FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE YORÙBÁ HTS (HIGH TONE SYLLABLE) REVISITED: EVIDENCE FROM ÌGBÒ SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF YORÙBÁ

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The *HTS* (High Tone Syllable), a v-shaped element that occurs between the subject noun phrase and the verb phrase in declarative sentences, remains unarguably a most controversial element in the grammar of Yorùbá language, as scholars have expressed contradictory opinions on its precise form and function. This study examines the HTS from the standpoint of second language acquisition with data collected through oral production from three Igbo native speakers (one child and two adults) who were Yorùbá L2 learners. It was discovered that the element has the unvarying form *o* with a high tone (*ó*) and it usually and persistently occurs before verbs, and also appears to indicate tense and aspect in their interlanguage. The study concludes that, though the actual syntactic function of the HTS still remains controversial, evidence from Igbo L2 Yorùbá learners supports the fact that the element functions more like a tense and aspectual marker which indicates past/present actions in the language, as suggested by Awóbùlúyì (1992).

Keywords: High-Tone Syllable, second language acquisition, Yorùbá, Ìgbò, tense and aspect.

La sílaba de tono alto (*HTS* por sus siglas en inglés), un elemento en forma de vocal que aparece entre la frase nominal sujeto y la frase verbal en oraciones declarativas, es sin duda un elemento muy controvertido de la gramática del yoruba, dado que los estudiosos de la lengua han expresado opiniones contradictorias acerca de su significado y función precisos. Este estudio examina la HTS desde el punto de vista de la adquisición de segunda lengua, con datos de producción oral recolectados de tres hablantes nativos de igbo (dos adultos y un niño), aprendices de yoruba como segunda lengua. Se descubrió que el elemento tiene la forma invariable *o* con tono alto (*ó*) y que se coloca usualmente antes de los verbos, al parecer indicando tiempo y aspecto en su interlengua. El estudio concluye que, aunque la función sintáctica precisa de la HTS permanece en discusión, la evidencia recolectada a partir de hablantes nativos de igbo que adquieren el yoruba como segunda lengua apoya la hipótesis de que el elemento funciona como un marcador de tiempo y aspecto que indica acciones pasadas y presentes, como propone Awóbùlúyì (1992).

Palabras clave: sílaba de tono alto (HTS), adquisición de segunda lengua, yoruba, igbo, tiempo y aspecto.

1. I ntroduction

Language acquisition is a branch of psycholinguistics that has become increasingly relevant in the field of linguistics, as it has helped explain some knotty issues, like what happens to learners in the course of acquiring a language –either first or second, and the underlying competence displayed by second language (L2) learners in the process of L2 acquisition, which is usually triggered by the residual knowledge of the first language (Long 2003; Slabakova 2009). It is also relevant in explaining the mental phenomenon involved in the preference of a particular lexical item over another in certain contexts by learners, and why learners (L1

or L2) arrange lexical items in a regular and specific pattern. Thus, language acquisition, particularly second language acquisition, can throw light on why second language learners would arrange lexical items differently from native speakers, and why such learners would use a particular lexical item in a context in which it does not occur in the speech of a native speaker. The present study attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding the form and function of a controversial grammatical element in standard Yorùbá with evidence gathered from L2 learners of the language. The data revealed interesting facts, some of which substantiate existing claims on the element, while new facts were also uncovered. These findings help to make significant generalizations concerning the status and function of this element in Yorùbá.

2. Previous Studies on the High Tone Syllable

The *High Tone Syllable* (HTS henceforth) is a v-shaped element which occurs between the subject noun phrase (NP) and the verb in declarative sentence in Yorùbá. It is undoubtedly a controversial element in the grammar of the language, since various scholars have assigned to it conflicting forms and functions. For instance, Bámgbóṣé (1967: 33-34) and Courtenay (1968: 70-74) call it a concord marker, Fresco (1970: 65) believes it is a subject marker, Stahlke (1974: 170) analyses it as a subject concord prefix, Bámgbóṣé (1990) refers to it as a pronoun, Déchaine (1993: 84) says it is an agreement marker, Bisang & Sonaiya (1999) consider it a validator of actualized predicates, while Awóbùlúyì (1978, 1992, and 2001), Adéṣuyan (2006:1-9) and Olúmúyìwá (2009: 129-137)

all believe it is a preverbal element that marks past or present actions. Among all the analyses of the functions of HTS, the two most popular ones are the one that regard it as a pronoun and the one that considers it as a pre-verbal element that marks tense and aspect. Here are some examples of the HTS in standard Yorùbá with its contexts of occurrence:

(1)   Dàdá á   mu   omi   →   Dàdá mu omi
       Dàda HTS   drink water
       'Dàda drank water'

(2)   Ayò ọ́   mu   omi   →   Ayò ọ́ mu omi
       Òjó HTS   drink water
       'Titi drank water'

(3)   Dàda ni   ó   mu   omi
       Dàda FOC   HTS   drink water
       'It was Dàda who drank water'

(4)   Òjó ati   Dàda ni   ó   mu   omi
       Òjó and   Dàda FOC   HTS   drink   water
       'It was Òjó and Dàda who drank water'

(5)   Ó   mu   omi
       3.SG drink water
       'He/she drank water'

Bámgbóṣé (1990) and Ọladeji (2003) refer to the HTS (*ó*) in (3), (4) and (5) as pronouns. The one in (3) and (4) is tagged a resumptive pronoun, while the example in (5) is glossed as a 3.sg short subject pronoun. However, Awóbùlúyì (1992; 2005; 2006) expresses a contrary view and claims that the HTS is not a pronoun but a preverbal marker of past/present action. Awóbùlúyì (1992) proposed the form *o* with a high tone (*ó*) as the underlying form for the HTS in standard Yorùbá. He also claims that the HTS usually assimilates to the form of the last vowel of the preceding NP. His claim was borne out of the fact that the form *ó* with a high tone is found in several Yorùbá dialects in similar positions with a similar function, e.g. Òǹdó (Adéṣuyan 2006), Èkìtì (Olúmúyìwá 2009), Ọ̀wọ̀ (Oshodi 2013). Thus, examples (1) and (2) would be derived as shown in (6) and (7) below:

Underlying form	Assimilation	Deletion/Tone transfer (Surface form)

(6) Dàda ó   mu   omi → Dàda á mu omi → Dàdá mu omi
  Dada hts drink water
  'Dada drank water'

(7) Ayọ̀ ó   mu   omi → Ayọ̀ ọ́ mu omi → (a)*Ayọ́ mu omi.
                                          (b) Ayọ̀ ọ́ mu omi

  Ayọ̀   hts drink water
  'Ayọ̀ drank water'

In (6), the form *ó* occurs as the underlying form, then it is assimilated to the form of the last vowel of the preceding NP, and at the surface

level the HTS is deleted and its tone gets transferred to the last vowel of the preceding NP.

In (7), we observe that, after assimilation, the HTS is retained at the surface level in the correct form in (b). This is a result of a rule in Yorùbá where anytime the noun of the NP has two or more syllables, and the last two syllables occur in a sequence of mid and low tones –like the example *Ayọ̀*–, the low tone on the last vowel of the NP is retained and the assimilated form of the HTS is also retained. The asterisked form is thus ungrammatical in standard Yorùbá. However, Olúmúyìwá (2009) observed that in similar examples in the Èkìtì dialect, the HTS is deleted and its tone gets transferred to the last vowel of the preceding NP. Thus, the asterisked form, which is ungrammatical in standard Yorùbá, would be grammatical and acceptable in Èkìtì. This is another fact that validates Awóbùlúyì's claim.

Furthermore, Awóbùlúyì (1992; 2001) argues that the first overt element in (5), i.e. *ó*, which Bámgbóṣé (1990) and Ọladeji (2003) call a 3.sɢ pronoun is the same HTS which occurs underlyingly in (6) and (7). Awóbùlúyì claimed that the 3.sɢ pronoun in Yorùbá is always covert in the kind of construction exemplified in (5) (see Awóbùlúyì 2001 for a detailed discussion on this claim). It is interesting to note that, in spite of his persistent position on the HTS, Awóbùlúyì (1992) opined that a perfect solution may never be found to the problem of the HTS in Yorùbá, based on the polarized opinion on its actual form and function, and to date, the controversy continues.

3. The Present Study

There has been no previous attempt to examine the HTS from the second language learner's perspective. However, studies have shown that second language learners have a way of obeying the rules of the L2 to the letter, even rules which native speakers would normally disobey and ignore (White & Juffs 1998; Hoover & Dwivedi 1998; Clahsen & Felser, 2006). We believe that data from L2 learners would help explain some controversial issues in such language, even those that arise among native speakers. This is the approach that the present study adopts when focusing on the occurrence and function of the HTS; thus, we examine data from the interlanguage grammars[1] of some Ìgbò L2 speakers of Yorùbá.

3.1 *General Objective of the Study*

This study tries to ascertain the status of the HTS in Yorùbá in terms of its actual form and function. It attempts to see the form that the second language learners of Yorùbá (Ìgbò L1 speakers in this case) would use to represent the HTS in obligatory contexts, as well as the function that they would assign to the element in such contexts in their interlan-

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[1] The interlanguage grammar according to Selinker (1972) refers to intermediate states or intermediate grammars of a L2 learner's language as it moves towards the target language. It is a product of a creative process driven by inner forces and interaction, influenced by L1 and input from the target language. The interlanguage grammar has some peculiar characteristics, the most prominent one being its frequent changes. It is also governed by some innate rules as well as the structure of the L1.

guage grammar. It focuses on the contexts of occurrence of the HTS in Yorùbá sentences, and in the function it performs in each of the contexts in which it was used by the Ìgbò L2 Yorùbá learners.

3.2 *Sampling*

The subjects for this study were three native speakers of Ìgbò[2] (a child and two adults), who were second language learners of Yorùbá. The first subject (Uche) was a ten-year-old boy whose parents are of Ìgbò extraction. He was born and raised in a small village in Imo State, one of the five states which make up the South-East (Ìgbò region) in Nigeria. His parents moved to Ibadan (a town in the Southwestern part of Nigeria), where Yorùbá is the lingua franca, when he was five years old. Prior to this time, Uche had never had any encounter with Yorùbá native speakers and the only language he spoke according to his parents was Ìgbò. He was enrolled in a public primary school where all the teaching took place in Yorùbá, and the students also communicate among them in Yorùbá, but the parents still used Ìgbò when talking to him at home. At the time of data collection, Uche had spent five years in Ibadan and had been exposed to Yorùbá language for five years, both formally and informally.

The second subject (Pius) was a 49-year-old trader also of Ìgbò extraction. He was equally born and raised in a small village in Imo State in Nigeria. He moved to Ibadan when he was 8 years old to join his uncle,

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2 Igbo is a language classified under the Niger-Congo language family sub-classified under the west Benue-Congo of the YEAI group. The language does not have a HTS of the type we find in Yorùbá.

who was a trader. Prior to that time, he had never had contact with any Yorùbá native speakers and the only language he spoke was Ìgbò. He had completed six years of elementary education, as well as five years of secondary school in Ibadan. After his secondary education, he concentrated fully on his business as a trader in Ibadan, where his uncle opened a shop for him in one of the main markets. At the point of data collection, Pius had been exposed to Yorùbá language for over forty years, both formally and informally, and he considered himself a competent speaker of Yorùbá language.

The third subject (Nneka) was a 26-year-old trader married to Pius, the second subject described above. She is from the same village as Pius. She moved to Ibadan at the age of 22 (four years before the collecting of the data) and prior to that time she had never had any encounter with a Yorùbá native speaker: the only language she spoke was Ìgbò. She joined her husband in running his business as soon as she came to Ibadan and had been constantly interacting with Yorùbá speakers. This implies that she had been exposed to Yorùbá informally for four years when these data were collected.

3.3. *Research Questions*

This study is guided by two overarching questions:

i.   What is the exact form and function of the Yorùbá HTS, as reflected in the interlanguage grammar of Ìgbò L2 learners of Yorùbá?

ii.   Do Ìgbò L2 learners of Yorùbá employ the HTS in the same context as

L1 (native) Yorùbá speakers?

Answers to these two questions would be provided with data from the three Ìgbò native speakers, who were L2 Yorùbá and whose linguistic and social backgrounds were given above. The age differences among the subjects, and the fact that their exposure to Yorùbá language varied in length, source and modes, adds validity to the results.

3.4 *Instrument*

This study examined a set of spontaneous production data collected from three Ìgbò second language learners of Yorùbá. The data were collected for a period of three months at regular intervals. The three subjects were interviewed separately four times in a week, and twelve times each for the entire three-month period; each of these was recorded as a file. The data were collected through various interviews and discussions under naturalistic settings, i.e. they took place in informal conditions where the subjects had the opportunity to express themselves naturally in the target language (Yorùbá). There was a particular context in which Pius and Nneka were recorded during business transactions with their customers who were native Yorùbá speakers. During the discussion and interview sessions, family members, friends of the subjects who are native speakers of Yorùbá, as well as the researcher, participated in the discussions. They were given the opportunity to discuss issues of interest and were also allowed to dictate the tune of the discussions. The focus was on the HTS, its form and contexts of occurrence as well the function assigned to it by the three subjects in their interlanguage grammar. The

results were analyzed based on accuracy[3] and inaccuracy of suppliance of the HTS in obligatory contexts.

3.5 *Findings*

The result of this study concerns the form and function assigned to the established v-shaped element (HTS) which occurs between the subject NP and the verb in declarative sentences in Yorùbá in obligatory contexts,[4] as supplied by the Ìgbò subjects. We do not focus on the comparison of results, rate or level of accuracy among the three subjects, but on the correct and incorrect suppliance of the HTS in comparison with their suppliance in established contexts of occurrence as used by Yorùbá native speakers. Thus, the use of statistical measurement is not relevant in the analysis of results. In all, the three subjects displayed good knowledge of the element in their individual speeches. Table 1 shows a summary of the number of occurrence of the elements in their files.

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[3] Accuracy as used in this study was analyzed and viewed from two angles: (a) it refers to any context in which adult Yorùbá native speakers would not normally use the HTS, and (b) it was also regarded as an acceptable form when the context of use as well the function assigned to it by the L2 subjects is in line with the underlying form proposed by Awóbùlúyì (1992).

[4] Obligatory contexts refer to any context in which adult native speakers of Yorùbá would normally and consistently use the HTS.

Table 1: Suppliance of the HTS in oral production among the three subjects

Subjects	Accurate A	%	Accurate B	%	Inaccurate	%	Total
Uche	258	53.3	192	39.7	34	7	484
Pius	424	61	261	37.6	10	1.4	695
Nneka	127	29.9	243	57.2	55	12.9	425

Note. Accurate a= accurate suppliance of the HTS as judged by adult Yorùbá native speakers. Accurate b= accurate suppliance of the HTS following the underlying form proposed by Awóbùlúyì (1992). inaccurate= suppliance of the HTS in wrong contexts.

From the results presented in Table 1, which show the accurate and inaccurate suppliance of the HTS among the three subjects, it was discovered that the accurate suppliance of the HTS by the subjects far outnumbered the inaccurate suppliance. For example, Uche had 53.3% for Accurate a, 39.7% for Accurate b and only 7% for *inaccurate suppliance*. Pius had 61% for Accurate a, 37.6% for Accurate b and 1.4% for *inaccurate suppliance*, while Nneka had 29.9% for Accurate a, 57.2% Accurate b and 12.9% for *inaccurate suppliance* of the HTS. Furthermore, it was discovered that the suppliance for Accurate a –which is the form that adult native speakers of Yorùbá would use in all contexts– had a higher number of suppliance than Accurate b (i.e. the position of the underlying form proposed by Awóbùlúyì, 1992) in the results of two of the subjects (Uche and Pius), while the third subject (Nneka) had a higher number of suppliance in Accurate b than Accurate a. The reason for the disparity between the results of Nneka and the other two subjects may be due to the fact that she had the least exposure to Yorùbá

at the time of data collection. It was also observed that Pius had a higher rate of suppliance for Accurate a than Accurate b. This is likely due to his more that forty years of exposure to Yorùbá. The only context of inaccurate suppliance for all the subjects, as observed in the data, was when the HTS was used alongside the continuous marker *ń* in certain contexts (see examples in Section 4).

4. Discussion

Based on previous studies on the HTS among Yorùbá native speakers, there are restrictions on the position in which the HTS can occur. For example, the HTS is believed not to co-occur with the negative marker *kò* (see Adéwọlé 1999). However, a lot of facts revealed in this new study contradict some established generalizations about the HTS regarding its position of occurrence, particularly when it is considered from the angle and position of the underlying form proposed by Awóbùlúyì (1992; 2001; 2006) in standard Yorùbá. Below are examples of such uses (the asterisks indicate inaccurate suppliance):

(8) Wàhálà **ó** pọ̀   ni ọjà   Onitsha
     stress   hts plenty at market Onitsha
     'There is too much stress at Onitsha market'   (Pius)

(9) *Ṣé èyin **ó** ń   lọ sí Àkùngba lóní?
     qm you.pl hts cont go to Akungba today
     ('Are you(pl) going to Akungba today?')   (Uche)

(10) Tiṣà   **ó**   nà   mi
teacher HTS beat me
'The teacher beat me'   (Uche)

(11) Ṣé ìyàwo mi **ó**   wà ni shop?
QM wife   my HTS be   at shop
'Is my wife at the shop?'   (Pius)

(12) Èmí kò   lọ   ìyàwó mi   àti   ọ́mọ̀ mi ni   **ó**   lọ
I   NEG go   wife   my   and child my FOC HTS go
'I did not go it was my wife who went (there)'   (Pius)

(13) Nneka **ó**   wà ni'le
Nneka HTS be   at-home
'Nneka is at home'   (Pius)

(14) Ọ́rẹ́   mi **ó**   fun   mi   jẹ
friend my HTS give   me   eat
'My friend shared it with me'   (Uche)

(15) Èmí ni   **ó**   tà   a   fún   ùn
I   FOC HTS sell it   give 3.SG
'It was I who sold it to him'   (Nneka)

(16) *Ebi   **ó**   ń̀   pà   ọ́mọ̀ mi   ní   ọ̀jọ   náà
hunger HTS CONT kill child my   on   day   the
('My baby was hungry on that day')   (Nneka)

(17) Èló   ni ókò   mi **ó** pè   e   fún ẹ?
      how.much be husband my HTS call it give you
      'What price did my husband give you?'   (Nneka)

(18) *Òrẹ́ mi **ó** ń   gbé   ní   Ìkàrẹ
      friend my HTS CONT live in   Ìkàrẹ́
      ('My friend lives in Ìkàrẹ́')   (Pius)

(19) *Ṣé òga **ó** ń   bò   ní'bàdàn   ní   òtúnla?
      QM boss HTS CONT come to-Ibadan in   three-days-time
      ('Is the boss coming to Ibadan in three days' time?')   (Nneka)

(20) Mò **ó** sò   fún àwọn customers tí **ó** wá   rà   ójà   pe
      I   HTS tell give they customers REL HTS come buy market that
      ójà   **ó** ti   wọn
      market HTS REL expensive
      'I told my customers who came that goods are now expensive'   (Pius)

(21) Òún **ó** wà   nílé   ní   òjọ   náà
      3.SG HTS be at-home on   day   the
      'He was at home on that particular day'   (Pius)

(22) Bàbá mi ni **ó** rà   ìwe   fún   mi
      father my FOC HTS buy book give me
      'It was my father who bought books for me'   (Uche)

(23)　Awá　**ó**　wà　ni　East　nígbà　náà
　　　 we　　HTS　be　in　East　at-time　the
　　　 'We were in the East (Ìgbòland) during that time'　　　　　　(Pius)

(24)　Omo　náà　**ó**　sáré　　wọle　　　　omo　náà　**ó**　sá　pàmọ
　　　 child　the　HTS　run-race　enter-house　child　the　HTS　run　hide
　　　 'The boy ran into the house and hid himself'　　　　　　　(Uche)

(25)　Bàbá　mi　**ó**　wà　ni　ìlú　wa
　　　 father　my　HTS　be　at　town　our
　　　 'My father is our town'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Nneka)

A look at examples (8)-(25) shows that they all assigned the form [o] with a high tone (*ó*) as the form of the HTS in all contexts of suppliance. In example (24), a Yorùbá native speaker would deliberately omit the second NP, i.e. *ọmọ náà*, which would make that NP position vacant. By contrast, the Ìgbò subject, a second language speaker of Yorùbá, used the NP overtly in the same position, which confirms that some innate language mechanism must be fundamentally responsible for this, and that the NP is underlyingly present. Another important revelation is that the HTS was consistently used between the subject NP and the verb in all instances, even in contexts where Yorùbá native speakers would not use it overtly. This was shown in (20), (21) and (23), where the HTS was used immediately after pronouns. Example (21) is particularly interesting because the HTS was used after the third person singular pronoun *òun*. Though this is an unusual occurrence, it appears to corroborate the claim

of Awóbùlúyì (1992) that the HTS is not a pronoun and that, in constructions where the HTS is the first overt element in standard Yorùbá (see example 5 above), the subject NP is always truly covert. Furthermore, the Ìgbò subjects also used the HTS immediately after the focus marker *ni* and the relative marker *tí* as shown in (12), (15), (20) and (22) just like Yorùbá native speakers. However, the use of the HTS between the subject NP and the continuous marker (i.e. after the subject NP and before the continuous marker [ń] in a sentence) is an unusual occurrence of the HTS, which was neither expected nor predicted. This is the only case regarded as inaccurate suppliance in this study (see examples 9, 16, 18 and 19) and this is why the sentences were asterisked (*). In standard Yorùbá, the HTS can co-occur with the continuous marker *ń* only in certain contexts, thus example (26) below is grammatical:

(26) **Ó**　　ń　　　gbé　ní　Ìkàrẹ́
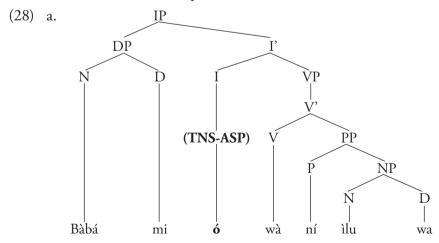　　　 hts　cont　live　in　Ìkàrẹ́
　　　 'He/she lives in Ìkàrẹ́'

It should be noted that the HTS can only co-occur with the continuous marker in (26) because the subject NP is covert. Once the subject NP shows up, the HTS would have to be removed or else the construction would become ungrammatical. Consider (27) below:

(27) Ọ̀rẹ́　　mi　ń　　　gbé　ní　Ìkàrẹ̀
　　　 friend　my　cont　live　in　Ìkàrẹ̀
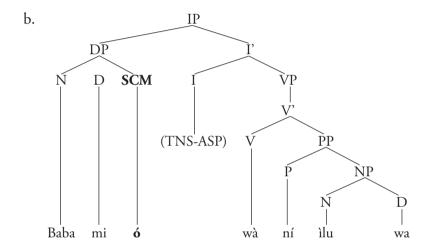　　　 'My friend lives in Ìkàrẹ́'

If (27) is compared with (18) above, it becomes obvious why (18) is considered ungrammatical. On the other hand, the use of an overt subject in this position by the Ìgbò subjects strongly supports the claim by Awóbùlúyì that the subject NP is truly covert but underlyingly present; this must have triggered its overt use by the Ìgbò subjects in that particular position. However, this usage (i.e. the occurrence of the HTS between the subject NP and the continuous marker) is a notable occurrence because there was no instance where the HTS was used alongside other aspectual markers (e.g. the future marker *á* and the negative marker *kò*) by any of the Ìgbò subjects. Thus, its use with the continuous marker in this context may suggest something different about its function, contrary to the claim made by Awóbùlúyì. It may suggest that its function may be underlyingly restricted within the NP and not the VP. Recall that Awóbùlúyì argued that the HTS usually assimilates to the last vowel of the preceding NP (see example 6 above). Yet, he claims that the element is a tense/aspectual marker that would have to occur under Inflection, which is still related to the verb. Taiwo (2006), observed that if the HTS were a tense/aspectual marker in standard Yorùbá, it would be difficult to explain its relationship with the preceding NP, since it assimilates to its last vowel. This argument is in line with reseachers like Fresco (1970), who refers to the HTS as a subject concord marker, Stahlke (1974), who calls it a subject concord prefix, Bámgbóṣé (1967), and Courtenay (1968), who refer to it as a concord marker. All these functions are restricted to the NP, which means that the function of the HTS according these writers relates more to the subject NP, the one that usually precedes the HTS in declarative sentences in Yorùbá.

Since the claim of Awóbùlúyì regarding the underlying form of HTS was also corroborated in this study, the function assigned to it by the Ìgbò subjects would be subject to syntactic analysis. If the two views (i.e. the one which claims the HTS is a preverbal element a tense/aspectual marker which marks past/present tense and the one which claims it is a concord marker which agrees with the preceding NP) are considered from the theoretical framework of the Government and Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981), and the Minimalist Programme (Chomsky 1998), the occurrence of the HTS under the representation of both claims could be given as in (28a) and (28b) from example (25) above. The tree diagrams below would represent the grammatical function assigned to the HTS, depending on the particular function assigned to it in the context. In (28a), TNS-ASP stands for tense/aspectual marker, while SCM stands for *subject concord marker* in (28b).

Bàbá mi ó wà ní ìlu wa (example 25)

(28)   a.

In (28a), the HTS was placed under Inflection, where it was analyzed as the tense marker in the sentence. The sentence in (28a) has only one interpretation. It shows the present state of being of the subject NP *bàbá mi* which reflects simple present tense.

b.

In (28b), the HTS was placed under the DP, where it was analyzed as the subject concord marker that agrees with the preceding NP *bàbá mi*; the sentence still expresses the simple present tense.

According to Awóbùlúyì (2005), the analysis in (28b), which regards the HTS a subject concord marker, would run into difficulties when certain constructions in standard Yorùbá are considered. For example in focus construction:

(29) **Àwa** ni   **ó**   lọ
      We   FOC HTS go
      'It was we that went (there)'

(30) ** Òjó àti Dàda** ni   **ó**   lọ
     Òjó and Dàda FOC HTS go
     'It was Òjó and Dada that went (there)'

    In (29) and (30), the subject NPs (*àwa* and *Òjó and Dàda*) are plural and, going by concord rule, the concord or agreement marker should also be plural. Thus, if the HTS truly functions as a concord or agreement marker it should not occur in that position in (29) and (30), since the HTS denotes singularity. Example (12) by one of the subjects also confirms this.

    Also, the occurrence of the HTS in some Yorùbá dialects like Òwò further confirms that the HTS appears not to function as a pronoun and neither as a subject concord marker. According to Oshodi (2013), the HTS *ó* occurs overtly between the subject NP and the verb in declarative sentences, only in contexts which could express either present or past actions in Òwò; any attempt to assimilate the HTS to the last vowel of the preceding NP, like it happens in standard Yorùbá, would result in either ungrammaticality or ambiguity. Consider the examples below:

(31) Ọẹ   **ó**   yòn
     stew HTS sweet
     'The stew is delicious'

(32) Ejin **ó**   rò
     rain HTS fall
     'It rained'

If the assimilation and deletion processes (i.e. when the HTS is deleted and its tone gets transferred to the last vowel of the preceding NP) are applied to Ọ̀wọ̀, this would result in ungrammaticality in (31) and ambiguity in (32) as shown in (33) and (34), respectively:

(33)   *Ọbẹ́ yọ̀n
       ('stew sweet')

(34)   Ejín rọ̀
       rain fall
       'It is raining' or 'It rained'

What we discovered from the examples in Ọ̀wọ̀ dialect is that anytime the HTS occurs overtly in a declarative sentence, the sentence usually expresses present or past action, which suggests that it appears to function as a tense and aspect marker.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study revealed some facts about the form and function of the HTS, which also directly answer the two research questions proposed in §3.3. First and foremost, it was demonstrated that all the Ìgbò subjects used the form *ó*, which is the form proposed by Awóbùlúyì as the underlying form of the HTS. The form is also attested in some dialects of standard Yorùbá, like Ọ̀wọ̀ and Ifọ́n (Awóbùlúyì 1992), Èkìtì (Olúmúyìwá 2009), Òǹdó (Adesuyan 2007) and Ọ̀wọ̀ (Oshodi 2013).

This would support the claim of Awóbùlúyì (1992; 2001) that the underlying form of the HTS is *ó*. It is surprising that the Ìgbò subjects used the HTS (i.e. the form *ó*) in positions in which speakers of the above Yorùbá dialects normally use them, first, because they do not speak any of these dialects, and even more so, because the Ibadan dialect which they speak does not employ that form of the HTS in the underlying positions identified above. The occurrence of the HTS as employed by the Ìgbò L2 subjects showed that they used it to express past/present actions, which also supports the claim of Awóbùlúyì. However, the use of the element with the continuous marker *ń* in certain contexts in which it does not seem to express past or present action may be seen as evidence to support the claim of Fresco (1970), Stahlke (1974), Bámgbóṣé (1967) and Courtenay (1968), according to which the element is a subject marker and that its function is related to the NP. Nonetheless, a look at the instances where the HTS was used with the continuous marker by the Ìgbò subjects revealed that the claim that its function is related to the NP cannot be fully supported. For example, (16) and (18) still express past and present actions, respectively. (8) and (19) are questions (where the sentences have the question marker *ṣé* in initial position) and thus are derived sentences, which means that the original arrangement of the basic sentences had been altered. What this confirms is that the HTS tends to function as a tense and aspectual marker in declarative sentences, as well as in some derived sentences of the Ìgbò subjects, thus supporting the claim by Awóbùlúyì that the element expresses past/present actions. The linguistic ability displayed by the Ìgbò subjects in using the HTS in Yorùbá definitely goes beyond input. This ability appears to have been

triggered by some language related innate features, i.e. UG, as suggested by White (2007). This is similar to what Ayoun (2005) discovered with some L2 learners of French, whose use of tense and aspect revealed some qualities and abilities which go beyond linguistic input. This results led her to conclude that their performance could be linked to the concept of UG, just like the case for L1 acquisition.

In sum, apart from revealing some facts about the form and function of the HTS, this study also confirms the claim in Second Language Acquisition that a thorough and careful study of the speech pattern of L2 learners (interlanguage) can help to throw more light on the structure of the target L1 in certain instances. This is because L2 learners have the tendency to obey the rules of the target language to the letter, including rules that native speakers would normally take for granted. This was clearly revealed in the way the HTS was used by the Ìgbò L2 speakers of Yorùbá. Also, the occurrence of the HTS in the interlanguage grammar of the Ìgbò native speakers suggests that the concept of UG may actually be involved in L2 acquisition, as claimed by White (2010). This is because the Ìgbò native speakers came to the Yorùbá L2 learning context with zero knowledge of Yorùbá language, and thus their ability to acquire and use the controversial HTS –particularly the underlying form proposed by Awóbùlúyì (1992)– in correct contexts cannot be attributed to input. One good reason for arguing this is that the Ibadan dialect of Yorùbá does not use the *ó* form of the HTS overtly in certain contexts in which the subjects used them; therefore, they must have acquired the knowledge through innate means. This could also be substantiated with the fact that both Nneka and Uche –who had between four and five years

of exposure to Yorùbá when the data were collected– and Pius –who had over forty years of exposure– still exhibited similar linguistic tendencies in their use of the HTS. Though facts concerning the form and particularly the function of the HTS were revealed in this study, the controversy surrounding its precise function in standard Yorùbá as observed by Awóbùlúyì (1992) is still far from over, as contradictory facts still showed up in the data examined.

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