

Syntactic analysis of focus construction in Olukumi and Ilorin dialects of Yoruba

Fatai Toyin Kareem^{1*}

¹Department of English and Linguistics, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria, kareemfatai89@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Received: 27 February 2025 | Accepted: 18 March 2025 | Published: 26 May 2025

Abstract: This research paper discusses a syntactic analysis of focus construction in Yoruba Olùkùmi spoken in Aniocha, Delta State, and Yoruba Ìlòrín spoken in Ìlòrín, Kwara State. The aim of this study is to compare and contrast focusing in the two dialects while the specific objectives are to: identify the focus marker, analyze varied constituents that can be focused on in the two dialects, and compare the relatedness of the two dialects. Data for this research were drawn from five purposively selected native speakers, each in Olùkùmi spoken in Ugboodu, Delta State, and Ìlòrín, Kwara State, via observation and interview. Government and Binding Theory is employed for this study since it is a syntactic theory that adopts the d-structure and s-structure as levels of representation. The Move-Alpha, a sub-theory of Government and Binding Theory, was used for analysis in this paper because it maps d-structure into focus construction, s-structure. The study finds that the two dialects use 'ni' to mark focusing. Also, it is revealed in these dialects that constituent focusing involves the movement of the target constituent to the sentence-final position, while sentence focusing signals attachment of particle 'ni' to the sentence final. Furthermore, it is discovered in these dialects that whenever a subject NP is moved for focusing, the extraction site is plenished with resumptive pronoun 'ó', while the extraction site of the genitival NP is plenished with resumptive pronoun 'rè'. This study revealed that there is no difference between Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrín in the aspect of focus construction and therefore concludes that focusing is one of the syntactic evidence that establishes Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá spoken outside Yorùbá communities within Nigeria.

Keywords: D-structure, Focus construction, Move-alpha, Resumptive pronoun, Resumptive pronoun, S-structure

Biographical notes: Dr. Fatai Toyin Kareem is a lecturer at the Department of English and Linguistics, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria. His research interests range from dialectology, morphology, and Yoruba syntax. Dr. Kareem has been active across different levels of higher education in Nigeria for close to a decade.

1. Introduction

Focus construction constitutes a germane aspect of sentence structure, it helps interlocutors to highlight particular constituents within a sentence or sentence as a whole for informational or pragmatic purposes. Focus is a universal phenomenon in all human languages. However, it is marked differently across languages. It could be marked prosodically, morphologically or syntactically. The study of focus construction in terms of theoretical approach has generated extensive debates in syntax, demonstrated with varying theoretical frameworks and through investigations. Within the generative tradition, focus constructions have been explored through the lens of transformational grammar.

Linguists such as Chomsky (1995), Keenan and Comrie (1997), Vallduvi (1995) and Krifka (2007) have examined how focus, as one of the syntactic structures, is derived via movement operations. Also, Lambrecht (1994) explores focus through the lens of pragmatics, showcasing it as a discourse-driven phenomenon that uncovers interlocutors' communicative intentions and contexts. Yusuf (1989: 57) sees focus construction as "a syntactic device whereby an NP in a sentence is made prominent by coding it sentence-initially." This implies that a constituent is focused when it is moved to the initial position of the focused sentence. Arokoyo (2018) submits that focus construction is a construction that is specifically designed to serve an identification function. Lambrecht (1994) identifies three types of focusing: predicate focus structure/argument focus structure, and sentence structure focus. Focus is a grammatical means of

Research Article: This article is published by *Jozac Publishers* in the *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JLLLS)*. This article is distributed under a Creative Common [Attribution \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) International License. **Conflict of Interest:** The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



marking the organization of information in discourse. Sentence structure focus is also divided into a focus and open position corresponding to background information in discourse (Jones 2006:143).

Going by Radford (2002: 453), “focusing indicates a movement operation by which a constituent is moved into a focus position at the beginning of a clause in order to highlight it.” Also, Arokoyo (2018:1) defines focus as a way of rendering a constituent of a sentence emphatic. Taking a critical look at the above definition, it suffices to say that focus places prominence or emphasis on a constituent of a sentence via the movement of a target constituent to the sentence-initial position.

This study surveys a contrastive analysis of focus construction in Yoruba Olùkumi and Yoruba Ilorin with a view to identifying the focus markers in the dialects, analyzing how varied constructed are focused, and comparing the level of relatedness of these dialects in terms of derivations, positions, and their markers. The data for this study are drawn from the structured interviews and observation through the purposively selected five native speakers, each in Yorùbá Olùkumi spoken in Ugboodu, Aniocha North LGA, Delta State, and Yorùbá Ilorin spoken by Yorùbá speakers in Ilorin, Kwara State. The data collected are analyzed within the framework of Government and Binding Theory propounded by scholars (Chomsky, 1981). The findings of this research paper will affirm the claims of scholars (Obișesan, 2012; Jacob & AbdulRafiu, 2016; Ajikobi, 2018; Elesin-Ajikobi, 2021; Kareem, 2021) who establish Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá spoken in the Diaspora within Nigeria due to its close affinity with other dialects of Yorùbá such as Ìkàlé, Oṇdó, Ọ̀wò, Ilorin among others as against the claim of Arokoyo (2012, 2014; 2016) and Eḷesin (2012, 2017) who see Olùkùmi as a distinct language despite the significant uniformities between Olùkùmi and Yorùbá in the area of phonology, morphology and syntax. Also, this work will facilitate understanding of focus constructions and information structure in Olùkùmi and Ilorin, contributing to linguistic knowledge, Yorùbá dialectology, language teaching and documentation.

2. Literature review

This section provides a review of the available relevant literature that are germane to the focus of this study. The review is presented under three subheadings as (i) theoretical framework (ii) extant works on focus construction, and (iii) extant works on Olùkùmi and Ilorin

2.1. Theoretical framework

Government and Binding Theory (GB) propounded by Chomsky (1981), is a model of analysis for this work. Sells (1987), Horrocks (1987), Haegman (1991), and Ouhalla (1991) also work extensively on the GB. GB theory captures all human languages. It is a theory embedded with principles and parameters which ensure that grammatically and acceptably formatted forms are derived in all human languages.

Cook and Newson (2007) assert that Universal Grammar holds that speakers know a set of principles that applies to all languages and parameters that vary within clearly defined limits from one language to another. It is a model that covers where languages meet and part. GB entails an interlocking arrangement of principles and sub-theories that establish a solid interface in diverse directions (Cook 1988). This submission can be supported by Haegman (1991) as he views GB as a theory that proposes a set of rules that reflect how sentences are derived and how they relate to one another, including the relationships between varying parts of a sentence like subjects and objects, and parameters that govern the use of language. Horrocks (1987:95) shared a similar view, ‘GB theory is best described as a set of interacting components.’ In this vein, Sanusi (1996) opines that GB theory is primarily concerned with the idea that languages have a Universal grammar and that this grammar entails a set of principles that govern how words are combined into sentences. GB has two levels of syntactic representations: the d-structure and the s-structure. The d-structure is mapped onto the s-structure through transformational rules such as deletion, insertion, substitution, and move-alpha.

Move-Alpha involves the movement of a syntactic element. It moves a constituent from an extraction site to the landing site. According to Ouhallah (1991:258), move-Alpha refers to any category that can be moved anywhere. It maps the d-structure onto the s-structure, and whenever the movement occurs, transformation has taken place. Move-alpha is subjected to a constraint termed the subjacency principle. It places conditions on what, where, and how a constituent is to be moved. Ouhalla (1991:262) defines subjacency as ‘Movement cannot cross more than one bounding node in a single step, where bounding nodes are IP and DP.’ This condition reveals that the GB is a theory of checks and balances.

Moving Alpha, as one of GB’s modules, is adopted for the analysis in this study because focus construction involves the movement of a target constituent to the sentence-initial position

2.2. Extant work on focus construction

A good number of Yoruba linguists (such as Awobuluyi 1978, 1987, 1988,199; Awoyale, 1985; Bamgbose, 1990; Ajiboye, 2006; Mercy, 2014; Arokoyo, 2009; Oshodi, 2016; Apuge, 2017; Olaogun, 2017, 2019; Nathaniel et al., 2020; Samuel, 2020; Kehinde, 2023) have worked extensively on focus construction in standard Yoruba and its dialects. These linguists unanimously arrive at the following views:

- i A constituent can be focused
- ii A sentence can be focused
- iii A constituent must be moved to the sentence-initial position before undergoing focusing
- iv All focused constituents have feature (+N)

- v If a subject NP is moved for focusing, the extraction site is replenished with resumptive pronoun *o*
 vi If a genitival NP is moved for focusing, the extraction site is replenished with resumptive pronouns ‘*rè*’

These views can be illustrated thus:

1. Adé ra bàtà Olú
 Adé buy shoe Olú
 “Adé bought Olú’s shoe”

Focus Construction:

- a. Ade ni ó ra bata Olú
 Adé FM RP buy shoe Olú
 “It was Ade that bought Olu’s shoes”
 b. Olu ni Ade ra bata rè
 Olú FM Adé buy shoe RP
 “It was Olu’s shoes that Ade bought”
 c. Bata Olú ni Ade ra
 Shoe Olú FM Adé buy

“It was Olu’s shoe that Ade bought”.

- d. Rírá ni Adé ra bata Olú
 Buying FM Adé buy shoe Olú
 “It is the buying that Ade bought Olu’s shoes”.
 e. Ade ra bata Olú ni
 Adé buy shoe Olú FM
 “Ade bought Olu’s shoes”.

Sentences (1a-d) illustrate constituent focusing, while sentence (1e) signifies focusing. Example (1a) reveals that if a subject NP is moved for focusing in Yorùbá, the extraction site is replenished with resumptive pronoun ‘*ó*’. Meanwhile, in case of genitival NP, resumptive pronoun ‘*rè*’ replenishes its extraction site. Example (1b) confirms this.

However, the syntactic status of focus construction has been debated in Yorùbá among the Yorùbá linguists. Two main perspectives emerge from the debate: focus constructions as noun phrases and focus constructions as derived sentences. Awobuluyi (1978; 1987) argues that focus constructions are noun phrases, with the particle ‘*ni*’ functioning similarly to ‘*tí*’ and subsequent structures serving as noun qualifiers. Awoyale (1985) supports this claim, considering focus construction as noun qualifiers. On the other hand, Owolabi (1981a; 1981b), Yusuf (1989; 1990), and Bamgbose (1990) observe that, despite structural uniformities with relative clauses, focus constructions cannot be expanded like relative clauses, which requires a predicate to be meaningful.

Arokoyo (2009) submits that focus constructions in Standard Yorùbá and Owé dialects are very close, except for the differences in their focus markers: Standard Yorùbá employs ‘*ni*’ as a focus marker, whereas Owé dialect uses ‘*ki*’. This implies that all the constituents that can be focused in standard Yorùbá can also be focused in Owé dialect. Omolewu (2014), who examines focus construction in Ègbá dialect, identifies ‘*ro*’, ‘*re*’, and ‘*si*’ as focus markers in Ègbá. The distributions of these focus markers rely on the constituent and particular phrase to be focused. Samuel and Olusegun (2015) investigate focus construction in the Èkití dialect of Yorùbá. They identify ‘*ni*’, ‘*li*’, and ‘*ki*’ as focus markers in Èkití dialect. According to the duo, ‘*ni*’ and ‘*li*’ are allomorphs. The focus marker ‘*ni*’ is employed when it precedes a word that begins with a consonant and changes to ‘*li*’ when it occurs before oral vowels /*e*/ and /*u*/. Also, Akintoye and Owoyele (2018) examine focus construction in Oñdó dialect of Yorùbá and Èbìrà language and observe that focus markers occur in the final position of the focused sentence in Oñdó dialect of Yorùbá and Èbìrà language and that the occurrence of high tone syllable in between subject and verb features in the two speech forms.

The foregoing shows that existing works on the focus construction in Yoruba dialects focus on the Yoruba dialects spoken in Nigeria within Yoruba communities. However, little exists on the Yoruba dialects spoken outside Yoruba communities within Nigeria. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap by exploring focus construction in Olùkùmi as one of the Yorùbá dialects spoken in Nigeria outside the shore of Yoruba communities. A dialectal relatedness of Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin with respect to focus construction will establish Olùkùmi as one of the Yorùbá dialects spoken in the Diaspora within Nigeria.

2.3. Extant work on Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin

Going by the available literature, much work has not been done on Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin. Especially in the area of syntax, which is the vital focus of this study. The major works on the syntax of Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin are Èlẹsin (2017); Èlẹsin-Ajikobi (2025); Fabunmi and Kareem (2019); Kareem (2020). Some other available literature is majorly on phonology (Adeniyi & Ajikobi, 2018; Arokoyo, 2012) and morphology (Èlẹsin-Ajikobi, 2023; Kareem, 2021; Obisesan, 2012). This study aims to add to the existing literature on Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin, particularly in areas of syntax and Yoruba dialectology.

3. Research methodology

The methodology employed for this study is the observation and interview method. Five native speakers from each Olùkùmi spoken in Ugbodu, Delta State, and Ìlọrin spoken in Ìlọrin, Kwara State were interviewed. Olùkùmi Ugbodu was chosen for this study based on its close affinity with Standard Yorùbá than the Ukwa-Nzu variety, which has been adulterated with neighbouring languages and compared with Ìlọrin, a dialect of Yorùbá. The informants were purposively selected because they are fluent in Olùkùmi and Ìlọrin dialects, and they have spent most of their lifetime

in Ugboodu and Ilorin. The data collected from the respondents were recorded with a recording gadget. The researcher also employed the secondary source of data collection by making use of the library, which afforded him the opportunity to have access to the available related works in the library. Journal articles, thesis, and the internet were also explored before and during this work. The data collected for this research were analyzed within the framework of Government and Binding Theory propounded by Chomsky (1981).

4. Findings and discussions

4.1. Focus construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin

This section surveys varying focus types that are attested in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá in Ìlọ́rin. The two dialects attest to constituent and sentence focusing as revealed in the data collected.

4.1.1. Constituent focusing in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin

In Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin, focused constituents must be moved to the sentence-initial position and immediately followed by the focus marker **ni**. The constituents that can be focused in these dialects are subject NP, object NP, and PP. It is worth knowing that if a subject NP is moved for focusing in the two dialects, the resumptive pronoun **ó** plenishes its extraction site while the resumptive pronoun **rẹ** fills in the extraction site of the genitival NP, respectively. Example (2) below showcases these claims.

Table 1: Constituent Focusing in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Ìlọ́rin

2ai) Yorùbá Olùkùmi Adé ra azá Olú nózà. Adé buy dog Olú at market “Adé bought Olú’s dog at market”.	2bi) Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin Adé ra ajá Olú lójà. Adé buy dog Olú at mar “Adé bought Olú’s dog at market.”
Focus Construction Subject NP Focus ii.) Adé ni ó ra azá Olu nózà Adé FM RP buy dog Olú at market “It was Adé that bought Olu’s dog at market”.	Focus Construction Subject NP Focus ii.) Adé ni ó ra ajá lójà Adé FM RP buy dog Olu at market ‘It was Adé that bought Olu’s dog at market’.
Object NP Focus iii.) Azá Olú ni Adé ra nózà Dog Olú FM Adé buy a market “It was Olú’s dog that Ade bought at market	Object NP Focus iii.) Ajá Olú ni Adé ra lójà Dog Olú FM Adé buy at market ‘It was Olú’s dog that Adé bought at market.’
Genitival NP iv.) Olú ni Adé ra aza rẹ nózà Olú FM Adé buy dog RP at market ‘it was Olú that Adé bought his god at market’.	Genitival NP iv.) Olú ni Adé ra ajá rẹ lójà Olú FM Adé buy dog RP at market’ ‘It wa Olú that Adé bought his dog at market.’
Predicate Focus v.) Rírà ni Adé ra aza Olú nózà buying FM Ade buy Olu’s dog at market ‘It was Olu that Ade bought his dog at market.’	Predicate Focus v.) Rírà ni Adé ra ajá Olú lójà buying FM Ade buy dog Olu at market “It was that Adé bought Olu’s dog at market’
Object of Preposition Focus vi.) Qzà ni Adé tí ra azá Olú Market FM Adé PERF buy dog Olú ‘It was at market Ade bought Olu’s dog	Object of Preposition Focus vi.) Oja ni Ade tí ra ajá Olú market FM Ade PERF buy dog Olu “It was at market Ade bought Olu’s dog market’

It is quite prevalent from the above examples that constituent focusing operates alike in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin. Example (2ai & bi) exemplify subject NP focusing, when subject NP is moved to the sentence-initial position for focusing, the extraction site is plenished with resumptive pronoun **ó**. (2aii & bii) showcase object NP focusing. When object NP is moved to the sentence-initial position, the extraction site remains unfilled. (2aiii & bii) demonstrate genitival NP. In this case, the resumptive pronoun ‘**rẹ**’ plenishes the extraction site of the genitival NP when it has been moved to the sentence-initial position. Also, (2aiv & biv) illustrate predicate focusing where the verb **ra** is nominalized via partial reduplication before undergoing focusing. Finally, (2av & bv) confirm the case of object of preposition focusing.

In addition, it is rightly observed in the data presented above that the phonological rule of Yorùbá Olùkùmi does not permit alternation of /n/ to /l/ before oral vowel, whereas such operation is allowed in Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin (see 2ai –v & bi-v). In a nutshell, we can conclude that there are five types of constituent focusing in Yoruba Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin; subject NP focusing, object of a verb NP focusing, object of a preposition NP focusing, genitival Np focusing, and predicate focusing.

4.1 2. Sentence focus in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin

Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin attest to sentence focusing. This process is achieved by inserting the focus marker **ni** at the sentence final. This implies that sentence focusing does not involve movement in these dialects. In this section, we will show how varied sentences, such as simple, compound, and complex sentences are focused in Yoruba Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlọ́rin. Examples 3, 4 & 5 confirm this assertion.

Table 2: Sentence focusing in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin

3ai.) Yoruba Olùkùmi	bi.) Yorùbá Ìlòrin
Olú gbé oma Olú carry child 'Olú carried the baby'.	Olú gbé omo Olú carry child 'Olú carried the child'.
Focus Construction Simple Sentence ii.) Olú gbe oma ni Olu carry child Fm "The fact is that Olú carried the baby."	Focus Construction Simple Sentence ii.) Olú gbe omo ni Olu carry child Fm "The fact is that Olú carried the baby'."
4.) Compound Sentence ai.) Òjó yú kàn-án èè fò. ai. Ojo come but NEG talk "Ojo came but they didn't talk."	4.)Compound Sentence bi.) Òjó wá sùgbòn kò sọrò Ojo come but NEG talk 'Ojo came but he didn't talk'.
Focus Construction ii.) Òjó yú kàn-án èè fò ni Òjó come but NEG talk FM "The fact is that Ojo came but the didn't talk	Focus Construction ii.) Òjó wá sùgbòn kò sọrò ni Ojo come but NEG talk FM "The fact is that Ojo came but he didn't talk
5. Complex Sentence ai.) Ba mi kpa ẹran té ó rà nánà father me kill goat that RP buy yesterday 'My father killed a goat he bought yesterday.'	5. Complex Sentence ii.) Bàbá mi kpa ẹran tí ó rà lánáá father me kill goat that RP buy yesterday "My father killed a goat he bought yesterday".
Focus Construction aai.) Ba mi kpa ẹran té ó rà nánà ni father me kill goat that RP buy yesterday FM "The fact is the my father killed a goat that he bought yesterday	Focus Construction bii.) Bàbá mi kpa ẹran tí ó rà lánáá ni father me kill goat that RP buy yesterday FM "The fact is that my father killed a goat yesterday".

The foregoing implies that simple, compound, and complex sentences can be focused in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin. This process of sentence focusing does not require movement; focus marker **ni** is inserted to the sentence final in order to affect prominence or emphasis in these dialects.

4.2. Similarities between Focus Construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin

Focus construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin has many areas of convergence as observed in our analysis so far. The two dialects employ particle **ni** as focus marker, example (6) confirms this.

Table 3: Similarities in Constituent and Sentence Focusing in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin

6ai.) Hawau yú mu egho ghá	Bi.) Hawau lèè mú owó wá
Hawau go bring money come "Hawau went to bring the money".	Hawau go bring money come "Hawau went to bring the money".
Focus Construction ii.) Hawau ni ó yú mú egho ghá Hawau FM RP go bring money come "it was Hawau that went to bring the money".	Focus Construction ii.) Hawau ni ó lèè mú owó wá Hawau FM RP go bring money come' "It was Hawau that went to bring the money".

It is observed in these dialects that the resumptive pronoun **ó** plenished the extraction site of the subject NP when it is moved to the sentence-initial position and immediately followed by **ni**, as it is demonstrated in (6aii & bii). In the same vein, the extraction site of the genitival NP is always filled with a resumptive pronoun **rẹ** when it is moved for focusing in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin (see 2aiiv & 2biv).

Another area of convergence is that the two dialects attest to constituent and sentence focusing; all constituents that can be focused in Yorùbá Olùkùmi are also focusable in Yorùbá Ìlòrin. For easy reference, (2aii-v & bii-vii) will be repeated below as (7):

Table 4: Focusable Constituents in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrin

7ai.) Yorùbá Olùkùmi	bi.) Yorùbá Ìlòrin
Adé ra azá Olú nọzà Adé buy dog Olú at market "Ade bought Olu's dog at market".	Adé ra ajá Olú lójà Adé buy dog Olú at market "Ade bought Olu's dog at market."
Focus Construction Subject NP Focus ii.) Adé ni ó ra azá Olú nọzà Adé FM RP buy dog RP at market "It was Ade that bought Olu's dog at market".	Focus Construction Subject NP Focus ii.) Adé ni ó ra ajá Olú lójà Ade FM RP buy dog Olu at market 'It was Ade that bought Olu's dog at market'.
Object of a Verb NP Focus iii.) Aza Olú ni Adé ra nọzà Dog Olu FM Ade buy at market "It was Olu's dog that Adé bought at market	Object of a Verb Focus iii.) Ajá Olú ni Adé rà nọzà Dog Olu FM Ade buy at market 'It was Olu's dog that Adé bought at market.'
Genitival NP Focus iv.) Olú ni Adé ra azá rẹ noza Olú FM Ade buy dog RP at market 'it was Olu that Ade bought his god at market'.	Genitival NP Focus iv.) Olú ni Adé ra ajá rẹ lójà Olú FM Ade buy dog RP at market' 'It was Olu that Ade bought his dog at market.'
Predicate Focus v.) Rirà ni Adé ra azá Olú nọzà Olu FM Ade buy dog Olu at market 'it was Olu that Ade bought his dog at market.'	Predicate Focus v.) Rirà ni Adé ra ajá Olú lójà buying FM Ade buy dog Olu at market "the fact was that Ade bought Olu's dog at market
Object of Preposition Focus	Object of Preposition Focus

vi.) Q̀zà ni Adé ti ra aza Olu Market Fm Ade PERF buy dog Olu 'It was at market Ade bought Olu's dog	vi. Q̀jà ni Adé ti ra ajá Olú market FM Ade PERF buy dog Olu 'The fact was that Ade bought Olu's dog at market
--	--

Examples (ii-vi) reveal that subject NP, object of a verb NP, object of a proposition NP, genitival NP, and predicate are subjected to focusing in Yoruba Olukumi and Yoruba Ilorin. It can also be added that all the focused constituents have +N feature. For instance, the verb **rà** in (2av & bv) is nominalized before it is focused, otherwise, the resultant will be ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality of (8) in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrín confirms this claim.

8a. Yorùbá Olùkùmi

*ra Ade ni ó ra akpaka nòzà
Buy Adé FM RP buy beans at market
"It is buying Adé bought beans at market".

b. Yorùbá Ìlòrín

*ra Ade ni ó ra èwà lójà
Buy Ade FM RP buy beans at market
"It is buying Ade bought beans at market".

Going by (8a & b), it is obvious that only constituents with +N feature can be focused in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrín.

5. Contribution of the study

This study adds to the extant literature in Olukumi and Ilorin dialects, particularly in the area of syntax, by revealing the linguistic mechanisms employed in the derivation of focus construction in the two speech forms. It also affirms the existing claims on Olukumi-Yoruba affinity as evident in the interrelatedness between Olukumi and Ilorin. More so, the study preserves and documents Olukumi, a lesser-known dialect of Yoruba against extinction or endangerment.

6. Conclusion

This research examines the syntactic analysis of focus construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrín. It identifies the focus marker and analyses how varying constituents are focused in these dialects. The study reveals that focus construction in the two dialects is similar; they both use the focus marker **ni** and attest to constituent and sentence focusing. Also, in the two dialects, constituent focusing involves movement of the target constituent to the sentence final position and is immediately followed by **ni**, while sentence focusing is achieved by attaching **ni** to the sentence-final in the two dialects.. This interrelatedness between focus construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yoruba Ilorin is one of the syntactic evidence that could form a basis for establishing Olùkùmi as a dialect of Yorùbá spoken outside Yoruba communities within Nigeria, as evident in works (Such as Ajikobi, 2018; Eḷesin-Ajikobi, 2021; Eḷesin-Ajikobi, 2025; Kareem, 2021. We hope this study will broaden our understanding of focus construction in Yorùbá Olùkùmi and Yorùbá Ìlòrín and Yorùbá dialects at large.

References

- Adeniyi, H. & Ajikobi, A. E. (2018). A tentative phonological sketch of Olùkùmi. *JOLAN: Journal of Linguistics Association of Nigeria Supplement III, Language Documentation and Description in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*, 285-295
- Ajiboye, O. (2006). A morpho-syntax of Ni in Mòbà Yorùbá. *The Journal of West African Languages*, . xxxiii, (2) 23-42
- Ajikobi, A. E. (2018). Olùkùmi: Èka-èdè Yorùbá láàrin àwọn èdè miiran ní ipílẹ̀ Delta. *YORUBÁ: Journal of Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria*, 9(1), 157-183
- Akintoye, O. S. (2006). Focus markers in Ekiti dialect. *Ekiti: Journal of Languages and Linguistics*, Vol 1: 35-43
- Akintoye, O. S., & Olusegun, J. O. (2018). A comparative of focus construction in Yoruba and Epira languages' *World Scientific News: An International Scientific Journal (WSN)* 102. 116-130.
- Apuge, M. (2017). The semantics of focus constructions in Akoose. People: *International Journal of Social Science*. 3/2:879-894.
- Arokoyo, B. (2009). A survey of focus construction in Òwè. Adika, G.S.K. (ed). *Current Perspectives in phono-syntax and Dialectology*. Ghana; Department of Gar Gonja, Faculty of Languages, University of Education, Winneba, 22-29
- Arokoyo, B. (2012). *A comparative phonology of Olùkùmi, Igala, Owé and Yoruba languages*. A Paper read at Towards Proto-Niger Congo: Comparison and Reconstruction Congress Paris 18-21.
- Arokoyo, B. (2016). A lexicostatistic comparison of Yoruba, Igbo and Olukumi dialects. *Inquiry in African Languages and Literatures* No.2, p.1-9.
- Arokoyo, B. (2018). *Unlocking focus construction*. NINLAN.
- Awobuluyi, O. (1978). Focus construction as noun phrases. *Linguistic Analysis*. . 4 (.2a) 93-113.
- Awobuluyi, O. (1987). Focus construction as noun phrases. A Reply. *Journal of the West African Languages*, XVII, (2)48-60.
- Awobuluyi, O. (1988). Some problems of case assignment in Yoruba. *Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin: 1-12*.

- Awobuluyi, O. (1992). Issues in standard Yoruba focus construction. *Journal of West African Languages*. Xxi(2):69-88.
- Awoyale, Y. (1985). Focus as an unbound movement rule in Yorùbá. *Journal of the Linguistics Association of Nigeria*, 4. (5) 30-41.
- Baker, C. J. (1995). Contrast, discourse, prominence and intensification with special reference to locally free reflexive in British English. *Language*. 71 (1):63-106.
- Bamgbose, A. (1990). *Fonólójì àti gírámà Yorùbá*. University Press PLC.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on government and binding*.: Foris publications..
- Cook, V. J., & Newson, M. (2007). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Èlẹ́sin, A. F (2012). *Comparative morpho-syntax of Olùkùmi and standard Yorùbá: A minimalist approach*. (Unpublished M.A Thesis) University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Èlẹ́sin, A.F (2017). The status of particle “Ni” in Olùkùmi. *Journal of Linguistics Association of Nigeria*. 20.(2) 40-51.
- Èlẹ́sin-Ajikobi, A.F (2021). Classifying Olùkùmi: An island dialect of Yorùbá. *AKJOLL: Akungba Journal of Linguistics & Literatures* 12, 29-40.
- Èlẹ́sin-Ajikobi, A. F (2025). Olùkùmi polar question derivation: A complex linguistic inquiry. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JLLS)*, 5.(1) 17-26.
- Fabunmi, F. A. & F. T. Kareem. (2019). The syntactic status of p article ‘fa’ in Yorùbá Ìlórín. *Ifẹ Journal of Languages and Literatures*, 5 (1):51-59.
- Haegman, L. (1991). *Introduction to government and binding theory*. Basil Blackwell.
- Horrocks, G. (1987). *Generative grammar*. Routledge.
- Jacob, O. & AbdulRafiu, A. (2016). Olùkùmi: A dialect of Yorùbá in diaspora. *Papers in English and Linguistics*. 17(1) 320-335.
- Jones, S. (2006). Focus in Yoruba: A semantic/pragmatic Account. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics* 46. 143-160.
- Kareem, F. T. (2020). Focus construction in Olùkùmi. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics*. (Adamawa State University, Mubi) .1, .1-8.
- Kareem, F. T (2021). *Àfiwé mofosintààsi Yorùbá àjùmòlò, èka-èdè, Òwò àti èka-èdè Olùkùmi* (Unpublished PhD Thesis) Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife.
- Keen, E. L., & Camrie (1977). Noun phrase accessibility and universal grammar’ *Linguistic Inquiry*. 8(1), 63-99
- Kehinde, O. O. (2023). Focus construction in Mòbà and Mòyèè dialects of Yoruba. *Anbar University Journal of Languages and Literature*. 16 (.1) 48-64.
- Krifka, M. (2007). Basic notion of information structure. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, 54, 243-276.
- Lambrecht, K. (1994). *Information structure and sentence form: topic, focus and the mental representations of discourse referents*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mercy, A. A. (2014). Information packaging, focus marking and focus constructions in Lateh. *Nordic Journal of African studies*, 23 (3)162-179.
- Nathanial, L. et al. (2020). Resumption in the production focus constructions in Akan speakers with agrammatism. *Aphasiology*, 34 (3) 343-364.
- Obiṣesan, H. O. (2012). *Lexical comparison of Olùkùmi, Òwò dialect and standard Yoruba*. (Unpublished M.A Thesis), University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Olaogun, S. O. (2017). Predicate/verb focus in Afa. *Inquiry in African Language and Literatures*, 10, 154-163.
- Olaogun, S. O. (2019). Focus construction in Njo-Koo. *American International Journal of Education and Linguistics Research*, 2(1) 1-12.
- Omolewu, O. C. (2014). Focus construction and negation of focused constituents in Ègbá. Ahmad A. (ed). *Bringing Our Cultures Home: Festschrift for Bade Ajayi at 70* ..312-334.
- Owolabi, K. (1981a). The Non-existence of topical qualifier in Yorùbá. *Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan*: 1-12
- Owolabi, K. (1981b). Focus construction as noun phrases: A Critique. *A Paper Presented at the Linguistics and African Languages Department Seminar, University of Ibadan*: 48-61.
- Oshodi, B. (2016). Question formation and focus construction in Òwò: A Yoruba dialect. *Macrolinguistics*, 4 (4) 126-142.
- Ouhalla, J. (1991). *Introducing transformational grammar from principles and parameters to minimalism*.: Oxford University Press.
- Redford, A. (2002). *Transformational grammar: A First Course*. Cambridge University Press.
- Samuel, A. O. (2020). A comparative analysis of focus construction in Igede language and some selected dialects of Yoruba: Ondo and Ikale. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 17(.5), 140-148
- Sanusi, L. S. (1996). Government and binding theory: An introduction. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 4(1), 1-11
- Sells, P. (1987). *Lectures on contemporary syntactic theories*. CSLI.
- Vallduvi. (1995). *The information component*. MIT Press.
- Yusuf, O. (1989). The derivation of focus constructions in Yoruba: A problem for the trace theory. *JOLAN*, 5:56-68

Yusuf, O. (1990). Yoruba copular 'ni' *Journal of West African Languages*. XXI:82-92.

