

IS OLÙKÙMI A DIALECT OF YORÙBÁ? AN EXPLORATION OF SYNTACTIC EVIDENCE

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Abstract

The linguistic status of Olùkùmi, spoken in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, is contending among the linguists. While some scholars classify it as a dialect of Yorùbá due to historical migration and lexical similarities, others consider it an autonomous but related language. This study treats the research problem of Olùkùmi's genetic affiliation, exploring syntactic evidence to find out the extent of structural similarity and difference between Olùkùmi and Standard Yorùbá. Employing a qualitative comparative syntactic analysis as methodology, data drawn from twenty (20) native speakers of Olùkùmi were compared with Standard Yorùbá construction across syntactic domains such as word order, negation, focus construction, and pronoun system. The findings reveal both similarities and significant differences. Both Olùkùmi and Standard Yorùbá operate SVO word order typology in a simple clause or sentence. Also, it was discovered that there are striking similarities in the syntactic distributions between Olùkùmi and Yorùbá pronoun systems. However, the latter does not attest second- and third-person plural pronouns, a contrast to Yorùbá's complete pronominal paradigm. Furthermore, the study reveals that negation, focusing, and relativization are carried out in the same manner in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá, aside from the differences in the negators and relative markers. Based on the syntactic evidence gathered, the paper concludes that Olùkùmi is a dialect of Yorùbá outside the Yorùbá community in Nigeria. These findings contribute

to the existing debates on the language-dialect status of Olùkùmi and underpin the need for more scholarly works on the syntactic documentation of the little-studied varieties.

Keywords: Word order, negation, pronoun system, focus construction, relativization

1.0 Introduction

Olùkùmi, a speech form enclaved in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria has become a linguistic discourse within the linguistic architecture in Nigeria. On one hand, Arokoyò (2012, 2014, 2016) and Èlẹ̀sin (2012, 2017) claimed that Olùkùmi is a distinct language. On the other hand, Obiṣẹ́san (2012), Jacob and AbdulRafiu (2016) and Kareem (2020) disagreed with this assertion; they established Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá spoken in diaspora within Nigeria due to its close affinity with other dialects of Yorùbá such as Ìkàlẹ̀, Òndó, Ọ̀wọ̀ among others.

Kareem (2021) went further by classifying Olùkùmi as a South-eastern dialect of Yorùbá due to its closeness to Ọ̀wọ̀. His classification is based on three criteria: historical criterion, morpho-syntactic similarity, and lexicostatistic analysis of basic numerals, basic parts of the body, and the pronoun system.

It is against this backdrop that this paper explored the genetic relatedness between Olùkùmi and Yorùbá via the lens of syntactic tools, such as word order, negation, focus construction, relativization and pronoun system as to establish the status of Olùkùmi spoken in Delta state in the linguistic realm.

1.1 Olùkúmi and Its Speakers

Olùkúmi is a speech form whose speakers are also popularly known as Olùkùmi. It is spoken in the Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. There are varying versions of stories concerning the origin of Olùkúmi. While some scholars claimed that Olùkúmi migrated from Òwò town, Ondo State, Nigeria, others believed that it is from Ilé-Ifè, the cradle of Yorùbá descendants (Èlẹsin 2012, Obiṣẹsan 2012, Jacob and AbdulRafiu 2016).

Ugbodu and Ukwu-Nzu are the two varieties of the Olùkúmi dialect. The former has a closer affinity with Yorùbá than the latter. Going by Èlẹsin (2012) as recorded in Arokoyo (2014:271), Olùkúmi clan comprises seven towns: Ugbodu, Ukwu-Nzu, Ubulubu, Ugboba, Idumogo, Ogodor, and Anioma. Olùkúmi shares boundaries with many ethnic groups, which is obviously evident in their dialects. On the East, she shares a boundary with Anambra State, South-east with Imo and Rivers States, Bayelsa State in the South, Isoko in the South-west, in the West with Urhobo, North-west with Edo State, and in the North with Kogi (Arokoyo 2014:273).

According to the National Population Census of 2006, Olùkúmi has a population of 13,750 (2014:271). Olùkùmis are predominantly Christians, and they practise farming as their major occupation.

2.0 Methodology

This research work employs a descriptive qualitative research design with elements of the linguistics fieldwork. Therefore, the approach delved on naturally occurring spoken data to identify, describe, and analyze the syntactic features of

an endangered speech form, Olùkúmi spoken in the Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, as to establish its genetic status due to the debates regarding its linguistic status as an autonomous language or a dialect of Yorùbá spoken outside the Yorùbá community. The research was conducted in Ugbodi village and its surrounding areas in Delta State, Nigeria. The target population for this study comprises twenty Olùkúmi native speakers who are 50 years above. They acquire Olùkúmi as their first language and use it daily in both domestic and community settings.

Data for this study were drawn from interviews. Each informant participated in two types of sessions; semi-structured interviews (40-60 minutes) comprising daily activities such as folktales, cooking, and farming and controlled elicitation (40 minutes) employing one hundred and fifty-item words (150) and sentences featuring specific syntactic structures like pronoun, word order, negation, focusing and relativization. All interview sessions were audio-recorded using digital recorder. The data were transcribed and analyzed within basin linguistic theory following procedures like identification of syntactic patterns across all informants, contrasting younger and older speakers' utterances to assess syntactic mix-ups and cross-verification of unclear data with five elderly native speakers who are not among the twenty informants in a separate session. All Olùkúmi data cited in this work are primary data gathered from our informants during the fieldwork as stated above.

This study ensured strict ethical guidelines compliance, such informant consent, voluntary participation and withdrawal, anonymity and data protection, community benefit, and compensation for the research to be robust and ethical-based.

3.0 Syntactic Evidence

This section presents syntactic evidence, such as word order, pronoun system, relativization, focus construction, and negation, to establish Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá spoken outside Yorùbá communities in Nigeria.

3.1. Word Order

Word order is a linear arrangement of syntactic constituents in a phrase, clause or sentence. It is observed that languages of the world are diverse in respect to word order. That is, individual word categories are arranged in a grammatical construction. Olùkùmi, like Yorùbá demonstrates an **SVO word** order in clauses or simple sentences. This implies that each item in a phrasal or sentential construction follows the order of subject (S), verb (V), and object (O). Consider the example (1) below:

Olùkùmi

- 1a. Òjọ ra azá
Òjọ buy dog
'Òjọ bought a dog.'

Yorùbá

- b. Òjọ ra ajá
Òjọ buy dog
'Òjọ bought a dog.'

It is clearly shown in (1a & b) that Olùkùmi and Yorùbá operate a Subject-Verb-Object word-order typology. Also, in the examples (1a & b), the two speech forms have a phonosyntactic property in common; Just like in Yorùbá, Olùkùmi L-tone verb changes to M-tone when follows by a noun object.

3.2 Negation

Negation is a universal syntactic process that features in all natural languages. The scope of negation varies from one language to another. Some languages mark negation morphologically by employing negative morphemes, as in the case of Yorùbá. Also, a language could exhibit negation

phonologically, phono-syntactically, or morpho-syntactically. Crystal (2008:323) defines negation as "a process of construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses contradiction of some or all of a sentence's meaning. In English grammar, negation is expressed by the presence of the negative particle 'not' or 'n't' (the contracted negative)." The preceding definition implies that negation is a syntactic process that alters the meaning of a sentence from positive to negative. Also notable from the definition is that a negation could be a constituent, a part of sentence or sentential, a whole sentence. The data in (2) demonstrates negation in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá.

2a. Olùkùmi

- i. Bòlà èè yú
Bòlá HTS NEG go
'Bòlá didn't go'
ii. É è dó Bòlá
HTS NEG marry Bòlá
'He didn't marry Bòlá'
iii. Olú é èjọ
Olú HTS NEG dance
'Olú didn't use to dance.'
iv. Mọ̀ọ̀ bínọ̀
NEG angry
'Don't be angry'

b. Yorùbá

- i. Bòlá kò lọ
Bòlá NEG go
'Bòlá didn't go'
ii. Kò fẹ̀ Bòlá
NEG marry Bòlá
'He didn't
iii. Olú kì jọ
Olú NEG dance
'Olú didn't use to
iv. Máà bínú
NEG angry
'Don't be

Looking at the example (2ai-iv & 2bi-iv) closely, one can deduce the following observations. First, Olùkùmi has è

and **mòṣ** as negators, while Yorùbá negators are **kò, kì**, and **má/máà**. Second, it is observed that HTS is overt in Olùkùmi. It occurs between the subject NP and the negator. On the contrary, HTS is always covert in Yorùbá negative formatives. It is, however, noteworthy to say that this rule is only applicable to Standard Yorùbá. For instance, just like Olùkùmi, in Òwò, a dialect of Yorùbá, HTS can occur between the subject and negator. Example (3) confirms this.

- 3a. É è yúbè
HTS NEG go-there
“He/she didn't go-there”
b. Dàdàà yúbè
Dàdà-HTS NEG go-there
“Dàdà didn't go-there”
(culled from Oshodi (2017:112))

This being the case, we can say Olùkùmi is a dialect of Yorùbá because it exhibits one of the syntactic features of Òwò, a Yorùbá dialect in Òwò town, Ondo State, Nigeria.

In example (3a), HTS occurs in an imperative negation; it assimilates the form of è, negators, while in (3b), it is deleted and its high tone surfaces on the last vowel of the subject NP, Dàdà.

Third, the imperative negators, **mòṣ** (Olùkùmi) and **máà** (Yorùbá) are different in respect to **o** and **a**. The difference can be accounted for as a result of the long-time separation between Olùkùmi and Yorùbá. However, they still have relics of HL tones. Aside from this, there are Yorùbá dialects such as Èkiti (**mòṣ**) Àwóri (**mòṣ**), Ifè Togo (**mòṣ**), Ìlàjè (**méè**), Òyó-Ibadan (**méè**) that employ **mòṣ** or a form closer to it as imperative negator (see Fabumi 2013).

3.3 Pronoun system

Pronouns serve as a replacement for noun phrases, and they can occur in the same position as nouns. The pronoun system can be used as a tool to measure the degree of language-relatedness. To this credit, Salawu (2009:429) quotes Newman (2002) thus:

.....because grammatical morphemes and such paradigmatic classes as PRONOUNS are much

less prone to borrowing. Vocabulary similarities between them can be strong

evidence of relatedness (Emphasis mine)

It is understood from the preceding quotation that pronouns can be used as one of criteria to determine relatedness of languages. This is due to the fact that they are less subjected to borrowing.

Olùkùmi and Yorùbá as parts of human languages attest short and long pronouns. Their pronouns reflect number (Singular and Plural) and person such as 1st person (the speaker), 2nd person (the listener) and 3rd person (the person or something discussed). Yusuf and Adeniyi (2004:10) colligate pronouns into personal, reflexive and possessive pronouns. The tables in (4a & b) demonstrate the forms of the pronouns while (5a & b) exhibit their syntactic distributions.

Short Pronoun

(a) Subject

Olùkùmi

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	Mo	a /àwa
2 nd Person	Wọ	èghen
3 rd Person	Ó	àwan

- i. Mò ó raṣọ ‘ I buy/bought cloth’
- ii. À á raṣọ ‘We buy/bought cloth’
- iii. Wò ó raṣọ ‘ You buy/bought cloth’
- iv. Èghen raṣọ ‘You buy/bought cloth’
- v. Ó raṣọ ‘He/She buy/bought cloth’
- vi. Àwan raṣọ ‘They buy/bought cloth’

(a) Subject

Yorùbá

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	Mo	A
2 nd Person	O	ẹ
3 rd Person	Ó	wọn

Yorùbá

- i. Mo raṣọ ‘I buy/bought cloth.’
- ii. A raṣọ ‘We buy/bought cloth.’
- iii. O raṣọ ‘You buy/bought cloth.’
- iv. Ó raṣọ ‘He/She buy/bought cloth.’
- v. Wọn raṣọ ‘They buy/bought cloth.’

**(b) Object
Olùkùmi**

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	Mi	Wa
2 nd Person	ẹ	Ghen
3 rd Person	Un	Wán

- i. Bisi hún mi. ‘Bisi gave me.’
- ii. Bisi hún wa. ‘ Bisi gave us.’
- iii. Bisi hún ẹ. ‘Bisi gave you.’
- iv. Bisi hún ghen. ‘Bisi gave you.’
- v. Bisi hún. ‘Bisi gave him/her’
- vi. Bisi hún wán. ‘Bisi gave them’

Object

Yorùbá

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	Mi	Wa
2 nd Person	ẹ	Yin
3 rd Person	Un	wọn

- i. Bisi fún mi. ‘Bisi gives/gave me.’
- ii. Bisi fún wa. ‘Bisi gives/gave us.’
- iii. Bisi fún ẹ. ‘Bisi gives/gave you.’
- iv. Bisi fún yin. ‘Bisi gives/gave you.’
- v. Bisi fún un. ‘Bisi gives/gave him/her.’
- vi. Bisi fún wọn. ‘Bisi gives/gave them’

**(c) Long Pronoun
Olùkùmi**

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	èmi	Àwa
2 nd Person	ùwo	Èghen
3 rd Person	òwun	Àwan

- i. Èmí zẹ akpaka. ‘I eat/ate beans.’
- ii. Àwa zẹ akpaka. ‘We eat/ate beans.’

- iii. Òwò zẹ̀ akpaka. ‘You eat/ ate beans.’
- iv. Èghẹ̀n zẹ̀ akpaka. ‘You eat/ ate beans’
- iv. Òwun zẹ̀ akpaka. He/She eats/atr beans.’
- v. Àwan zẹ̀akpaka. They eat/ate beans.

**(d) Yorùbá
Long Pronoun**

	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	Èmi	Àwa
2 nd Person	Ìwọ̀	èyin
3 rd Person	Òun	àwọ̀n

- i. Èmi jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘I eat /ate beans.’
- ii Àwa jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘ We eat/ate beans.’
- iii Ìwọ̀ jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘You ea/ate beans.’
- iv Èyin jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘You eat/ate beans.’
- v. Òun jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘He/She eats/ate beans.’
- vi. Àwọ̀n jẹ̀ ẹ̀wà ‘They eats/ate beans.’

It is rightly observed from the preceding analyses that Olùkùmi, unlike Yorùbá, uses long plural pronouns for short plural subject pronouns (see example 4a). Also, on the long pronoun, Olùkùmi does not attest to the 2nd person plural. The variations such as **wọ̀n** and **wan**, **eyin** and **eghẹ̀n**, and **owun** and **oun** in the form of Olùkùmi and Yorùbá pronouns are not peculiar to Olùkumi. They are also evident in some well-known Yorùbá dialects like Òwò, Owé, and Ìgbóminà, among others. These variations occurred as a result of time, space, and the influence of the neighboring languages. However, these observations do not negate the claim that Olùkùmi is a dialect

of Yorùbá. The striking similarities in the phonological forms and the syntactic distributions of Olùkùmi and Yorùbá pronoun systems are sufficient as linguistic evidence to justify our claim.

We could still prove this further by examining the reflexive pronouns in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá. Reflexive pronouns signal an action of the verb that returns to the speaker. The action of the verb is carried out or acts on the participant himself/herself. Example (5) illustrates this.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>5a. Olùkùmi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. ara ‘body’+ mi ‘my’→arami
‘my’→arami ‘myself’ ii. ara ‘body’ + rẹ̀ ‘your’→ararẹ̀
‘your’→ararẹ̀ ‘yourself’ iii. ara ‘body’ + rẹ̀ ‘his/her’→ararẹ̀
‘his/her’→ararẹ̀ himself/herself iv. ara ‘body’ + wan ‘your’→ara wan
wan ‘your’→arawọ̀n ‘themselves’ | <p>b. Yorùbá</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. ara ‘body’+ mi ii. ara ‘body’ + rẹ̀ iii. ara ‘body’ + rẹ̀ iv. ara ‘body’ + |
|--|---|

Examples (5ai-iv & 5bi-iv) indicate that reflexive pronouns are formed via compounding. Olùkùmi and Yorùbá take the morpheme ara ‘body,’ and short pronouns form reflexivity. We can still find this kind of striking similarity in the possessive pronouns as observed in the data below.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>a. Olùkùmi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. tẹ̀mi ii. tíwa iii. tíwọ̀ iv. tírẹ̀ v. tíwọ̀n | <p>Yorùbá</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tẹ̀mi tiwa tírẹ̀ tírẹ̀ tiwọ̀n | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘mine’ ‘ours’ ‘yours’ ‘his/hers/its’ ‘theirs’ |
|--|---|---|

It is shown in the data above that both Olùkùmi and Yorùbá employ the same scope to form possessive pronouns; **ti** and short pronoun. This also serves as another syntactic evidence that Olùkùmi is a dialect of Yorùbá.

3.4 FOCUS CONSTRUCTION

Focus is primarily employed to place prominence or emphasis on a targeted constituent or sentence. It is a universal syntactic process among natural languages. Radford (2003:275) views focus as a process by which a constituent is made the topic of a sentence by being moved into a mere prominent position at the front of the sentence. Olùkùmi and Yorùbá operate focusing. They both employ ‘ni’ as their focus marker. The constituents that can be focused in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá include subject NP, object NP, object of preposition NP, genitive NP and VP. Consider example (7) below:

Declarative Sentence

7a. Olùkùmi

- i. Òjò ra azá Olù ní ọzà
 ajá Olù ní ọjà
 Òjò buy dog Olù at market
 dog Olù at market
 ‘Òjò bought Olu’s dog at market.’
 bought Olu’s dog at market.’

b. Yorùbá

- i. Òjò ra
 Òjò buy
 ‘Òjò

Focus Constructions

Subject NP Focus

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| ii. Òjò ni ó ra azáOlù ní ọzà | ii. Òjò ni ó |
| ra ajáOlù ní ọjà | |
| Òjò FM RP buy dog Olù at market | Òjò FM |
| RP buy dog Olù at market | |
| ‘It was Òjò that bought Olu’s dog at market.’ | ‘It was Òjò |
| that bought Olu’s dog at market.’ | |

Object NP Focus

- | | |
|--|----------|
| iii. Azá Olù ni Òjò ra ní ọzà | iii. Ajá |
| Olù ni Òjò ra ní ọjà | |
| dog Olù FM Òjò buy at market | dog Olù |
| FM Òjò buy at market | |
| ‘It was Olu’s dog Òjò bought at market.’ | ‘It was |
| Olu’s dog that Òjò bought at the | market.’ |

Object of Preposition NP Focus

- | | |
|---|------------|
| iv. Ọzà ni Olù ti ra azá Òjò | iv. Ọjàni |
| Olù ti ra ajá Òjò | |
| market FM Olù PERF buy dog Òjò | market |
| FM Olù PERF buy dog Òjò | |
| ‘It was ats market Òjò bought Olu’s dog.’ | ‘It was at |
| the market that Òjò bought Olu’s dog.’ | |

VP/Predicate Focus

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| v. Rírà ni Òjò ra azá Olù ní ọjà | v. Rírà ni |
| Òjò ra ajá Olù ní ọjà | |
| buying FM Òjò buy dog Olù at market | buying |
| FM Òjò buy dog Olù at market | |

‘The fact was that Òjó bought Olu’s dog at market’
was that Òjó bought Olu’s dog at market’

Genitival NP

vi. Olú ni Òjó ra azá rẹ ní ọza Òjó ra ajá rẹ ní ọjà Olú FM Òjó buy dog RP at market Òjó buy dog his at market ‘It was Olú that Òjó bought his dog at market’ that Òjó bought his dog at market’	vi. Olú ni Olú FM ‘It was Olú
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It is obvious from the data above that focusing operates in the same way both in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá. Examples (7aii & bii) demonstrate subject NP focusing, when the subject NP is moved to be filled up with presumptive pronoun Ó. Object NP is illustrated in (7aiii & biii). When the object NP is moved to the sentence-initial position, the extraction site remains unfilled. (7aiv & biv) exemplify the object of the preposition focusing. (7av & bv) testify to Vp/predicate focusing, where the verb rà is nominalised via partial reduplication as a requirement of focusing. Finally, (7avi & bvi) exemplify genitival NP. At this juncture, the resumptive pronoun rẹ fills the initial position.

3.5 Relativization

Relativization is a syntactic process that has to do with the formation of a relative clause. Ilori (2010:251) defines relativization as:

a syntactic process of forming a relative construction.

A relative clause is a subordinate clause in a complex sentence

IP projection that contains a constituent that has a

kind of anaphoric links with another constituent serving as its antecedent in the main clause, such that the meaning

The complex clause involves two occurrences of a variable.

From the definition above, it is understood that a relative construction is subdivided into a matrix clause and a subordinate or embedded. A major divergence that exists between Olùkùmi and Yorùbá relativization is the relative marker. Olùkùmi uses **té** as a relative marker while Yorùbá employs **tí**. All syntactic positions can be relativised in Olùkùmi and can also be relativised in Yorùbá. The syntactic positions are subject NP, object NP, object of preposition NP, genitival NP, VP, etc. The Relativization in Olùkùmi and Yorùbá requires the movement of the relativized constituent from the embedded clause to the initial position of the matrix clause, then the relative markers **té/tí** will follow it immediately. The examples below showcase this assertion.

8a. Olùkùmi

Yorùbá

Declarative Sentence

i. Tolú kpa azá Bọla ní àná
ajá Bọla ní àná
‘Tolú t killed Bola’s dog yesterday.’
killed Bola’s dog yesterday.’

b.

i. Tolú pa
‘Tolú

Subject NP Relativization

NP Relativization

ii. Tolú té ó kpa azá Bọlaní àná
pa ajá Bọla ní àná

Subject

i. Tolú tí ó

Tolú Rel Rp kill dog Bola Prep. yesterday
Rp kill dog Bola Prep. yesterday
'Tolú that killed Bola's dog yesterday.'
killed Bola's dog yesterday.'

Object NP Relativization

Object NP Relativization

iii. Azá Bọla té Tolu kpa ní àná
Ajá Bọla tí Tolu pa ní àná
dog Bola Rel Tolu kill Prep market
Bola Rel Tolu kill Prep market
'Bola's dog that Tolu killed yesterday'
'Bola's dog that Tolu killed yesterday'

Object of preposition Relativization

iv. Àná té Tolú kpa azá Bọlá
Àná tí Tolú pa ajá Bọlá
yesterday Rel Tolu kill dog Bola
Yesterday that Tolu kill dog Bola
'Yesterday that Tolu killed Bola's dog'
'Yesterday that Tolu killed Bola's dog'

Genitival NP Relativization

Genitival NP Relativization

v. Bọla té Tolú kpa azá rẹ
Bọla tí Tolú pa ajá rẹ
Bola Rel Tolu kill dog his
Bọla Rel Tolu kill dog his
'Bọla that Tolu killed his dog'
'Bọla that Tolu killed his dog'

Tolú Rel

'Tolú that

ii.

dog

Object of

i.

i.

Predicate Relativization

Predicate Relativization

vi. Kpikpa té Tolu kpa azá Bọla
Pipa tí Tolu pa ajá Bọla
Killing Rel Tolu kill dog Bola
Killing Rel Tolu kill dog Bọla
'The killing that Tolu killed Bola's dog.'
'The killing that Tolu killed Bola's dog.'

v.

(8ai & 8bi) exemplify subject NP relativization in which the relativized constituent is moved from the embedded clause to the initial position of the matrix clause and immediately followed by the relative marker **té** in Olùkúmi and **tí** in Yorùba. A presumptive pronoun regularly filled up the extraction site where the subject NP is moved (8ai & bi). Object NP is illustrated in (8aii & bii). When object NP is moved to the initial position of matrix clause, the extraction site remains unfilled. The variation in the relative markers of Olùkúmi (**té**) and Yorùbá (**tí**) could be as a result of distance and long time of separation because there is possibility of variations in pronunciation and grammar between a language and its dialects due to distance, space and time (Fabunmi, 2010).

(8aiii & biii) showcase object of preposition relativization. In the case of (8aiv & biv), the genitival NP is relativized. When the genitival NP is moved to the initial position of the matrix clause, a presumptive pronoun **rẹ** always fills the extraction site. To cap it all, a predicate relativization is demonstrated in (8av & bv). In so doing, a verb is always nominalised before it can be relativized. This implies that in both Olùkúmi and Yorùbá, a relativized item must be a noun. This assertion could be supported by theoretical foundations and cross-linguistic

empirical evidence from major linguistic scholars, including but not limited to Keenan & Comrie (1977), Talmy (2000), Radford (2004), and Dryer (2013). These scholars unanimously conclude, based on cross-linguistic evidence, that a relativized item must be a noun.

This study shows that any attempt to relativize any other items in Olùkùmi or Yorùbá aside from nominals will make the resultant ungrammatical. Example (9) confirms this.

9. Olùkùmi Yorùbá

Tolú kpa azá Bọla ní àná
Tolú pa aja Bọla ní àná
Tólu killed Bólá's dog yesterday
'Tólu killed Bólá's dog yesterday'

* Tolú kpa **té** azá Bọla ní àná
Tolú pa **tí** ajá Bọla ní àná
Tolú kill Rel dog Bólá Prep yesterday
Tolú killed Bólá's dog yesterday
'Tolú killed that dog Bólá yesterday'
Tolú killed that dog Bólá yesterday'

The ungrammaticality of example (9) shows that relative construction is an NP, and it can only be headed by a noun.

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the comparative syntactic evidence gathered, this study concludes that the classification of Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá is supported by its syntactic structure, as shown that both Olùkùmi and Standard Yorùbá share

considerable syntactic distributions in common. The absence of distinct second- and third-person plural pronouns and the differences in relative markers and negators do not warrant Olùkùmi to be called a distinct language as some of the established dialects of Yorùbá, such as Owé, Òwò, and Ìgbómìnà, exhibit these features. These differences should be considered close affinity with notably structural divergence, prolonged geographical separation and the influence of neighboring languages where Olùkùmi is enclaved. The study therefore recommends further documentation of Olùkùmi syntax, particularly in negation, tense and aspect, relativization and focus construction to strengthen its position within Yorùbá dialectology. Studying Olùkùmi syntax is not only crucial for genetic classification but also for language documentation and language maintenance efforts in the community.

Abbreviations

HTS- High Tone Syllable
FM – Focus Marker
NEG – Negator
REL – Relative Marker
PREP – Preposition
RP – Resumptive Pronoun
NP – Noun Phrase
VP – Verb Phrase

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