

**Discourse Particles in Yoruba:
A verum analysis of sentence-final *o***

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1. Introduction

This talk concerns the semantics and pragmatics of the sentence-final particle *o* in Standard Yoruba. This particle can be used to emphasize a statement:¹

- (1) a. Mo je (Brown 2010, p. 2)
I ate
'I ate it.'
- b. Mo je o
I ate
'I ate it' (even though you thought I couldn't)

To our knowledge, the only previous work describing the interpretation of this particle is Brown (2010). (For discussion of its phonology, see Bamgbose 1966, Akinlabi & Liberman 2001, as well as Brown 2010.)

- Brown proposes that the particle is an affirmative evidential.
- '...it is added in contexts in which the hearer doubted the ability of the speaker to accomplish a goal, or where a speaker was expected to fail at completing a task'.

Our proposal:

- We will argue that Yoruba *o* marks verum emphasis (verum). That is, the particle is used to emphasize the truth of a proposition, analogous to the so-called *verum focus* construction in English in which an auxiliary is stressed (Höhle 1992):

(2) I DID eat it.

- We will present evidence for a verum analysis of *o* by showing that its discourse properties (i.e., the contexts in which it is licensed) are very similar to those that have been observed for verum in English (and other languages).

¹All data are from field notes collected through elicitation interviews with Foluke Adeniyi, a native Standard Yoruba speaker, unless specified otherwise. Examples are in Yoruba orthography, for which <p> represents /kp/, <ɔ> [ɔ], <ɛ> [ɛ], and <ɕ> [ʃ]; marking of tone is omitted here.

Theoretical background:

- Verum has been analyzed as a type of focus marking for English and German, in which verum and focus are both realized with a pitch accent (Höhle 1992, Büring 2006, Samko 2016, a.o.).
- However, recent cross-linguistic work on verum argues that a number of languages mark verum distinctly from focus, and thus verum is not a type of focus, at least in these languages (Hartmann 2013, Gutzmann, Hartmann, & Matthewson 2017, and Matthewson 2017).
 - Based on evidence from Chadic (Afro-Asiatic), Gitksan (Tsimshianic)
 - Matthewson (2017) additionally looks at Korean and Brazilian Portuguese
- Instead, verum is a common-ground (CG) management operator, responsible for the special discourse conditions of verum (Romero & Han 2004, Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011, Repp 2013, Romero 2015, Gutzmann et al. 2017)
- Matthewson 2017: The precise discourse conditions of verum can vary subtly across languages (see languages above), and this type of micro-variation can be accounted for with a CG-management approach.

Our findings:

- We will argue for a verum analysis of *o*, using diagnostics in Gutzmann et al. 2017 and Matthewson & Glougie (2015).
- We will show that Yoruba marks verum distinctly from focus, and that focus in Yoruba cannot be used to mark verum.
 - This supports the claim that verum is not focus (at least in some languages).
- We will show that Yoruba *o* has similar contextual restrictions to English verum, but that it also differs in some ways from English.
 - This supports Matthewson's (2017) proposal that there is cross-linguistic micro-variation in the discourse requirements of verum.
- We will adopt a (modified) CG-management analysis of Yoruba *o* to account for its pragmatic distribution.
 - We think the contextual restrictions of the particle may involve a combination of elements from previous proposals.

A complication: Other uses of sentence-final *o*

Brown also describes a second use of sentence-final *o*, which is used to express surprise or to announce danger:

(3) a. Ejo n bọ (based on Brown 2010, p. 2)
snake prog come
'A snake is coming.'

b. Ejo n bọ ò
snake prog come
'A snake is coming!'

- Brown calls this the surprisal particle.
- He distinguishes it both phonologically and semantically from the affirmative.
- Brown claims the surprisal is a low-tone /o/ and the affirmative a mid-tone /o/.
- We have not observed this difference in tone, but we will, as a starting point, follow Brown in treating the two uses of *o* as distinct, and we will focus on the affirmative.

This distinction is relevant for our analysis because the surprisal particle can appear in a context that has been observed to be typically bad for verum, namely, discourse-initially (Richter 1993):

(4) [Context: Out of the blue, I start the conversation with:]
#I DO have a headache. (based on Gutzmann et al. 2017)

(5) [Context: Telephone call]
#Who IS speaking? (based on Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011)

- As Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró describe this restriction: 'Verum emphasis is only felicitous if the lexical material that constitutes the propositional content of the sentence is already given in the discourse context' (p. 160).
- In other words, verum requires an overt linguistic antecedent.
- We will set aside the surprisal use of *o* to establish the pragmatic distribution of the affirmative, but we will return to the connection between the two uses once we've established an analysis for the affirmative.

Roadmap

- §2 Previous analyses of verum
- §3 Diagnosing verum in Yoruba
- §4 Conclusion

2. Previous analyses of verum²

2.1 Verum as focus (to be rejected for Yoruba *o*)

Sketch of a focus analysis of verum:

- The verum accent signals focus on a covert verum operator.
- The covert verum operator marks a proposition as true.
- This results in emphasis on the truth of the proposition.
- Assuming an alternative semantics of focus (Rooth 1992), a linguistic antecedent is required for the focus value of verum, which is {p, ¬p}.
- Not the right approach for Yoruba *o*: Yoruba marks constituent focus by positioning the focused phrase sentence-initially, immediately followed by a focus marker (see e.g. Carstens 1985, Dechaine 2002, a.o.):

(6) [Context: Someone asks, 'Who sang?']
Babababa ni o kọrin
Grandpa foc 3sg sing
'It was grandpa who sang.'

- This is distinct from the emphatic particle *o*, which can co-occur with focus:

(7) Rara, mamama ni o kọrin o.
No, grandma foc 3sg sing
'No, it was grandma who sang (emph.).'

- Moreover, focus cannot be used to express verum. Yoruba permits VP focus, as in (8), but this construction cannot convey verum emphasis. (8) is judged infelicitous in a context in which someone says, 'I don't think Ade bought a book.'

(8) Rira iwe ni Ade ra iwe. (based on Jones 2006, p. 144)
nom-buy foc A. buy book
'Ade [bought a/the book.]'
'#Ade DID buy a/the book.' (judgment from our field notes)

² Our review of previous proposals closely follows the overview of analyses in Matthewson 2017.

2.2 Verum as a conversational operator

- A second approach is to build the semantic/pragmatic contribution of verum directly into the denotation of the verum operator.
- Verum is a common-ground (CG) management operator.
- A CG-management operator specifies the status of a proposition relative to the CG (Repp 2013, Krifka 2008).
- CG = the set of propositions that the participants in the conversation mutually assume to be true (Karttunen 1974, Stalnaker 1978)
- Analyses of this type differ wrt the specific contextual requirements of verum.
- Different analyses may be appropriate for different languages, as the contextual requirements for verum can vary across languages (Matthewson 2017)
- Our question: Which analysis is the best match for Yoruba *o*?
 - We think the requirements for *o* may involve a combination of elements from previous proposals.
- Two analyses and their predictions:

Romero & Han (2004):

- (9) **Verum as an epistemic conversational operator (informal)**
 VERUM(*p*) conveys that the speaker is sure that *p* should enter the CG.
- (10) **Verum as an epistemic conversational operator (formal)**
 a. At-issue content: $\lambda p_{\langle s,t \rangle} . p$
 b. CG-man. content: $\lambda p_{\langle s,t \rangle} . \lambda w_s . \forall w' \in \text{Epi}_x(w) [\forall w'' \in \text{Conv}_x(w') [p \in \text{CG}_{w''}]]$
 b'. Paraphrase: 'x is sure that, in all worlds satisfying x's conv. goals, p is added to the CG'.
 b''. Abbreviation: FOR-SURE-IN-CG(*p*) (Romero 2015)
- **Potential problem** (observed by several authors): It's not clear if this analysis predicts verum to be infelicitous discourse-initially, as there is no explicit requirement that there be an overt linguistic antecedent.
 - As Repp (2013) describes the issue for Romero & Han's account: A speaker's making the conversational move in (9), that is, 'pointing out that there is a particularly high degree of strength for adding a proposition to the CG must be motivated—the proposition must have been up for negotiation before...' (p. 28)

Matthewson 2017 / Gutzmann et al. 2017 (revised version of Gutzmann & Miró 2011):

- (11) **Discourse condition on verum: QUD plus controversy**
 VERUM(*p*) is felicitous when *?p* is the maximal Question Under Discussion (QUD), and the speaker wants to prevent $\neg p$ from entering the CG.
- The QUD = the current issue that the interlocutors are trying to address.
 - This predicts verum to be bad discourse-initially, as discourse-initially, *?p* is not the QUD (Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011)
 - Further, the analysis predicts that verum requires a context that includes some controversy about how the QUD should be settled: 'The speaker has reason to believe that $\neg p$ is threatening to enter the CG and wants to prevent this.' (Matthewson 2017, p. 15)

3. Diagnosing verum in Yoruba

3.1 Contexts in which verum is expected to be felicitous (in English)

- All of the analyses discussed predict verum should be licensed in these contexts.

Correcting or denying a previous assertion:

- (12) A: Fadeke şe işe rẹ.
 Fadeke do work 3sg.poss
 'Fadeke did her work.'
- B: Rara, Fadeke ko şe işe rẹ o.
 No Fadeke neg do work 3sg.poss
 'No, Fadeke did not do her work (emph.)' (cf. Fa. did NOT do her work)

...this extends to correcting a presupposition:

- (13) A: Kilode ti Fadeke ko şe işe rẹ?
 why asp Fadeke neg do work 3sg.poss
 'Why didn't Fadeke do her work?'
- B: Fadeke şe işe rẹ o.
 Fadeke do work 3sg.poss
 'Fadeke did her work (emph.)' (cf. Fadeke DID do her work.)

Correcting a negative expectation arising from a previous utterance:

(14) A: Mio ro wipe Olu fe jẹun.
1sg.neg think that Olu want eat.inf
'I don't think Olu wants to eat.'

Olu: Mo fe jẹun o.
I want eat.inf
'I want to eat (emph.)' (cf. I DO want to eat.)

Answering an indirect question:

(15) A: Mio mọ boya ojo rọ lana.
1sg.neg know whether rain rain yesterday
'I don't know if it rained yesterday.'

B: Ojo rọ lana o.
rain rain yesterday
'It rained yesterday (emph.)' (cf. 'It DID rain yesterday.')

[Consultant comments: It's like I'm just certain it rained. I'm really sure. Maybe you guys were indoors, that's why you didn't know.]

Affirming a preceding statement:

(16) A: Fadeke mura daradara lana.
Fadeke dress well yesterday
'Fadeke was dressed well yesterday.'

B: Beeni, Fadeke mura daradara o.
Yes Fadeke dress well
'Yes, Fadeke was dressed well (emph.)' (Cf. Fadeke WAS dressed well.)

(Note: The QUD + controversy analysis predicts there must be some controversy regarding how ?*p* should be settled in order for (16) to be felicitous.)

3.2 Contexts in which verum is expected to be infelicitous (in English)

Discourse-initially (out-of-the-blue):

(4) [Context: Out-of-the blue, I start the conversation with:]
'#I DO have a headache.'

Neutral answers to questions:

(17) a. What do you do?
b. #I AM a doctor.

- The QUD requirement predicts these contexts to be infelicitous for verum.
- Point of variation: Unlike English verum, Yoruba *o* is judged acceptable in these contexts, but specific scenarios were provided for using the particle.

(18) Proposed generalization for Yoruba *o*: Controversy minus QUD

- The particle *o* is used when the speaker is sure *p* should be added to the CG.
- Further, at least typically, the particle is used when the speaker expects or anticipates some controversy over ?*p* (i.e., the speaker believes that the hearer believes, expects, or is considering $\neg p$), and the speaker wants to prevent $\neg p$ from entering the CG.
- No overt linguistic antecedent is required: Thus, ?*p* need not be the QUD.

Discourse-initially (out-of-the-blue):

[Context: I walk into the room and start the conversation with:]

(19) Fadeke še işe rẹ o.
Fadeke do work 3sg.poss
'Fadeke did her work (emph.)' (cf. '#Fadeke DID do her work.')

[Consultant comments: Maybe Fadeke is notorious for not doing her work.]

(20) Ade mu oti bia lana o.
Ade drink beer yesterday
'Ade drank beer yesterday (emph.)'

[Consultant comments: Maybe Ade has been warned not to be drinking beer. And I saw him drinking with his friends. So it might even be gossip... I just want you to know that I'm spying on him on your behalf.]

Answers to *wh*-questions:

- (21) [Context: You're at a job interview, and the interviewer asks 'What do you do?']
 [Note: The consultant is currently a graduate student, but she was a practicing doctor for many years before returning to school.]

A: Dokita ni mi o. (cf. #I AM a doctor.)
 Doctor FOC 1sg
 'I'm a doctor (emph.)'
 [Consultant comments: Maybe the person...knows I'm a student. And the person doesn't think I'm a doctor. So I might want to emphasize that I am a doctor... So maybe I'm just trying, you know, to just set the record clear.]

Answers to a broad 'What's happening?' or 'What happened?':

- (22) [Context: You see your friend and ask:]

A: Kilo n şele?
 What prog happen
 'What's happening?'

B: Nkan ko o şele o.
 something NEG 3sg happen
 'Nothing is happening (emph.)' (cf. #Nothing IS happening.)
 [Maybe I expect that something exciting should be happening now.]

- (23) [Context: You see Ade crying.]

A: Kilo şele?
 what happen
 'What happened?'

B: Nkan ko o şele o.
 something NEG 3sg happen
 'Nothing happened (emph.)' (cf. #Nothing DID happen.)
 [Maybe he just wants to emphasize that although he's crying, there's no problem. And then maybe he doesn't trust me, doesn't want to confide in me. So he just wants to say that so that I would leave him alone. I wouldn't go a step further and say, 'I don't believe that, you wouldn't be crying.]

Answers to *yes/no*-questions:

- (24) A: şe o pari işe e?
 Q 2sg finish work 2sg.poss
 'Did you finish your work?'

B: Mo pari işe mi o.
 1sg finish work 1sg.poss
 'I finished my work (emph.)' (Cf. 'I DID finish my work.)'
 [Comments: Usually the response is [without *o*]. But then if we've been having this conversation back and forth 'You lazy girl go finish your work' and then I'm like 'Oh, I did', then I would say [this].]

Extension to the surprisal use: The surprisal use of *o* might also be construed as appearing in contexts in which the speaker anticipates some controversy over *?p*, that is, the speaker expects that the hearer believes or expects $\neg p$ (as the status quo), and the speaker wishes to prevent $\neg p$ from entering the CG:

- (3) Ejo n bọ ò (Brown 2010, p. 2)
 snake prog come
 'A snake is coming!' (danger)

This may explain why the particle can also be used to make an announcement, or to express the excitement of the speaker, even when no danger is conveyed:

- (25) Kabiyesi n bọ o.
 king prog come
 'The king is coming (emph.)' (cf. #The king IS coming.)
 [Comments: Because the king is somebody we all attach importance to, maybe I want people to behave themselves while the king is passing by. So it might be that I'm trying to make people aware of what's happening in the next couple of minutes, or out of excitement.]

Cf., Brown (2010), who distinguished these cases:

- a. Ejo n bọ o (based on Brown 2010, p. 13)
 snake prog come
 Announcement (to audience): 'A snake is coming!' (affirmative for Brown)
- b. Ejo n bọ ò
 snake prog come
 Danger & surprise: 'A snake is coming!' (surprisal for Brown)

Results:

- The particle is used when the speaker is sure p should be added to the CG.
- At least typically, the particle is used when the speaker expects or anticipates some controversy over $?p$, and the speaker wants to prevent $\neg p$ from entering the CG.
- No overt linguistic antecedent is required: $?p$ need not be the QUD.
- These properties suggest Romero & Han's analysis, repeated in (9), along with the controversy requirement in (26):

(9) **Verum as an epistemic conversational operator (informal)**
VERUM(p) conveys that the speaker is sure that p should enter the CG.

(26) **Discourse condition on verum: Controversy minus QUD**
VERUM(p) is felicitous when ~~$?p$ is the maximal Question Under Discussion (QUD),~~ and the speaker wants to prevent $\neg p$ from entering the CG.

- The controversy component may provide a unified account of the affirmative, surprisal, and announcement uses of o .

Similar analyses:

- Matthewson & Glougie (2015) observe similar pragmatic conditions for *actually*:
 - '*Actually* can be used to respond to implicit, anticipated or even imagined disagreements, as long as the speaker has reliable evidence for their claim' (p. 24)
- Matthewson (2017) proposes Romero & Han's analysis for Korean *-ci*.
 - Korean *-ci* is felicitous in answers to *wh*-questions, unlike English verum:

(27) A: What is Rachel's favourite colour? (Matthewson 2017, p. 68)
B: #It IS yellow.
B': I'm sure it's yellow. (Acceptable with Korean *-ci*)

— Korean *-ci* is infelicitous discourse-initially (possibly unlike Yoruba o):

(28) [Context: A has just entered the room where B is. No prior discussion of Rachel.] (Matthewson 2017, p. 68)
B: #Rachel's favourite colour IS yellow.
B': #I'm sure that Rachel's favourite colour is yellow. (# with Korean *-ci*)

5. Conclusion

- We have argued for a verum analysis of the Yoruba sentence-final particle o .
- Cf. Brown (2010), who analyses the particle as an affirmative evidential.
- We have shown that focus in Yoruba cannot be used to mark verum.
 - This supports previous work arguing that verum is not focus (at least in some languages). (Gutzmann et al 2017)
- We have shown that Yoruba o is used in contexts similar to English verum, but that it also differs in that o does not require that the modified proposition currently be up for negotiation in the discourse
 - This supports previous work arguing that there are subtle cross-linguistic differences in the contextual conditions that license verum in different languages. (Matthewson 2017)
- We have explored a (modified) CG-management analysis of Yoruba o to account for its pragmatic distribution.
- Questions for future research on Yoruba o :
 - Similarities / differences between Yoruba o , English *actually*, and Korean *-ci*.
 - Is controversy (26) a necessary condition for the affirmative marker? What exactly does (9) on its own predict for the pragmatic distribution of verum?
 - More uses of o :
 - The particle also appears in greetings: *Kaaaro o* 'Good morning o.'
 - The particle also appears in vocatives: *Olú ò!* 'Olu!'

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Appendix: Additional data

- (29) [Context: You're at the doctor's office and the nurse asks:]
 A: N jeun ni oogun koko ti o lo?
 prog eat focus any medication ASP
 'Are you taking any medications?'

 B: Rara, mio lo oogun koko o.
 No 1sg.NEG any medication
 'No, I am not taking any medications (emph.)'
 [Consultant comments: Maybe the nurse is taking my vitals and notices my blood pressure is high. And then well maybe it's undiagnosed.]
- (30)[Context: You're at a job interview, and the interviewer asks 'What do you do?']
 Akeko ni mi o.
 student FOC 1sg
 'I am a student (emph.)' (cf. #I AM a student.)
 [Comments: Maybe I'm talking to someone who thinks I shouldn't be a student.]
- (31) [Context: Doctor's office and the nurse asks:]
 A: Omo odun melo ni e?
 old year many COP 2sg
 'How old are you?'

 B: Omo odun mokanlelogun ni mi o.
 old year 21 COP 1sg
 'I'm 21 (emph.)'
 [Consultant comments: Maybe we think that she should be older or younger. And there's also a possibility that I asked that question like three times. And then she's like 'Well, let me be. I'm 21.']

(32) [Context: You come home from work and ask your children:]

Parent: Kini o n şe?
What 2sg prog do
'What are you doing?'

Child: Mo n şe işe mi o.
1sg prog do work 1sg.poss
'I am doing my work (emph.).' (Cf. #I AM doing my work.)
[Consultant comments: For instance, if I assume that they were doing what they shouldn't have been doing, and they're trying to say, 'Well, we're not breaking the rules'. Then they will say [this]. Maybe I caught them yesterday doing something. They might want to just say 'Well, we are good this afternoon.']

(33) [Context: Customs officer asks, 'Where do you live?']

Lekki ni mi n gbe o.
Lekki FOC 1sg prog live
'I live in Lekki (emph.).' (cf. #I DO live in Lekki.)
[Consultant comments: Imagine my address is on my international passport. And I grew up in Ipaja. And even for so many years after I had grown up, I still had Ipaja on my address for so many things...]

(34) [Context: You see Ade crying.]

Kilo şe
what happen
'What happened?'

Mo padanu işe mi o.
1sg lost work 1sg.poss
'I lost my job (emph.).'

[Consultant comments: Maybe he's shocked himself that it happened to him. Or maybe he's also trying to give a reason why he's so sad.]

[Context: I walk in and start the conversation with:]

(35) Mo pari işe mi o.
1sg finish work 1sg.poss

'I finished my work (emph.).' (cf. #I DID finish my work.)
[Consultant comments: Maybe I'm happy that I finished this work that was so much. And then it might also be maybe people around me don't believe that I can finish it.] [Maybe we've been talking about this grad school assignment that won't come to an end. And then we just want a girls' night out. And I'm like 'Oh, I finished my work!' So I can just throw that in.]

(36) Ori n fa mi o.
head prog break 1sg

'I have a headache (emph.).' (cf. #I DO have a headache.)
[Consultant comments: Maybe you are trying to let us know that someone should do something, you have a headache. It might not be a lot of headache, you might just want attention. And it might also be a lot of headache... It can be an announcement, it can be an alert. And it can also be an attention-seeking statement. You know, I can say, 'I've been telling you people, I have a headache o.' It might even be that oh I'm surprised that I have a headache...]

(37) Ara Fadeke oya o.
body Fadeke not-well

'Fadeke is sick (emph.).' (cf. #Fadeke IS sick.)
[Consultant comments: It might be an announcement. Maybe we're just talking and I'm like 'Oh, are you aware? Fadeke is sick o.' And it can be a thing of surprise.]

(38) Mo ra ile kan o.
1sg buy house one

'I bought a house.'
[Consultant comments: Maybe [the house was] so expensive that I can't even believe I could afford it. Or I just got a very good deal. I might be shocked, I might be excited to let my friends know.]

(39) O ra ile kan o.
3sg buy house one

'She bought a house.'
[Consultant comments: I'm surprised that she can afford it. Or I'm excited.]

(40) Ojo rọ lana o.
rain rain yesterday

'It rained yesterday (emph.).'
[Consultant comments: Maybe when the rain is in the dry season, when nobody expects rain. And we were surprised it rained yesterday. Or we've been praying for rain and the rain has refused to come, and it rained yesterday.]

Inside yes/no questions (Note: o was generally judged bad in *yes-no* questions)

(41) şe o ti şe işe amurele o?
Q 2sg complete do homework

'Did you do your homework?'
[Speaker comments: If you had been telling your child to do their homework all day, but they still had not.] This question cannot be used to indicate that the parent doubts that the child did his/her homework (i.e., it cannot mean 'Did you really do your HW?')