

# A partial Copy Deletion account of non-agreeing resumptive pronouns in Yorùbá\*

Bode Adedeji, Ka-Fai Yip

Yale University

*olabode.adedeji@yale.edu, kafai.yip@yale.edu*

## 1. Introduction

- Resumption: *movement* dependencies vs. *pronominal* dependencies?
    - An important issue since early generative grammar (e.g., Perlmutter 1972, Koopman 1983, Engdahl 1985, McCloskey 1990; cf. Hewett 2023 for an overview)
    - Reviving interests with **non-agreeing resumptive pronouns (NRPs)** which mismatch with their antecedents in phi-features, found widely in African languages:
      - Akan (Korsah 2016, Yip & Ahenkorah 2023)
      - Cameroon Pidgin English (Fongang 2025)
      - Dinka (van Urk 2018)
      - Igala (Martinović 2024)
      - Igbo (Georgi & Amaechi 2023)
      - Swahili (Scott 2021; cf. Liu 2024)
      - (For other languages, see Boeckx 2003, Yip & Ahenkorah 2023, Yip & Yuan 2024, Ershova 2024, among others)
  - Yorùbá has been long recognized to have an NRP *ó* (3SG), at least descriptively (Pulleyblank 1986)
    - Phi-mismatches in A'-movement of subjects (e.g., *ni*-focus movement)
    - Often called High Tone Syllable (HTS) (due to Awobuluyi 1964, 1975)
- (1) a. àwọ̀n ni ó lọ. (number mismatch) cf. b. àwọ̀n ni wọ̀n lọ.  
3PL FOC 3SG go 3PL FOC 3PL go  
'It's they who went.' 'It's they who went.' (Pulleyblank 1986: 52)
- But its grammatical status has been subject to debate for years!<sup>1</sup>
    - Non-future tense (Awobuluyi 1964, 1975; Bode 2000; Ilori 2010, Ajiboye 2024)
    - Agreement marker of INFL (Pulleyblank 1986) or Tense (Dechaine 1993)
    - Expletive (for EPP requirements) (Adesola 2005, 2010)
    - "Marker" of subject-predicate relationship (Bisang & Sonaiya 1999)

- Today's goals
  - We argue that *ó* should be analyzed as **movement-derived resumption** (with phi-mismatches), drawing on two novel data patterns in Yoruba:
    - **Honorific** antecedents disallow subject NRPs
    - **Prepositional objects** (P-objects) allow NRPs and show the same honorific restrictions
  - We propose chain resolution is subject to multiple constraints of an **Optimality Theory (OT) calculus** in the PF (Fanselow and Ćavar 2001, van Urk 2024)
    - Leading to a **partial Copy Deletion** analysis of NRPs (cf. van Urk 2018, Scott 2021, Georgi & Amaechi 2023, Yip & Ahenkorah 2023, Jarvis 2026, i.a.)
    - With emphasis on the role of **honorificity** in resumption, which is novel to our knowledge
  - NB: Data based on Standard Yoruba with 5 additional consultants (besides the first author)

\* For Yoruba judgement and comments, we thank Daud Abolade, Lolade Omotilewa Adedeji, Bolaji Olusoji, Babatunde Popoola, and Ismail Yusuf. For discussion, we thank Mitcho Erlewine, Matthew Hewett, and Sreekar Raghotham. All errors are ours.

<sup>1</sup> We only focus on *ó* in extraction contexts. The literature has also discussed HTS in non-extraction contexts, which either docks on the final vowel of the subject or a geminated/lengthened rhyme. We set aside this use in this study (but see Appendix).

(i) Akin jeun.  
Akin.HTS eat.  
'Akin ate.'

(ii) Akin in jeun.  
Akin HTS eat.  
'Akin ate.'

## 2. The pronominal inventories in Yoruba

- Yorùbá pronouns have different series by their structural positions (Pulleyblank 1986)
- We will focus on the following three series today:
  - **Nominative** forms: subjects
  - **Oblique** forms (“Qualifiers”): P-objects and possessors
    - Object forms: the same as oblique form, except for 3SG, which is a lengthened vowel
  - **Strong** forms: focus positions, coordination, relative clause head noun ...<sup>2</sup>

	SG	PL
1	mo	a
2	o	ẹ
3	ó	wọ̀n

Table 1: Nominative pronouns

	SG	PL
1	mi	wa
2	rẹ̀ <sup>3</sup>	yín
3	rẹ̀	wọ̀n

Table 2: Oblique pronouns

	SG	PL
1	èmi	àwa
2	ìwọ	ẹ̀yìn
3	òun	àwọ̀n

Table 3: Strong pronouns

- The 3SG forms in non-extraction contexts:

(2) ó lọ.  
3SG go  
‘S/he went.’

(3) Adé wà [ní ẹ̀yìn rẹ̀].  
Ade be at back 3SG  
‘Ade is behind him/her.’

(4) a. {òun/ \*ó} nikan lọ.  
3SG 3SG only go  
‘Only s/he went.’

b. [{òun/ \*ó} ati Adé] lọ.  
3SG 3SG and Ade go  
‘S/he and Ade went.’

## 3. Subject resumption

- Subject pronouns are required in extraction contexts: gaps are not allowed in subject position.
  - E.g., focus movement with *ni* (cf. Awóbùlúyí 1978, Aremu 2024)<sup>4</sup>

(5) a. òun ni ó lọ.  
3SG FOC 3SG go  
‘It’s him/her who went.’

b. \*òun ni \_ lọ. (focus movement)  
3SG FOC go  
Int.: ‘It’s him/her who went.’

- The resumed subject pronouns may have **phi-features mismatch** with their antecedents (Pulleyblank 1986, Adesola 2005, 2010, among many others)

- **Number** mismatch

(6) a. àwọ̀n ni ó lọ. (NRP)  
3PL FOC 3SG go  
‘It’s they who went.’

cf. b. àwọ̀n ni wọ̀n lọ. (Agreeing RP=ARP)  
3PL FOC 3PL go  
‘It’s they who went.’ (Pulleyblank 1986: 52)

- **Person** mismatch

(7) a. ìwọ ni ó lọ.  
2SG FOC 3SG go  
‘It is you<sub>SG</sub> who went.’

b. ìwọ ni ọ lọ.  
2SG FOC 2SG go  
‘It is you<sub>SG</sub> who went.’

(8) a. èmi ni ó lọ.  
1SG FOC 3SG go  
‘It is I who went.’

b. èmi ni mo lọ.  
1SG FOC 1SG go  
‘It is I who went.’

<sup>2</sup> When the coordinated structure is a P-object, both strong forms and (most) oblique forms may be used.

<sup>3</sup> Pulleyblank reported a tonal difference:  $\grave{r}\acute{e}$  for 2SG and  $\bar{r}\acute{e}$  for 3SG, which is not found for our consultants.

<sup>4</sup> ó may be fused with focus marker *ni* as *lọ*, which we do not represent here.

- Mismatch in **both number and person** features<sup>5</sup>

(9) Èyin ni {ó/ ẹ} lọ. (10) Àwa ni Adé rò [pé {ó/ a} lọ].  
2PL FOC 3SG 2PL go 1PL FOC Ade think COMP 3SG/ 1PL go  
'It is you<sub>PL</sub> who left.' 'It is us who Ade thinks left.'

- NRPs are found in other A'-movement dependencies: **wh-movement** and **relativization**<sup>6</sup>

- NB: lexical NP antecedents pattern with pronominal antecedents  
(i.e., unlike Igbo and Atchan, cf. Georgi & Amaechi 2023, Jarvis 2026)

(11) àwọn wo ni ó rí Adé? (wh-movement)  
3PL which FOC 3SG see Ade  
'Which persons saw Ade?'

(12) àwọn akẹkọ̀ọ̀ [ti ó ra iwé] (relativization)<sup>7</sup>  
3PL student REL 3SG buy book  
'The students who bought the book'

- NRPs display **movement** properties

- **Long-distance** dependency is possible (see also (10))  
□ For both NRP and Agreeing RP (ARP)

(13) àwọn ni Adé rò [pé {ó/ wọn} lọ].  
3PL FOC Ade think COMP 3SG 3PL go  
'It's they who Ade thinks went.'

- **Island effects** (e.g., complex NP islands)

- NRP is sensitive to islands, unlike ARP

(14) Àwọn akẹkọ̀ọ̀ ni mo rí [iwé [tí {\*ó/ wọn} rà ní ilé-itajà-iwé]]. (CNPI)  
PL student FOC 1SG see book REL 3SG 3PL buy at house-of-sell-book  
'It is the students who I saw the books which they bought at the bookstore.'

- **Reconstruction for binding**

- Possible with NRP, less natural with ARP

(15) a. [Akin ati Adé]<sub>k</sub> rò pé [àwọn iwé arawọ̀n<sub>k</sub>] dára (baseline)  
Akin and Ade think COMP PL book each.other good.  
'Akin and Ade think each other's books are good.'

(i.e., Akin thinks Ade's books are good, and Ade thinks Akin's books are good.)

b. [àwọn iwé arawọ̀n<sub>k</sub>] ni [Akin ati Adé]<sub>k</sub> rò pé {ó/ ?wọn} dára (focus mvnt.)  
PL book each.other FOC Akin and Ade think COMP 3SG 3PL good.  
'It is each other's books that Akin and Ade think are good.'

<sup>5</sup> For reasons unclear to us, some speakers only accept NRPs for first person plural pronoun *àwa* in long-distance extraction contexts. *ó* is unacceptable for them in (i), but acceptable for other speakers (see also Adesola 2010:75).

(i) àwa ni {<sup>9</sup>ó/ a} wá. (unacceptable to some speakers)  
1PL FOC 3SG 1PL come  
'It is us who came.'

<sup>6</sup> In A-movement dependencies like raising constructions with *dàbí* 'seem', NRPs are not allowed.

(i) Akin ati Adé dàbí pé {\*ó/ wọn} máa ẹ̀jẹ̀n  
Akin and Ade seem COMP 3SG 3PL FUT eat  
'Akin and Ade seem like (as if) they will eat.'

<sup>7</sup> Like the case of *ni*-focus movement, *ó* may be fused relative marker *tí* as *tó*.

- The use of NRPs is sensitive to **honorificity!**
  - (Standard) Yoruba may use plural forms for a singular referent for politeness; apply to all the pronoun series (Oyetade 1995, cf. Abiṣṣun 1992 for the dialects of Yoruba that allow it)

- (16) *Addressing your teacher (only one)* (17) *Talking about your principal (only one)*  
 ẹ lọ. wọ̀n lọ.  
 2PL go 3PL go  
 ‘You<sub>HON</sub> went’ ‘S/he<sub>HON</sub> went.’

- When the antecedent pronouns are honorific (formally plural),  
 → no NRP is allowed, and ARP must be used.
  - Not reported in the Yoruba literature and the resumption literature in general

- (18) a. *Addressing your fellow classmates (multiple)* b. *Addressing your teacher (only one)*  
 Èyin ni { ó/ ẹ } lọ. Èyin ni { \*ó/ ẹ } lọ.  
 2PL FOC 3SG 2PL go 2PL FOC 3SG 2PL go  
 ‘It is you<sub>PL</sub> who left.’ ‘It is you<sub>HON</sub> who left.’
- (19) a. *Talking about your students (multiple)* b. *Talking about your principal (only one)*  
 àwọ̀n ni { ó/ wọ̀n } wá. àwọ̀n ni { \*ó/ wọ̀n } wá.  
 3PL FOC 3SG 3PL come 3PL FOC 3SG 3PL come  
 ‘It is them who came.’ ‘It is them<sub>HON</sub> who came.’

#### 4. P-object resumption

- Prepositions in Yorùbá are classified into two groups: (Adesola 2005)
    - The **simple** group (e.g. *sí* ‘to’): takes object pronouns
      - Allows P-stranding; resumptive not allowed
    - The **complex** group (e.g., *nípa* ‘about’, *lẹ̀yìn* ‘behind’): takes oblique pronouns
      - Does not allow P-stranding; **resumptive obligatory**
      - Complex because they are bimorphemic: *ní* ‘at’ + N (e.g., *ipa* ‘path’, *ẹ̀yìn* ‘back’)
- (20) Kí ni Olú da omi sí (\*i)? (21) Adé ni a sọ̀rò nípa \*(rẹ̀).  
 what FOC Olu pour water to 3SG Ade FOC we talk about 3SG  
 ‘What did Olu pour water into?’ ‘Ade was the person who we talked about.’  
 (Adesola 2005:90) (Adesola 2005:92)

- P-objects allow **NRP rẹ̀ ‘3SG’** – not reported before for Yoruba to our knowledge
  - **Number mismatch & Person mismatch** (see for (29) both)

- (22) {àwọ̀n/ iwọ/ èmi} ni Adé wà [lẹ̀yìn rẹ̀]. (NRP)  
 3PL 2SG 1SG FOC Ade be behind 3SG  
 ‘It is {them/you<sub>SG</sub>/me} who Ade is behind.’
- (23) {a. àwọ̀n/b. iwọ/c. èmi} ni Adé wà [lẹ̀yìn {a. wọ̀n/ b. rẹ̀/ c. mi}]. (ARP)  
 3PL 2SG 1SG FOC Ade be behind 3PL 2SG 1SG  
 ‘It is {them/you<sub>SG</sub>/me} who Ade is behind.’

- *Rẹ̀* may also be an NRP for **possessors** (Pulleyblank 1986)
  - Consistent with the view that complex prepositions are *ní* ‘at’ + N

- (24) Èmi ni Ségún rí [iwé {rẹ̀/ mi}].  
 1SG FOC Segun see book 3SG/ 1SG  
 ‘It is me that Segun saw my book.’ (Pulleyblank 1986:52)

➤ Also found in other movement dependencies: **wh-movement** and **relativization**<sup>8</sup>

(25) àwọ̀n wo ni Adé wà léyìn {rẹ̀/ wọ̀n}]? (wh-movement)  
3PL which FOC Ade be behind 3SG 3PL  
'Which persons are behind Ade?'

(26) àwọ̀n akẹ̀kọ̀ọ́ [tí Adé wà léyìn {rẹ̀/ wọ̀n}]. (relativization)  
3PL student REL Ade be behind 3SG 3PL  
'The students who Ade is behind'

➤ The use of NRP *rẹ̀* also exhibits movement properties

- **Long-distance** mvt. possible

(27) àwọ̀n ni Akín rò [pé Adé wà [léyìn rẹ̀]].  
3PL FOC Akin think COMP Ade be behind 3SG  
'It is they who Akin thinks that Ade is behind.'

- **Island effects:** NRP *rẹ̀* is banned whereas ARP is possible

(28) Àwọ̀n akẹ̀kọ̀ọ́ ni mo rí [ìwé [tí ó wà léyìn {\*rẹ̀/ wọ̀n}]]. (CNPI)  
PL student FOC 1SG see book REL 3SG be behind 3SG 3PL  
'It is the students who I saw the books that are behind them.'

➤ Importantly, we found the same restrictions as subject resumption:  
**Honorific uses** of 2PL and 3PL antecedents **resist** NRP *rẹ̀*

(29) a. *Addressing your fellow classmates (multi.)*      b. *Addressing your teacher (only one)*  
Èyìn ni Adé wà [léyìn {rẹ̀/ yín}].      Èyìn ni Adé wà [léyìn {\*rẹ̀/ yín}].  
2PL FOC Ade be behind 3SG 2PL      2PL FOC Ade be behind 3SG 2PL  
'It is you<sub>PL</sub> who Ade is behind.'

(30) a. *Talking about your students (multiple)*      b. *Talking about your principal (only one)*  
Àwọ̀n ni Adé wà [léyìn {rẹ̀/ wọ̀n}].      Àwọ̀n ni Adé wà [léyìn {\*rẹ̀/ wọ̀n}].  
3PL FOC Ade be behind 3SG 3PL      3PL FOC Ade be behind 3SG 3PL  
'It is them who Ade is behind.'

➤ Interim summary

Properties		Subject resumption		P-object resumption	
		NRP <i>ó</i>	ARP	NRP <i>rẹ̀</i>	ARP
Movement types	A'-mvt. (FOC, WH, REL)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	A-mvt. ( <i>dàbí</i> 'seem')	✗	✓	N/A	
Locality	Long-distance	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Across islands	✗	✓	✗	✓
Antecedent	Persons: 1, 2, 3 Number: SG, PL	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Honorific 2PL/3PL	✗	✓	✗	✓

Table 4: Syntactic properties of subject and P-object resumption

<sup>8</sup> Some speakers (2 out of 5) preferred using the ARP, but they still reported NRP to be grammatical *rẹ̀*. We set aside the issue of individual variation and potential differences from subject NRP *ó*, where such (dis)preference is not found.





(40)	<[D:NOM, 2, HON, FOC]> <sub>k</sub> ... <[D:NOM, 2, HON]> <sub>i</sub>	SPECTP	F-HON	CH-ECON
⊗	<[D:NOM, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <[D:NOM, 2, HON]>= <i>é<sub>i</sub></i>			*x7
	<[D:NOM, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <[D:NOM]>= <i>ó<sub>i</sub></i>		*!	*x5
	<[D:NOM, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <>= <i>∅</i>	*!		*x4

- Prediction is that when there are no violations of SPECTP (which would enforce pronunciation), → full CD, with less violations of CH-ECON, should be selected as an optimal candidate
  - Borne out in V-object positions

- (41) *Addressing your teacher (only one)*      ▫ [D:α, 2, HON, FOC] ↔ *èyin* (α=any value)
- Èyin ni Adé rí (\*yín / \*-í).      [D:ACC, 2, HON] ↔ *yín*
- 2PL FOC Ade see 2PL 3SG      [D:ACC] ↔ *V*
- ‘It is you<sub>HON</sub> who Ade saw.’

(41)	<[D:ACC, 2, HON, FOC]> <sub>k</sub> ... <[D:ACC, 2, HON]> <sub>i</sub>	SPECTP	F-HON	CH-ECON
	<[D:ACC, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <[D:ACC, 2, HON]>= <i>yín<sub>i</sub></i>			*x7!
	<[D:ACC, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <[D:ACC]>= <i>V = í<sub>i</sub></i>		*!	*x5
⊗	<[D:ACC, 2, HON, FOC]>= <i>Èyin<sub>k</sub></i> ... <>= <i>∅</i>			*x4

## 6. Conclusion

- Summary of the talk
  - We argued that *ó* should be analyzed as **movement-derived resumption** (with phi-mismatches), drawing on two novel data patterns in Yoruba:
    - **Honorific** antecedents disallow subject NRPs
    - **Prepositional objects** (P-objects) allow NRPs and show the same honorific restrictions
  - We proposed chain resolution is subject to multiple constraints of an **Optimality Theory (OT) calculus** in the PF (Fanselow and Ćavar 2001, van Urk 2024)
    - Leading to a **partial Copy Deletion** analysis of NRPs (cf. van Urk 2018, Scott 2021, Georgi & Amaechi 2023, Yip & Ahenkorah 2023, Jarvis 2026, i.a.)
    - With emphasis on the role of **honorificity** in resumption, which is novel to our knowledge
- Remaining questions
  - Why is it the [D] that resists deletion:
    - Structural height (van Urk 2018) vs. categorical feature (Yip & Ahenkorah 2023)
    - also related to the questions of how CD works (deletes structures vs. deletes features)
  - What is the nature of the honorificity restrictions? Can it be derived from the structure of DP?

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### Appendix: The pronominal status of *ó*

- Awobuluyi (1964, 1975): HTS is non-future tense (also Bode 2000; Ilori 2010)
  - Cannot co-occur with future tense markers *yòò* and *máa*

- (42) a. Ayaba yòò/máa fọ ife (ní òla).      b. Ayabá (\*yòò/\*máa) fọ ife.  
 queen FUT wash cup (at tomorrow)      queen FUT wash cup  
 ‘The queen will wash the cup (tomorrow).’      ‘The queen washed the cup.’

- However, *ó* **can** co-occur with [+FUT] morphemes

- (43) Akin ín dàbí pé **ó** **máa** jẹun  
 Akin HTS seem COMP 3SG FUT eat  
 ‘Akin seems like (as if) he will eat.’

- Moreover, *ó* **cannot** co-occur with subject pronouns in non-extraction contexts

- (44) a. Mo (\*ó) lọ      b. Mo ni mo (\*ó) lọ  
 1SG 3SG go      1SG FOC 1SG 3SG go  
 ‘I went.’      ‘It is I who went.’  
 c. Mo ni \*(ó) lọ  
 1SG FOC 3SG go  
 ‘It is I who went.’

- Complementary distribution between HTS and subject pronouns
  - In environments where HTS is expected (i.e., without negation *kò* and/or future *yòò*)
    - All subject pronouns resist HTS (see also Bisang & Sonaiya 1999)
    - All strong pronouns require HTS

$$(45) \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{mo} / \text{a} / \\ \text{o} / \text{ẹ} / \\ \text{ó} / \text{wọ̀n} \end{array} \right] + (*\text{HTS}) + \text{Verb}$$

$$(46) \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{èmi} / \text{àwa}/ \\ \text{ìwọ} / \text{ẹ̀yin}/ \\ \text{òun} / \text{àwọ̀n} \end{array} \right] + *(\text{HTS}) + \text{Verb}$$