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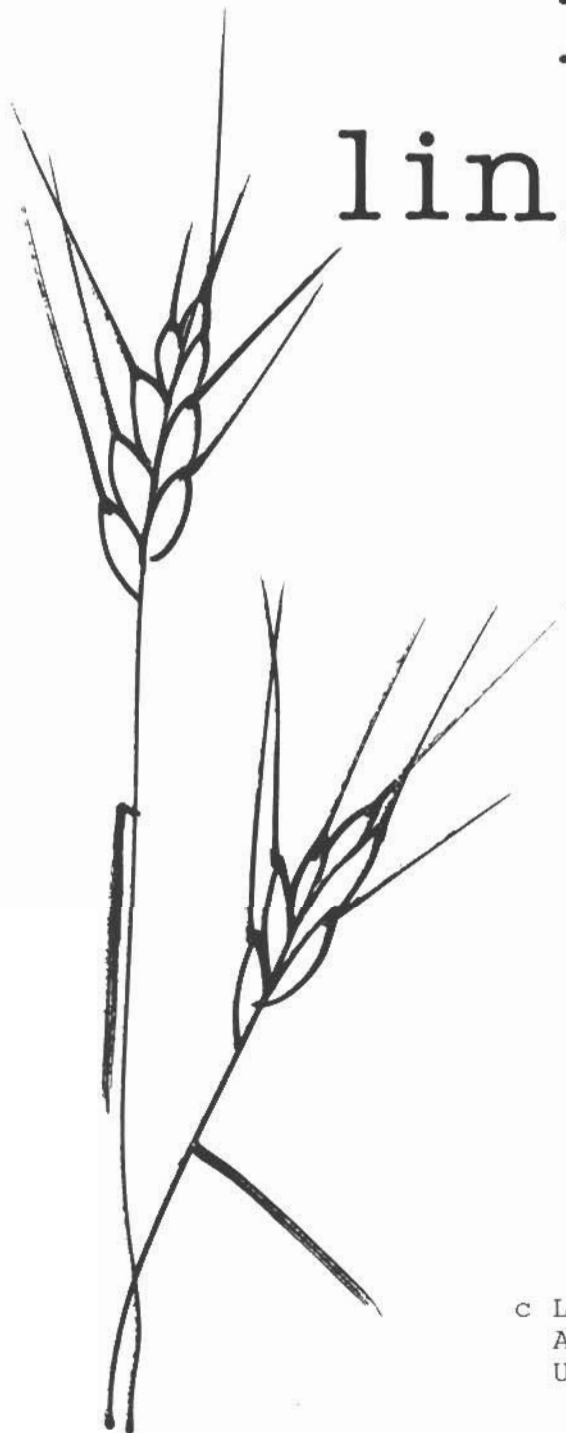
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Volume 13, 1988

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Prefix oní- in Yorùbá

Antonia Y. Fọlárín

1. Introduction

In Fọlárín (1987), I pointed out that the prefix oní- is the only class-maintaining prefix in Yoruba. For example, it is the only prefix attached to a noun to form another noun. It can be prefixed to either a derived or a non-derived noun and the resulting meaning of the nouns derived with oní- prefixation is the "owner of" or "possessor of" . In some cases, the meaning can refer to a performer of an action or of a particular profession.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the prefixation of oní- to derived and non-derived nouns respectively.

(1.) oní- prefixed to derived nouns:

I Verbs	II derived nouns	III oní-prefixation ¹
a. jà 'to fight'	--> ijà 'fight'	--> onijà 'someone who fights or loves to fight'
b. so 'to produce fruit'	--> èso 'fruit'	--> eléso 'owner of fruits'
c. kú 'to die'	--> òkú 'dead person'	--> olókú 'owner of the dead person'
d. dé 'to crown'	--> adé 'crown'	--> aládé 'owner of the crown'

(2) oni- prefixed to non-derived nouns.

a.	oni	+	aṣọ	-->	aláṣọ
	prefix		'clothes'		'owner of
	'owner of'				clothes'
b.	oni	+	ẹṣẹ	-->	ẹlẹṣẹ
			'legs'		'owner of legs'
c.	oni	+	ewé	-->	eléwé
			'leaves'		'owner of leaves'
d.	oni	+	bàtà	-->	onibàtà
			'shoes'		'owner of shoes'
e.	oni	+	ọmọ	-->	ọlọmọ
			'child'		'owner of a child'

Notice, however, that there are other cases where the oni- prefix also functions as a class-changing prefix. For example, the data in (3) illustrate the prefixation of oni- to adverbs² to form nouns.

3. a.	oni	+	jàgidijàgan	-->	onijàgidijàgan
			'trouble making'		'a trouble maker'
b.	oni	+	wérewère	-->	oniwérewère
			'aimlessly'		'someone who does things aimlessly'
c.	oni	+	bókibàki	-->	onibókibàki
			'nonsense'		'someone who does nonsensical things'

Considering the existence of prefix o³- and the verb ni "to have", or "to possess" in Yoruba, some Yoruba scholars, e.g., Abraham (1958), Rowlands (1969), Owolabi (1981) and Awobuluyi (1983), assumed that oni- is a compound prefix which consists of two morphemes o (prefix) and the verb ni "to have". Others such as Akinlabi (1986) share a similar view with the scholars mentioned above except that they assume that the o- of oni- is the second person pronoun singular subject that already exists in Yoruba.

On the other hand, there are other scholars, such as Bamgbose (1965, 1967, and 1984) and Ogunbowale (1970), who assume that oni- is a single morpheme without providing evidence to support this assumption. In this paper, I will discuss the advantages of analyzing oni- as two morphemes o- and ni-. However, I will show that in spite of these advantages, based on facts of Yorubá, it is better to analyze oni- as an inseparable, single morpheme.

2.1 Oni- As Two Separate Morphemes

The question of analyzing oni- as a sequence of o "second person singular pronoun subject" + ni "to have" as suggested in Akinlabi (1986) does not seem plausible because the meanings of nouns derived with oni- prefixation have nothing to do with the notion "second person singular". For example, the nouns derived in (1a) can refer to either the speaker or the hearer. It can also be used to refer to one person (singular) or many people (plural).

A more plausible analysis is one that analyzes oni- as o- (nominalizing prefix) + ni "to have." This type of analysis will, for example, account for the forms in (2a-c) as shown in (4a-c) respectively.

(4)	I Verb+Noun	II Verb Phrases ⁴	III <u>o-</u> Prefix -ation	IV Assimi- lation Process
a.	ni + aṣọ --> 'to have' 'clothes'	láṣọ --> 'to have clothes'	oláṣọ	--> aláṣọ 'owner of clothes'
b.	ni + ẹṣẹ --> 'legs'	lẹṣẹ --> 'to have legs'	olẹṣẹ	--> ẹlẹṣẹ 'owner of legs'
c.	ni + ewé --> 'leaves'	léwé --> 'to have leaves'	oléwé	--> eléwé 'owner of leaves'

The analysis in (4) assumes, first of all, the derivations of verb phrases in column II, in the

syntactic component. These verb phrases will further serve as inputs to the morphological process of o- prefixation as shown in column III. Finally, if the first vowel of the verb phrase is either e, e, o, or a, the prefix o- undergoes a vowel assimilation rule, which assimilates all the features of the prefix to the first vowel of the verb phrase as shown in column IV.

This analysis has several advantages:

- i. It is economical in the sense that there will be no need of postulating an extra prefix since o- already exists in Yoruba as a nominalizing prefix and ni also exists as a verb.
- ii. It serves as support to the claim that phrasal forms² do serve as inputs to the morphological component of Yoruba.
- iii. It also confirms the independent existence of the phrasal verbs, such as in column II, in Yoruba. This fact can be illustrated by comparing the sentences in (5) with the derivations in (4) above.

- (5) a. Mo + ní + aṣọ --> mo láṣọ/ mo ní aṣọ
'I' 'have' 'clothes' 'I have clothes'
- b. O + ní + ẹṣẹ --> O lẹṣẹ/ O ní ẹṣẹ
'You' 'have' 'legs' 'You have legs'
- c. Ó + ní + ewé --> Ó léwé/ O ní ewé
'He' 'have' 'leaves' 'He has leaves'

The examples in (5) show that the items in column II of (4) can exist as independent verb phrases in a sentential frame. Since nominalization of verb phrases through prefixation is a common phenomenon in Yoruba, it does look plausible to analyze oni- as two morphemes.

What this analysis implies, however, is that any noun that contains oni- is derived by prefixing o- to verb phrases that underlyingly consist of the verb ni- 'to have' plus an object noun or an adverb. In the next section, I will provide evidence to show that this is not the case in Yoruba.

2.2 Evidence in Support of oni- as a single morpheme

As pointed out in section 2.1, analyzing oni- as o- + ni implies that any form or derived noun that has the structure oni+X must have the ni+X (i.e., "have X") counterpart as correctly shown in column II of (4). However, examples abound in Yoruba to show that there are nouns that have the structure oni+X but the ni+X counterparts either do not exist or sound awkward. For example:

- (6)
- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| a. oniṣòwò | (derived from <u>oni+iṣòwò</u>) | *niṣòwò |
| 'a trader' | | 'a trade' |
| b. oniwàdùwàdù | " " <u>oni+wàduwàdu</u>) | *niwàdùwàdù |
| 'a restless person' | | 'to be restless' |
| c. oniṣàngó | " " <u>oni+ṣàngó</u>) | *niṣàngó |
| 'ṣango worshipper' | | |
| d. ológò | " " <u>oni + ògò</u>) | *lógò |
| 'collection agent' | | 'debt collecting' |
| e. oniṣègùn | " " <u>oni+iṣègùn</u>) | *niṣègùn |
| 'owner of medicine or a doctor' | | 'medicine' |
| f. onidùró | " " <u>oni+ idùró</u>) | *nidùró |
| 'someone who stands as a surety' | | 'standing as a surety' |
| g. onigbàdégbà | " " <u>oni+iqbàdégbà</u>) | *nigbàdégbà |
| 'something that happens from time to time' | | 'from time to time' |
| h. alárinà | " " <u>oni + àrinà</u>) | *lárinà |
| 'marriage broker' | | |
| i. oniṣòṅà | " " <u>oni + iṣòṅà</u>) | *niṣòṅà |
| 'a carpenter' | | 'carpentry' |
| j. alágbe | " " <u>oni + aqbe</u>) | *lágbe |
| 'a begger' | | 'begging' |

is either o, ō, or a (also see Folárin 1987). On the other hand, the last column of (8) shows that the o- of oni- in column I becomes completely assimilated to the features of the following vowel. If the o- in (8) is the same as the prefix o- in (7), the expected forms in column IV of (8a, b, and c) will be as represented in (9a, b, and c) below.

- (9) a. *oléwé
 b. *olésè
 c. *oláşo

The fact that (9a, b, and c) do not occur in Yoruba confirms the assumption that the o- in (8) is different from the prefix o- in (7). This being the case, it is wrong to assume that oni- is made up of two morphemes o- (prefix) and ni 'to have'.

3. Conclusion

In the above discussion, I have argued that oni^o should be analyzed as a single unit that cannot be segmented into o- (prefix) and the verb ni 'to have'. This assumption is supported by the facts of Yoruba which show that not all the forms with oni + X structure have the ni + X counterparts. In addition, this assumption is further supported by the different characteristics manifested by prefix o- and o- of oni-.

If oni- is made up of o- and ni, one would expect the o- of oni- to behave similarly to prefix o- which already exists in the language. Since the contrary is the case, I am assuming that oni- should be treated as a single morpheme instead of two separate morphemes.

NOTES

1. There are some phonological rules that interact here with oni- prefixation to derive the forms in column III in examples (1) and (2). The derivations of elésó, onijà, aláşo, and olómó below will

illustrate how such phonological rules interact with oní- prefixation.

Stems:	aşq 'clothes'	èso 'fruits'	qmq 'child'	ijà 'a fight'
Prefixation:	oní+aso	oní+èso	oní+qmq	oní+ijà
V-Deletion:	on'aşq	on'èso	on'qmq	on'ijà
Tone rules:	onáşq	onéso	onqmq	onijà
/n/-->[l] :	oláşq	oléso	olqmq	---
V-Assimi- lation:	aláşq	eléso	qlqmq	---
Outputs:	aláşq	eléso	qlqmq	onijà

In the above derivations, a denasalization rule changes /n/ to [l] in the environment of oral vowels apart from /i/, while a vowel assimilation rule assimilates all the features of /o/ to those of the initial vowel of the noun.

2. These adverbs are commonly referred to as ideophones (see Awoyale 1974 and Akinlabi 1985).

3. Q- represents a [-High], [-Low], and [+Back] vowel that is not marked for advanced tongue root. As I will illustrate later on, it is realized as q- when the vowel of the following syllable is either /i/, /e/, /o/, or /u/. On the other hand, if the vowel of the following syllable is either /q/, /e/, /a/, /i/, or /u/, the prefix will be realized as q-. The vowels /i/ and /u/ do not participate in the harmonic system in Yoruba (see Fólárin 1987 for details).

4. The verb phrases here have undergone a denasalization rule.

5. In Fólárin 1987, I argued that outputs of the syntactic component should be allowed to serve as inputs to the morphological component in Yorùbá, since there are many verb phrases that undergo morphological processes such as prefixation and reduplication.

6. This same assumption is applicable to prefix oni- which is the counterpart of oni- in forms such as:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|------------------|
| a. olòṣi | derived from | <u>oni + òṣi</u> |
| 'poor person' | | 'poverty' |
| b. elèṣù | derived from | <u>oni + èṣù</u> |
| 'stumbling
block' | | 'devil' |

See Awobuluyi (1983) and Bamgboṣe (1984) for more examples of words with oni-.

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