>ọ̀</i> <i>wá</i> <i>Ayò</i> HTS come	→	* <i>Ayọ́ wá</i>

In (23 and 24), the subject NPs *ilẹ̀* and *Ayò* both have a mid and low tone combination on their first and second syllables respectively, this explains why the HTS was not deleted after assimilation. Though the asterisked output is ungrammatical in Yorùbá, it provides evidence for the underlying form of the HTS as proposed by Awóbùlúyì (2001). Note that the removal of the HTS between the subject NP and the verb will assign a different meaning to the sentences in (10-16). Consider what happens in examples (25-30) below where the HTS is removed:

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 25. | <i>Bùnmi</i> <i>fò!</i>
rain fall
“Bùnmi jump!” |
| 26. | <i>Dàda</i> <i>lọ!</i>
<i>Dàda</i> go
“Dada go!” |
| 27. | <i>Ọ̀wọ̀</i> <i>dára!</i>
<i>Ọ̀wọ̀</i> fine
“Ọ̀wọ̀ (a town) be beautiful!” |
| 28. | <i>Ọ̀jò</i> <i>rọ!</i>
rain fall
“Let it rain!” |
| 29. | <i>Ilẹ̀</i> <i>gbẹ̀!</i>
ground dry
“Ground be dry!” |
| 30. | <i>Ayò</i> <i>wá!</i>
<i>Ayò</i> come
“Ayò come!” |

Due to the removal of the HTS in examples (25-30), the structure of the sentences changed from declarative to imperative, this confirms the grammatical function of the HTS as a tense and aspectual marker in Yorùbá as claimed by Awóbùlúyì (1992: 2001). Furthermore, this particular structure is grammatical and acceptable in Èkìtì dialects according to Olúmúyìwá (2009: 130), below are examples from Èkìtì dialect;

	<i>Base form</i>	→	<i>Vowel assimilation</i>	→	<i>Deletion/Surface form</i>
31.	Ayò ó lọ Ayò HTS go “Ayò went”	→	Ayò ọ lọ Ayò HTS go	→	Ayó lọ
32.	Alẹ ó gbẹ ground HTS dry “The ground is dry”	→	Alẹ ẹ gbẹ ground HTS dry	→	Alẹ gbẹ

Based on the above evidences, Awóbùlúyì (2001) stressed further that the ó with a high tone which is considered the 3psg short subject pronoun is the same as the HTS which occurs between the subject NP and the VP. He claimed the element is not a pronoun but a tense and aspectual marker which marks both present and past tense in Yorùbá. If the different grammatical information expressed in examples (10-16) is considered, the claim made by Awóbùlúyì can be substantiated. For example, while constructions (10, 11, 13, 15 and 16) express past tense, those in (12 and 14) express present tense whereas in (21-26) where the HTS was removed, the sentences all express command. According to Awóbùlúyì (2006: 1-14) in example (16) where the morpheme ó occupies the subject NP position, the subject NP is always covert in such construction and the first overt element is always the HTS. In summary, Awóbùlúyì (2001: 2006) concluded that, the “o” which occurred as the first element in (16) is the same as the HTS which occurred between the subject NP and the verb in (20-22), Awóbùlúyì further claimed that the HTS functions as a tense and aspectual marker anywhere it occurs in standard Yorùbá thus, the “o” in (16) cannot be a pronoun.

In other to gain more insight into the controversies associated with the 3psg short subject pronoun and particularly the misconception and misrepresentation of the HTS as the 3psg short subject pronoun, Awóbùlúyì (1992: 1-79) made a clarion call to Yorùbá scholars to start studying the structurally diverse dialects of Yorùbá in order to discover new facts that they might reveal about the standard variety. In answer to this call, some writers examined the “o” with a high tone (i.e. HTS) in some Yorùbá dialects with the aim of discovering its precise form and function in such dialects. For example, Adésuyan (2006: 1-9) examined the form in *Oṅdó* dialect, Olúmúyìwá (2009: 129-137) studied the form in Central Yorùbá dialects of Èkìtì, Ifẹ, Ijẹṣà and *Mọ̀bà* while Oshodi (2013: 213-224) examined the form in *Ọ̀wọ̀* dialect. These three scholars discovered that the HTS has the overt form “o” with a high tone, the form identified in *Ọ̀wọ̀* by Awóbùlúyì (1992) and it sometimes assimilates to the form of the last syllable of the preceding NP as observed in standard Yorùbá by Awóbùlúyì (2001). Furthermore, they also concluded that the HTS does not function as a pronoun but as a tense and aspectual marker as claimed by Awóbùlúyì (2001; 2006) confirming that it cannot be the 3psg short subject pronoun.

THE MORPHEME “UN” AS UNDERLYING FORM OF THE 3PSG SHORT SUBJECT PRONOUN

In support of his claim that the 3psg has an underlying form which only manifests in some Yorùbá dialects, Awóbùlúyì (2001: 1-8) claimed that the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá is *un* which occurs in *Owé* and *Ìyàgbà* dialects. Awóbùlúyì backed up his claim with the following examples:

33. Baba ghé hi un mó re(*Owé*)
 father say that 3psg NEG go
 “Father said that he/she should not go”
34. Yala ùn gha àbí ún mó ghàá(*Owé*)
 whether 3psg come or 3psg NEG come-NEG
 “He/she may or may not come”
35. Ọpé wí ùn re (*Ìyàgbà*)
 father say 3psg go
 “Father said that he/she should go”

Another fact given as evidence by Awóbùlúyì (2001: 2) was that the long pronouns were derived from the short forms through vowel Prefixation as shown below:

36.	Prefix		Short Pronoun		Long Pronoun
(a)	è	+	mí	→	èmi
(b)	ì	+	wọ	→	ìwọ
(c)	ò	+	un	→	òun
(d)	à	+	wa	→	àwa
(e)	à	+	wọn	→	àwọn
(f)	ẹ	+	yín	→	ẹyin

In (36c) which shows the derivation of the 3psg pronouns (short and long forms), we notice that the prefix *ò* was combined with the morpheme *un* to derive the long form *òun*. Since the other morpheme in (a, b, d, e and f) i.e. *mí*, *wọ*, *wa*, *wọn* and *yín* are all established short subject pronouns in standard Yorùbá, Awóbùlúyì (2001) concludes that *un* must be the underlying form for the 3psg short subject pronoun.

Based on the two points above, Awóbùlúyì concluded that the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in Yorùbá is *un* which normally fails to show up overtly in standard Yorùbá and some of its dialects due to a particular language specific rule which forbids its overt occurrence in the initial position where it should normally have occurred. However, there were no solid evidences to back up this claim. For example, Awóbùlúyì did not provide examples in both *Owé* and *Ìyàgbà* where the proposed form *un* occurred in sentence initial position like the case for the other short subject pronouns. Also, the inconsistency of tone on the proposed form raises serious doubts on this claim (notice that the [*un*] from examples (33-35) has no definite tone. It has a mid-tone in (33); it has two forms in (34) with low and high tone respectively

while it has a low tone in (35). This is an important issue because tones perform grammatical functions in Yorùbá. Thus, a morpheme with different tones in the same context tends to express different syntactic functions. These two inconsistencies make this claim very suspicious and since it is not a consensus claim the controversy continues.

Following the contradictory opinions expressed on the form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá the big question then is: what constitute the form of this particular pronoun in the language? Following the claim of Awóbùlúyì that the 3psg short subject pronoun has an underlying form which is usually covert in the standard form but overt in some of its dialects, this study attempts to investigate the form in Àkùngbá, Òwò, Òṣogbo, Ìlọ̀rìn and Òyó dialects of Yorùbá with the aim of determining if the pronoun truly has an underlying form as well as to determine the actual underlying form of this controversial pronoun.

THE FORM OF THE 3PSG SHORT SUBJECT PRONOUN IN ÀKUNGBA, ÒWÒ ÒṢOGBO ÌLỌ̀RÌN AND ÒYÓ DIALECTS

In the Yorùbá dialects of Àkùngbá, Òwò, Òṣogbo, Ìlọ̀rìn and Òyó, apart from the *o* HTS), a particular morpheme *í* also occurs as the first overt element in the subject position in certain constructions. Consider the examples below from the five dialects:

5a. ÀKUNGBÁ DIALECT

37. \acute{I} ghò m
 3psg look me
 “He/she is looking at me”
38. \acute{I} nínó òde
 3psg inside house
 “He/she is inside the house”
39. Şé í nínó òde?
 QM 3psg inside house
 “Is he/she at home?”
40. Òjọ́ nínó òde í jìjẹ̀rì
 Òjọ́ be-inside house 3psg eat
 “Òjọ́ is eating inside the house”
41. \acute{I} ì mọ̀ntín
 3psg NEG drink(wine)
 “He did not drink wine”

5b. ÒWÒ DIALECT

42. Í ó yúbẹ̀
3psg HTS go(there)
“He/she said that he/she (outside the context) went there”
43. Í ó lálá
3psg HTS big
“He/she said that he/she (outside the context) is big”
44. Í á yúbẹ̀
3psg FUT go(there)
“He/she said that he/she (outside the context) will go there”
45. Í é yúbẹ̀
3psg CONT go-there
“He/she said that he/she (outside the context) always goes there”
46. Í mò ó yúbẹ̀
3psg I HTS go-there
“He/she said that I went there”
47. Í wò ó yúbẹ̀
3psg you (sg) HTS go-there
“He/she said you (sg) went there”

5c. ÒŞOGBO ÌLÒRIN AND ÒYÓ DIALECTS

48. Í n̄ bẹ̀ n̄'lé
3sg CONT sleep at-house
“He/she is at home”
49. Í n̄ sùn
3psg CONT sleep
“He/she is sleeping”
50. Şé í n̄ bẹ̀ n̄'le?
QM 3psg CONT be at-house
“Is he/she at home?”
51. Òjọ kii tètè sùn sùgbón í n̄ tètè jí
Òjọ NEG quickly sleep but 3psg CONT quickly wake
“Òjọ sleeps late but wakes up early”

The occurrence of the morpheme *í* (with a consistent high tone) in the position of the 3psg short subject pronoun as shown in the examples from the Yorùbá dialects above clearly makes the morpheme the most obvious contender for the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá. For example, in Òṣogbo, Ìlṣorin and Òyó dialects, anywhere the morpheme *í* occurs in the position of the 3psg short subject pronoun, the *ó* (HTS) never shows up. The same thing happens in Àkùngbá dialect where the same morpheme *í* occurs in certain contexts where the disputed HTS *ó* normally occurs. Also, it consistently occurs before the negative marker in the dialect a position where the proponents of *ó* as the 3psg short subject pronoun claim it cannot occur.

The most obvious and convincing evidences come from Òwò dialect. Apart from the fact that the [*í*] occurs in the same position (as the first overt element which shows up in the position of the 3psg short subject pronoun) where the HTS usually occurs, it also revealed that the *ó* cannot be a pronoun. In (44) the *í* occurred with *á* (an established future marker in the dialect) while in (45) it occurred with *é* (an established continuous marker in the dialect). However, in (42 and 43) it occurred with the HTS *ó* (the form 'claimed' to be the 3psg short subject pronoun), while (42) expresses past tense (43) expresses present tense confirming that *ó* functions as an aspectual marker in this dialect as claimed by Awóbùlúyì (1992; 2001; 2006) who also observed that that in standard Yorùbá, the *ó* occurred in the same position where *á* (future marker) and *é* (continuous marker) both of which are tense and aspectual markers also occurred. Another important thing to note is that in (42-45) where there were references to two different people in the context of the 3psg short subject pronoun, only the first one (i.e. the direct subject) was overtly represented while the second one (i.e. the one referred to outside the context) still remained covert.

Furthermore, in (46), the [*í*] i.e. the proposed underlying form occurred and was used in the same construction together with the first person singular short subject pronoun *mi*, which changes to *mo* with the last syllable assimilating to the form of *ó* the HTS which interestingly is retained. However, the mid tone on the 1psg short subject pronoun changed to low tone turning the form to *mò*. The same thing happened in (47) where the *í* also occurred with the second person singular short subject pronoun *wo*, there was no case of assimilation since the last vowel is the same as the HTS, just like in (46) the mid tone on the 2psg short subject pronoun changed to a low tone and it becomes *wò*. The most significant revelation in (46 and 47) is that the *ó* (HTS) which some writers tagged the 3psg short subject pronoun occurred together in the same construction with the two other short subject pronouns where it (HTS) functions as a tense marker and not a pronoun. The *ó* in (41 and 42) is definitely the same as the one in (46 and 47) and since it is not a pronoun in (46 and 47) it cannot be a pronoun in (41 and 42) as well.

The final evidence comes from a particular construction in Òwò which involves [*í*] (the morpheme proposed as the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in this study), the HTS *ó*, *un* (the form termed as the 3psg short subject pronoun) by Awóbùlúyì (2001: 8) and the complementizer *dí*. Below are examples:

52. Íj ó fi dí un jẹun → Íj ó fi dún un jẹun
 3psg HTS say that 3psg eat 3psg HTS say that 3psg eat
 “He/she said that he/she asked him/her to eat”
53. Bàbá ó fi dí u màá yú → Bàbá ó fi dú u màá yú
 father HTS say that 3psg NEG go father HTS say that 3psg NEG go
 “Father said that he/she should not go”

Example (52) contains three forms of the 3psg short pronouns. The first one [í] is the direct subject of the sentence and a second one (indirect subject) is covert while the third one is *un*. In this context, *un* is actually an anaphor which refers to [í] the initial 3psg pronoun which is the direct 3psg short subject pronoun in the sentence (thus both carry the symbol j), while in (53) the morpheme *u* represents the 3psg short pronoun but not as the subject but object in the sentence. There is every possibility that the *un* (with whichever tone) in *Owé* and *Ìyàgbà* which Awóbùlúyì proposes as the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá is the same as the *u* in *Òwò* (see example 53). However, from the examples given in Awóbùlúyì (2001) these particular forms did not occur in the subject position anywhere in *Owé* and *Ìyàgbà*, the form is similar to the one in (52) in *Òwò* where it refers to an entity outside the context and does not in any way function as the subject of the sentence. The only form which can occur in such subject position in certain contexts and subsequently function as the 3psg short subject pronoun is the morpheme *í*, which makes it the most structurally motivated to represent the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá, facts from Àkùngbá, *Òwò* *Òşogbo*, *Ìlòrin* and *Òyó* dialects clearly confirm this.

One important observation concerning this proposal has to do with the status assigned to the vowel [i] in standard Yorùbá language. According to Yorùbá writers (e.g. Awóbùlúyì 1978; Archangeli & Pulleyblank 1989), this particular vowel has been analysed as the default/epenthetic vowel in Yorùbá which is the most likely to be inserted in default context suggesting that the vowel is underspecified in the language. For example, Awóbùlúyì (1978) observed that all Yorùbá nouns are originally vowel initial. With evidence from Yorùbá dialects like *Òwò*, *Òndó* and *Ìkálẹ̀*, he proposed [i] as the epenthetic vowel which occurs (underlyingly) in front of all Yorùbá nouns. Below are examples:

	<i>Dialects</i>	→	<i>Standard Yorùbá</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
54.	i-Títí	→	Títí	“a name”
55.	i-fèrèsé	→	Fèrèsé	“window”
56.	i-koríko	→	Koríko	“grass”
57.	i-bàbá	→	Bàbá	“father”
58.	i-kpákó	→	Kpákó	“plank”
59.	i-yàrá	→	Yàrá	“room”
60.	i-kẹ̀kẹ̀	→	Kẹ̀kẹ̀	“bicycle”

Based on the above claim, proposing [i] an alleged underspecified vowel in standard Yorùbá as

¹ In *Òwò* sentences (52 and 53) would actually come out in the forms indicated by the arrow where the vowel of the complementizer gets assimilated to the full form of the 3psg short pronoun it precedes.

an underlying form of a morpheme would contradict this established claim. However, there is a theoretical explanation for this in this current proposal.

In this current proposal, it assumed that [i] without any tone is in effect underlying zero which is filled in the course of spell out by the default unmarked epenthetic vowel quality of the language. It can be argued that the spell-out analysis of the Yorùbá 3sg short subject pronoun has TWO components, and it seems more likely based on markedness that the underlying form of this morpheme is simply a High tone (bearing in mind that the high tone is the most restricted of the three tones in standard Yorùbá) which is then supported by default vowel features in most cases [i] as a matter of abstract form which is irregular and dialect specific but which fails to show up overtly in this position in standard Yorùbá due the fact that it is usually underspecified in certain positions in standard Yorùbá but shows up in Àkùngbá, Òwò, Òşogbo, Ìlòrin and Òyó, which are all established dialects of Yorùbá.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted on the premise that the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá has an underlying form which can be accounted for through a careful examination of the structural pattern of the 3psg short subject pronoun in some Yorùbá dialects. Using the transformational grammar through a structurally motivated underlying representation account, the morpheme [i] with a high tone was proposed as the underlying form based on its abstract properties in terms of its consistent form and occurrence in the position of the 3psg short subject pronoun in five Yorùbá dialects. The *un* initially proposed by Awóbùlúyì (1992) has no specific form since it carries different tones in the same context. In actual fact it appears to be another form of the 3psg short pronoun which can only function as an indirect subject. This is unlike [i] which functions as a direct subject in certain contexts and is thus proposed as the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá. In fact, we are convinced that a study of other Yorùbá dialects will reveal similar facts concerning the vowel [i] proposed in this study which would validate the claim made regarding the underlying form of the 3psg short subject pronoun in standard Yorùbá.

List of Abbreviations

NEG: negation, sg.: singular, pl: plural, NP: noun phrase, 3psg: third person singular pronoun, FUT: future tense marker, CONT: continuous tense marker, *: ungrammatical construction

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Boluwaji Oshodi is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Languages at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. He holds a Ph.D in Linguistics from the Centre for Language Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia and a Master's degree from Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. He currently teaches Linguistics at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. His research interests include applied psycholinguistics, morpho-syntax of Yorùbá and its dialects, comparative and historical linguistics (with focus on Arigidi Cluster and Yorùbá), lexicography and documentation of endangered Nigerian languages.