Issues on the Categorial Status
of 'Òun' in Yorùbá

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Abstract

This paper examines issues on the categorial status of *òun* in Yoruba grammar, particularly its status as conjunction. It draws insight from binding theory to show that in Standard Yoruba and other related dialects, such as Ìlàjẹ, *òun* is constantly anaphorically bound by the first of the two nominal constituents it purportedly coordinates in line with binding rule and binding principle 'B' within the particular phrasal context where it is often analysed as conjunction. Relying on data from South-Eastern Yoruba dialects (Oǹdó and Ào) and a Central Yoruba dialect (Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí) where there is clear cut evidence for two *òun* in the lexicon, one of which is non-referential unlike the *òun* in Standard Yoruba, the paper shows that the use of *òun* as conjunction in Ào, reported in Taiwo (2005), is not exclusive as there are other dialects in the language that do the same. The paper however provide additional evidence to demonstrate that the claim that *òun* is a conjunction

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in Yoruba based on the Ào data cannot be generalized to Standard Yoruba and other related dialects (e.g., Ìlàjẹ) where the non-referential *òun* found in Ào, Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí, and Oǹdó dialects is absent. These make argument in favour of the so-called conjunction *òun* in Standard Yoruba (School) grammar being a 3sg pronominal anaphor compelling.

Keywords: Yoruba, nominal conjunction, dialects, pronominal anaphor, agreement, binding principle B

1. Introduction

Òun in Yoruba[1] grammar is generally believed to have dual syntactic functions. It is analysed as third person singular pronominal in the bracketed nominal phrase in (1) and as a nominal conjunction in (2).

(1) a. [Èmi   àti   *òun*]   jọ   jẹun   lánàá.
       1sg   and   3sg   together   eat   Loc-yesterday[2]
       'S/he and I ate together yesterday.'

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[1] Yorùbá belongs to the Defoid-Yoruboid subgroup within the Kwa family of Niger-Congo (now Benue-Congo) languages. Other languages in the subgroup are Igálà, Itshẹkiri, and the Akokoid/Amgbɛ́ languages, all of which are natively spoken in Nigeria (Bendor-Samuel (ed.) 1989, Heine & Nurse (eds.) 2000). Yoruba is a tone language and its basic word order is SVO.

[2] Here is a list of abbreviations used in this article:
Agr—Agreement; Comp—Complementizer; Conj—Conjunction; ConjP—Conjunction Phrase; DP—Determiner Phrase; D—Determiner; Emph—Emphatic; Foc—Focus marker; Fut—Future tense marker; Infl—Inflection; Loc—Locative; Neg—Negative morpheme; Part—Particle; sg—singular; pl—plural; Phi-features—person, number, and gender features; Prog/Cont—Progressive/Continuous aspect; Perf—Perfective aspect; Q-m—Question marker; Rel—Relative clause marker; 1/1st—1st person; 2/2nd—2nd person; 3/3rd—3rd person; 3ms—3rd person masculine; 3fs—3rd person feminine; Ø—null element

b. [*Òun* àti   Tádé] ni   wọ́n   pè.
   3sg and Tade   foc   3pl   call
   'They called HIM/HER and TADE.'

(2) a. Mo   rí   [Òjó   *òun*   Dàda].
       1sg see   Ojo   and   Dada
       'I saw Ojo and Dada.'

   b. [Adé *òun* Délé] wá.
      Ade   and   Dele   come
      'Ade and Dele came.'

This scenario raises the question of the categorical status of *òun* in Yoruba grammar. Are we dealing with homonyms in these two contexts such that *òun* in (1) has a separate syntactic function and meaning different from (2), as traditionally believed, or is it that we are missing out on some structural generalizations about these two contexts which appear to shroud the true function of *òun*, particularly in (2)? The former would most probably be said to be the case since there are examples of other words in the language having dual or even triple syntactic functions. For instance, *dúdú* '(to be) black' functions as attributive adjective, verb, and/or noun, respectively, in (3a-c).

(3) a. Mo   ra   òbúkọ *dúdú*   kan.
       1sg buy   goat   black   one
       'I bought a black goat.'

   b. Ẹran náà   *dúdú* gan-an.
      animal def   black   Deg
      'The animal is very black.'

   c. *Dúdú*   ni   ẹran   yẹn.
      black   foc   animal that
      'That animal is BLACK.'

However, there are certain syntactic behaviours of *òun* in context (2) which make the whole conjunction claim suspicious. Apart from the fact that *òun* in context (2) where it is commonly called a conjunction is highly restrictive, being the only context where it performs such function, *òun* appears to select viz. phi-feature agreement, the type of nominal constituent that can occur to its left in the coordination unlike other nominal conjunctions, e.g., *àti*, which can coordinate any two nominal constituents without establishing number and/or person agreement relation with any of them. This accounts for the ill-formedness in (4a) where the first of the two coordinated nominal phrases, *àwọn ọlọ́pàá* 'the policemen,' has 3pl features in contrast to the 3sg features of the conjunction *òun*.

(4) a. [Àwọn   ọlọ́pàá   *àti/*òun*   adigunjalè
        3pl   police   and   robber
        náà]   ń   yìnbọn   sí   ara-wọn.
        the   prog   shoot-gun   Loc   themselves
        'The policemen and the armed robber engaged in a gun duel.'

     b. [Ọlọ́pàá   kan   *òun/àti*   adigunjalè   náà]
        police   one   and   robber   the
        ń   yìnbọn   sí   ara-wọn.
        prog   shoot-gun   Loc   themselves
        'A policeman and the armed robber engaged in a gun duel.'

Yusuf (1980) was the first to recognise the fact that the interpretation of *òun* in context (2) actually has to do with agreement. He thereby offered the following piece of advice on the issue before proceeding to analyse *òun* in that context as a marker of agreement (Yusuf ibid.: 8):

> Despite the fact that *òun* has been glossed as 'and' . . .
> there is the need to exercise caution before we conclude
> that it is a conjunction.

These observations, coupled with some other pieces of evidence
discussed in this article, made Ilọri (2004) argue that *òun* in
context (2) is one and the same 3sg pronominal found in the
Yoruba pronoun system (see Tables 1 and 2).

However, Taiwo (2005) presents some interesting data from Ào
(a South-Eastern Yoruba dialect spoken in Ondo State) which cast
serious doubts on this claim. He reported that *òun* is the only
nominal conjunction in the dialect and that it can coordinate any
two nominal constituents, including the 3sg pronominal *òun*,
irrespective of their phi-feature properties. (5a-c) are some
examples of this culled from Taiwo (2005: 183):

(5) a. Tádé   *òun*   Ayò   ó   zẹrun.
       Tayo   and   Ayo   Infl   eat
       'Tade and Ayo ate.'

   b. Òmi   *òun*   Ayò   ó   zẹrun.
       1sg   and   Ayo   Infl   eat
       'Ayo and I ate.'

   c. Mo   rí   Ìnin   *òun*   Òun.
       1sg   see   2pl   and   3sg
       'I saw you and him/her.'

He concluded on this premise that *òun* is nothing short of a
conjunction in context (2) in Yoruba.

In order to establish the veracity of this claim, there is need to
investigate whether this structural fact of Ào dialect is equally true
for SY and other Yoruba dialects as apparently presumed in Taiwo
(2005). In actual fact, and as this article will attempt to show,

evidence from SY, South-Eastern Yoruba (Ìlàjẹ and Oǹdó), and Central Yoruba (Òmùò-Àràròmí) dialects reveal that the conjunction *òun* noted in Ào also exists in some, but not all, dialects of Yoruba. Those pieces of evidence also show that there are fundamental lexical and syntactic differences between the conjunction *òun* in Ào and the other *òun* in SY. These and other related issues raised in this paper challenge the exact categorical status of *òun* in its purported coordination function in Standard Yoruba.

2. Categorising *Òun*

One of the most widely used principles employed in the classification of words into syntactic categories is, as in Awobuluyi (1978: 2), based on the functional behaviour/distribution of such words in the syntax of the language concerned. Relying on that principle, we shall in this section examine the syntactic behaviour/distribution of *òun* first as a pronominal, second as a conjunction, and third as a marker of agreement in Yoruba similar to Hausa agreement markers as suggested in Yusuf (1980).

2.1. *Òun* as Pronominal

Basically, *òun* as a pronominal in Yoruba is the third in a set of six items. Each of these items is independently emphatic (unlike their closely related short non emphatic pronoun[3] counterparts)

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[3] There is consensus in the literature about Yoruba monosyllabic pronouns (see Table 2) being morphologically related to their emphatic bi-syllabic pronominal counterparts. While some believe that the latter are derived from the former through vowel prefixation, others are of the opinion that it is the other way round through the deletion of initial vowels of the pronominals. See Déchaine (1993), Awobuluyi (2001, 2008), and Ilọri (2010).

with distinct grammatical features of person and number as shown
in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Yoruba Pronominals

Person	Singular	Plural
1st	èmi	àwa
2nd	ìwọ	ẹ̀yin
3rd	*òun*	àwọn

Table 2. Pronouns in Yoruba

Person	Singular		Plural	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object
1st	mi/mo	mi	a	wa
2nd	o/ọ	ẹ/ọ	ẹ	yín
3rd	Ø (un)	un	wọn	wọn

   These unique phi-features ensure that words in the Yoruba
pronominal set (Table 1) do not overlap in their referential
capabilities. Each of them can function as subject or object, take
modifiers, be relativized or focused, and be coordinated along with
another member of the set or any other nominal constituent in the
language, as exemplified in (6a-g).

   (6) a. Subject
        Èmi   ò   mọ   ibẹ̀.
        1sg-emph   neg   know   there
        'I don't know the place.'

b. Object

O ò lè kí *èmi*.
2sg neg can salute 1sg-emph
'You mean you cannot greet me.'

c. +Modifiers

ìwọ ọmọ yìí
2sg child this
'you this child'

d. Relativized

àwa tí a jẹ́ akọni
1pl-emph rel 1pl be heroe
'we who are heroes'

e. Focused

Òun ni mo ń pè.
3sg-emph foc 1sg prog call
'I am calling HIM/HER.'

f. Coordinated with Another Pronominal

àwọn àti *òun*
3pl-emph and 3sg-emph
'they and s/he'

g. Coordinated with Other Nominal Phrase

ẹ̀yin àti ọ̀gá àgbà
2pl-emph and boss old
'you and the big boss'

These Yoruba pronominals also obey binding principle B which states that pronominals, i.e., pronouns and pronominals, are free in their governing category (GC) but can be bound by a c-commanding antecedent from outside it. GC in this respect means the smallest

phrase or clause containing such pronominal anaphor (Haegeman 1991: 216, Yusuf 1998: 153) and its governor. However, before binding co-indexation can be fully established, there must be phi-feature agreement between the anaphor and its antecedent. For instance, *òun*, *èmi*, *ìwọ*, and *àwa* are anaphorically bound by their respective co-indexed antecedents from outside the (bracketed) smallest simple clauses which house them in (7a-d).

(7) a. Adé$_i$ ti   sọ   pé   [*òun*$_i$ ò   ní   í   tẹ   ibẹ̀].
       Ade   perf say comp 3sg   neg have Infl step there
       'Ade said he won't go there.'

   b. Mo$_i$ mọ̀   pé   [*èmi*$_i$ ni   wọ́n   pè].
       1sg   know   comp   1sg   foc   3pl   call
       'I know I was the one called.'

   c. Akin$_i$, ṣé   o$_i$ gbọ́   pé   [*ìwọ*$_i$ ni   o   máa   lọ]?
       Akin, Q-m 2sg hear comp 2sg   foc 2sg fut   go
       'Akin, have you heard that YOU are the one to go?'

   d. [Èmi àti   Kúnlé]$_i$ ti   sọ   ohun tí   [*àwa*$_i$ á   mọ̀].
       1sg   and kunle   perf say thing rel   1pl   Infl know
       'Kunle and I have disclosed what we know.'

This piece of evidence clearly shows that *òun* and other Yoruba pronominals refer anaphorically to some antecedents in line with binding rule and binding principle B of Chomsky (1981).

2.2. *Òun* as Conjunction

Òun is generally believed to belong to the set of conjunctions that coordinate nominal constituents in Yoruba. Other members of the set appear to be *àti* and *pẹ̀lú* with all of them literally glossed as 'and.' One other way to establish the syntactic category of an

item/word is to apply the substitution test: if a word or constituent can substitute for another in the same syntactic position, the two constituents/words can be said to belong to the same syntactic category. On this basis, *àti*, *pèlú*, and *òun*, as nominal conjunctions, should substitute for one another in the syntax of coordinated noun phrases in Yoruba if they truly belong to the same category. This appears to be the case in contexts such as (8).

(8) Ẹgbẹ́ Bùhárí pe [[Ọbásanjọ́] *àti/pèlú/òun* [Àtíkù]] léjọ́.
    party Buhari call Obasanjo   and   Atiku   foc-case
    'Buhari's party sued Obasanjo and Atiku.'

Interestingly, however, *òun* behaves differently in other coordinated nominal contexts. For instance, it can not substitute for *àti/pèlú* when the first of the coordinated constituents or the two coordinated constituents are plural, as in (9a) and (9b&c).

(9) a. [[ọ̀pọ̀ èèyàn] *àti/pèlú/*òun* [ọmọdé yìí]] ni a pè.
       many people and   child this foc 1pl call
       'We invited MANY PEOPLE AND THIS CHILD.'

    b. kò yẹ   kí   [èmi]   *àti/pèlú/*òun* [ìwọ] jà.
       Neg befitting Comp 1sg   and   2sg fight
       'It is not right for you and me to fight.'

    c. [[Àwọn òṣìṣẹ́ wọ̀nyí] *àti/pèlú/*òun* [adarí wọn]] dà?
       3pl   workers these   and   leader 3pl Q-m
       'Where are these workers and their leader?'

The reason for this is not far fetched. Unlike *àti/pèlú, òun* cannot coordinate unless the first of the two coordinated nominal constituents shares the third person singular phi-features with it. For example, the ill-formedness noted in (10a) is because *èmi*, the first of the coordinated items there, is a first person singular

pronominal, ditto in (10b) where the first of the coordinated constituents, *ìwọ*, is a second person singular pronominal.[4]

(10) a. [Èmi] *àti/pèlú/*òun* [Tádé]
       1sg and Tade
       'Tade and I'

  b. [Ìwọ] *àti/pèlú/*òun* [àwọn akékòọ]
       2sg and 3pl student
       'you and the students'

It is evidently clear from (8)-(10) that analysing *òun* as conjunction in that particular context as often done in Standard Yoruba (SY henceforth) grammar is simply misleading. Such analysis completely missed out on the agreement restriction between *òun* and one of the constituents it purportedly coordinates, i.e., the one which occurs to its left in the construction. This fact, as evident in the following subsections, has far reaching implication for the understanding of the syntactic derivation and interpretation of such expressions in Yoruba.

2.3. *Òun* as a Marker of Concord Agreement

Yusuf (1980) suggested that *òun* in the context where it is commonly analysed as conjunction in Yoruba be analysed as an agreement marker similar to Hausa words like *yá* 'he' and *tá* 'she' in two of his examples rewritten here as (11a&b).

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4 Phrases like (10a) and (10b) can be well-formed if *òun* is interpreted there as '3sg' pronominal (such that (10a) would be glossed as '[I, s/he, and Tade] heard' while (10b) would be '[you, s/he, and the students] heard'). However, a brief pause, graphically marked by a comma before and after *òun* in such context, is often used to differentiate such interpretation (i.e., Èmi, *òun*, Tádé 'I, s/he, and Tade') from those in (10a) and (10b).

(11) a. Ùbá   ná   *yá*   zó.
     father   my   he   come
     'My father has come.'

  b. Uwárgidá   *tá*   dádà   àbíncí.
     woman-house   she   cook   food
     'The woman has cooked.'

  c. *Yá*   zó.
     He   come
     'He has come.'

  d. *Tá*   dádà   àbíncí.
     She   cook   food
     'She has cooked.'

According to him, *yá* and *tá* are gender-number pronominal markers for their antecedent nouns which could be optionally omitted in such Hausa expressions as evident in (11c&d). He exemplified this view with example (12) taken from Yusuf (1980: 12).

(12) Aṣapé fún   wèrè   jó [   ] *òun* wèrè   lẹgbẹ́.
     clapper for madman dance   and   madman be-equal
     'One who claps for the madman to dance and the madman are equals.'

Here, Yusuf said the initial noun to which *òun* refers, is omitted (indicated with the bracket) in (12) without any loss of intelligibility. The parallel he tried to draw is that, just as the subjects *Ùbá* and *Ùwárgídá* in (11a&b) are deleted in (11c&d) without any loss of intelligibility, the N to which *òun* supposedly refers in Yoruba (12) is equally deleted.

However, while it is true that phi-feature agreement plays a very

crucial role in the interpretation of *òun* in (12) and other similar expressions in Yoruba where *òun* is analysed as conjunction, the way and manner such agreement relation is constructed between *òun* and its antecedent is quite different from the way *yá* and *tá* operate in Hausa. First and foremost, *òun* is a pronominal in Yoruba, and because of that, the agreement relation it involves in is an argument-argument co-reference relationship. In other words, *òun* (just like every other pronominal in Yoruba) and its antecedent are arguments (see 7a-d) and that relationship is determined by binding rule and binding principle B which says a pronominal is free in its GC but can be bound from outside it. On the other hand, the agreement between *yá* and *tá* and their referents in Hausa is a Subject-Infl relationship. In other words, *yá*, and *tá* are Infl elements which function exclusively as subject-concord agreement markers. *Sún* 'they' is the third and the only gender neutral item out of the three subject-concord agreement markers in Hausa. This is evident in (15a&b).

(13) a. Audù/shí   *yá*   á   tèfi   mákáríntá.
       Audu/3sgm 3ms pst   go   school
       'Audu/he has gone to school.'

    b. Ø   *yá*   á   tèfi   mákáríntá.
       null   3ms pst   go   school
       'He has gone to school.'

(14) a. Fátímà/ítá   *tá*   á   tèfi   mákáríntá.
       Fatima/3sgf 3fs pst   go   school
       'Fatima has gone to school.'

    b. Ø   *tá*   á   tèfi   mákáríntá.
       null   3fs pst   go   school
       'She has gone to school.'

(15) a. [Audù   dà   Fatimà]/[*sú] *sún*   tèfi   mákárántá.
      Audu   and   Fatima 3pl   3pl   go   school
      'Audu and Fatima have gone to school.'

   b. Ø   *sún*   tèfi   mákárántá.
      null   3pl   go   school
      'They have gone to school.'

In line with Bamgboṣe (1980: 190), it is evident in (13)-(15) that Hausa has undisputable personal subject pronouns, i.e., *shí*, *ítá*, and s*ú*, to which these agreement markers relate. Therefore, the claim that *yá*, *tá*, and *sún* are subject-concord markers (Infl elements) is undisputable in that they relate only to third person subjects of clauses in the language to indicate the gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular or plural) of such subjects. That makes it possible for such subjects to be dropped in Hausa clause syntax without any loss of referent interpretation. That in itself is an indication that Hausa is a pro-drop or null-subject language. This observation, exemplified in (13a-c), aligns with the following excerpt from UCLA language materials project on Hausa:

> Hausa scholars describe the basic syntax of the clause as consisting of (i) the subject, followed by (ii) the so-called pre-verbal "person-aspect complex" which includes tense/ aspect information and *subject agreement morphology*, and lastly (iii) the verb phrase. *If the underlying subject is a simple personal pronoun, it is obligatorily unpronounced*. The person and number features of the deleted subject are recoverable via the agreement morphology present in the person-aspect complex. In this way, Hausa is a "pro-drop" language.

Another piece of evidence that shows that the items in question

are Infl elements in Hausa is their interaction with Infl elements like tense and aspect, as in (16) and (17), culled from Mohammed (2004: 23) and Yusuf (1997: 44, 45).

(16) a. Audù *yá* á káámà záákì.
     Audu 3ms perf catch lion
     'Audu caught a lion.'

  b. Audù *yá* nà káámà záákì.
     Audu 3ms cont catch lion
     'Audu is catching a lion.'

  c. Audù zá *yà* káámà záákì.
     Audu fut 3ms catch lion
     'Audu will catch a lion.'

(17) a. Máríyámù táá shá rúwá.
     Mariyamu she-PAST drink water
     'Mariyamu drank water.'

  b. Máríyámù záá *tà* shá rúwá.
     Mariyamu will SUBJUNCT: she drink water
     'Mariyamu will drink water.'

The fact that tense/aspect information occurs immediately before or after *yá* and *tá* and could be morphologically fused with them reinforces the claim that these items actually belong to the Infl category. As a matter of fact, most grammar works on Hausa, e.g., Bamgboṣe (1980), Amfani (1996, 2004: 47), Yusuf (1997), Newman (2000), and so on are unanimous on analysing the items in question as markers of subject-concord agreement.

On the other hand, *òun* in Yoruba is a nominal item that functions as subject or object, and it is not known to be preceded by tense/aspect in clause syntax. In addition to this, Yoruba

grammarians are more or less unanimous on the assertion that, unlike Hausa, English, and other Indo-European languages, Yoruba does not employ Subject-Infl or Infl-Object agreement. That explains why Yusuf himself remarked that (Yusuf 1997: 7):

> The construct 'Agreement' is not selected synchronically
> in Standard Yoruba in certain environment but the item
> is obligatory in Hausa (a Chadic language).

The term *certain environment* in this excerpt, I guess, refers to Subject-Infl type of agreement employed in Hausa.

We, therefore, disagree with Yusuf's (1980) view that *òun* is a concord agreement marker in Yoruba clause contexts like (12) because there is no syntactic basis for the comparison between *òun* and Hausa *yá*, *tá*, and *sún*. The latter are not pronouns but Infl items which function as subject-concord agreement markers in Hausa. They evidently possess certain syntactic properties which *òun* and other Yoruba pronouns/pronominals lack, and vice versa. Therefore, if we are to draw any parallel between *òun* and relevant Hausa words on this matter, such would be better between *òun* and Hausa pronominals like *shí*, *ítá*, *sú*, and so on (see Newman & Newman 2002: 142).

2.4. Conjunction *Òun* as 3sg Pronominal

There is no gainsaying the fact that phi-feature agreement is the key to the interpretation of *òun* in constructions like (12) and (2). However, if it is true that *òun* is not just a concord agreement marker in such context, as we have shown, then, it logically follows that the intelligibility of such constructions does not lie in subject-concord agreement but on some other type of agreement relation between *òun* and its referent. We hold in this paper that the agreement relation involved in the construction is the argument-argument (i.e., antecedent-anaphor) type. In the

relationship, *òun*, as a pronominal, is the anaphor while the nominal constituent occurring to its left in the supposed coordination (aṣapẹ́fúnwèrèjó in (12)) is the antecedent. This implies that the supposed omission of the nominal constituent to which *òun* refers in (12) does not arise in anyway because there is no need for it. *Òun* there is a pronominal that refers anaphorically outside its GC to the nominal constituent *aṣapẹ́fúnwèrèjó* which immediately occurs to its left in line with the biding rule and binding principle B. In other words, the morphologically complex noun, *aṣapẹ́fúnwèrèjó*, is outside the GC of *òun* and it shares the same 3sg phi-features with it in that expression. That straightforwardly accounts for its being the antecedent of *òun* in (12).

One piece of evidence that supports this analysis is that (12) is often paraphrased in Yoruba as (18) where it is evidently clear that *àti* (not *òun*) is the actual conjunction in such construction.

(18) Aṣapẹ́fúnwèrèjó$_i$ [*òun*$_i$ *àti*   were]   lẹgbẹ́.
     Clapper-for-mad-dance 3sg   and   mad-fellow foc-mate
     'One-who-claps-for-the-mad-to-dance and the mad fellow
     are equals.'

It is, therefore, logical to conclude that expressions like (12) must have derived from their paraphrase counterparts like (16) through ellipsis of the recoverable nominal conjunction, *àti*, as shown in (16). This hypothesis aligns with the understanding of the concept of ellipsis in syntactic analysis as depicted in the following excerpt (Radford 1988: 82):

. . . it is possible in . . . (. . . languages) for some part of a sentence to undergo ellipsis (i.e., to be omitted) provided that the missing part of the sentence can be understood from the context . . . and is thus in some sense 'recoverable.'

Interestingly, such omission of the conjunction, *àti,* in Yoruba coordinated nominal constructions, is not exclusive to the immediate linear position after *òun* but possible in similar environment when other pronominals are coordinated in the language.[5] This is evident in (19b-f).

(19) a. *òun*   (*àti*)   Dàda   →   *òun*   Dàda
     3sg   and   Dada   3sg   Dada
     '3sg and Dada'   '3sg and Dada'

  b. èmi   (*àti*)   Akin   →   èmi   Akin
     1sg   and   Akin   1sg   Akin
     'Akin and I'   'Akin and I'

  c. ìwọ   (*àti*)   Délé   →   ìwọ   ọ-Délé
     2sg   and   Dele   2sg   Dele
     'you and Dele'   'you and Dele'

  d. àwa   (*àti*)   wọn   →   àwa   a-wọn
     1pl   and   3pl   1pl   3pl
     'we and they'   'we and they'

  e. ẹ̀yin   (*àti*)   Adé   →   ẹ̀yin   Adé
     2pl   and   Ade   2pl   Ade
     'you (pl) and Ade'   'you (pl) and Ade'

  f. àwọn   (*àti*)   Mojí   →   àwọn   ọn-Mojí
     3pl   and   Moji   3pl   Mojí
     'they and Moji'   'they and Mojí'

The inference that could be drawn from (19a-f) is that whenever

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[5] Note that this is not exclusive to SY. Similar syntactic manipulation can be observed in Ìlàjẹ̀ (example (26)), and Oǹdó (example (24c)).

a pronominal is coordinated with another nominal item (either a noun or another pronominal), such that the pronominal immediately precedes the conjunction, the conjunction can be dropped/omitted without any meaning loss in the resultant expression. This however is not the case if the first constituent in the coordination is a noun or any other nominal constituent. That explains the ill-formedness of (20b&d) as conjunction phrases.

(20) a. Akin *àti* Túndé
     'Akin and Tunde'
         ↓
  b. *Akin in-Túndé
     'Akin and Tunde'

  c. iyẹn   *àti*   Lágbájá
     that   and   Lagbájá
     'that fellow and lagbaja'
           ↓
  d. *ìyẹn ẹn-Lágbájá
     that   Lágbájá
     'that fellow and Lagbaja'

It is pertinent to mention here that (20b&d) would be regarded as well-formed if they are interpreted as appositive constructions where the referent of the first constituent is the same with that of the second. However, such interpretation evidently does not derive from (20a&c). Similarly, the outputs in (19b-f) are ambiguous as they too can be interpreted as appositive constructions. However such other interpretations, for obvious reasons, are not derived from the inputs in (19b-f).

If our observations on (18), (19), and (20) are anything to go by, it logically follows that those expressions like (2) and (12) where *òun* is often analysed as conjunction in Yoruba are elliptical

expressions where the nominal coordinator *àti* undergoes ellipsis, but is recoverable. Therefore, (2) must have derived from (21) where *àti* is put in parenthesis to show that its phonetic content there is optional in the syntax and that when it is phonetically null, (2a&b) is the result.

(21) a. Mo   rí   [Òjó$_i$ *òun$_i$*   (àti)   Dàda].[6]
        1sg   see   Ojo   3sg   and   Dada
        'I saw Ojo$_i$ him$_i$ and Dada.'

   b. [Adé$_i$ *òun$_i$*   (àti)   Délé] wá.
        Ade   3sg   and   Dele   come
   'Ade$_i$ he$_i$ and Dele came.'

The fact that the nominal conjunction in this context is not *òun*, and that the omitted conjunction can be understood in the syntax of such expression is evident in (17a-f) where *àti* is not phonetically present in the derived outputs but its coordination interpretation is understood and recoverable in the syntax. We therefore propose the schema in Figure 1 as the structural projection of SY nominal phrases where *òun* is often analysed as conjunction.

Figure 1 depicts the fact that *òun*, as a pronominal, is a functional D item that can not be bound by any constituent within its GC, i.e., ConjP, but which can be bound from outside it by ac-commanding nominal phrase which shares the same 3sg phi-features with it. It also predicts that the Conj *àti* can be recoverably omitted in such context thereby taking care of elliptical forms like those in (19a-f).

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[6] (21a&b) are well-formed paraphrases of (2a&b) (cf. examples (18) and (19)). See n. 4 for comment on possible ambiguity in the interpretation of this type of expressions and how to disambiguate them.

Figure 1. Projection of SY Coordinated Nominal Phrases
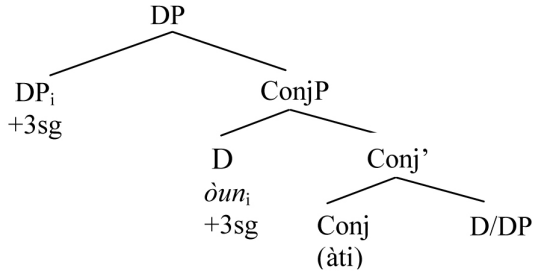
3. Dialectal Variations

Data from Ào (5a-c), a South-Eastern Yoruba dialect spoken in seven towns and villages spread across two local governments in Ondo State (Taiwo 2005: 25), repeated here as (22a, c, d) for ease of reference appear to cast very serious doubts on the claim advanced so far in this article.

(22) a. Tádé *òun* Ayọ̀ ó   zẹrun.
          Tayo and Ayo Infl eat
          'Tade and Ayo did not eat.'

     b. Òmi *òun* Ayọ̀ ó   zẹrun.
          1sg and Ayo Infl eat
          'Ayo and I ate.'

     c. Ùgwọ *òun* Olú ó   ya.
          2sg   and Olu Infl come
          'You and Olu came.'

d. Mo   rí   Inin   *òun*   Òun.
   1sg   see   2pl   and   3sg
   'I saw him and you.'

Òun, which is the only visible nominal conjunction in this dialect, does not have the phi-feature trappings that identify the assumed conjunction *òun* in SY as anaphorically referential to the first of the nominal constituents it purportedly coordinates. One interesting thing about the dialect is that the conjunction *òun* there can coordinate the pronominal *òun* along with any other nominal constituent (22d), and such construction does not require the first of the coordinated constituents to be third person singular before being convergent (22b-d).

It is however equally interesting to discover that this same type of conjunction *òun* is also employed (though with some little structural difference) in two other dialects of Yoruba namely, Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí (a Central Yoruba dialect spoken in Ekiti State) and Ọ̀ndó (a North-Eastern Yoruba dialect spoken in Ọ̀ndó town, Ilẹ̀ Olúji, and Ìdànrè in Ondo State).[7] This is evident in the relevant data from these dialects presented in (23) and (24).

Òmùò-Ararọmi:

(23) a. èmi   *òun*   rẹ̀
        1sg   and   3sg
        'I and s/he'

     b. àa   *òun*   Olú
        1pl   and   Olu
        'we and Olu'

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    c. ọ̀ọn   *òun*   riẹn
      3pl   and   2pl
      'you(pl) and them'

    d. òun   *pẹ̀lú*/**òun*   riẹn
      3sg   and   2pl
      'him/her and them'

Oǹdó:

(24) a. Èmi   *òun*   Akin   á   wá.
       1sg   and   Akin   will   come
       'I and Akin will come.' OR 'I, s/he, and Akin will come.'[8]

    b. Èmi   *òun*   ẹ̀   á   lọ.
      1sg   and   3sg   will   come
      'I and he/she will come.'

    c. Èmi   ẹ̀   á   lọ.
      1sg   3sg   will   come
      'I and he/she will come.'

    d. Ùwọ   *òun*   èmi   lọ   í.
      2sg   and   1sg   go   part
      'You and I went.' OR 'you, s/he, and I went.'

    e. Òun   *òun*   Akin   á   wá.
      3sg   and   Akin   will   come
      'S/he and Akin will come.'

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8 This is another indication that expressions like this can be ambiguous in Yoruba. However, as hinted in n. 4, such expressions can be disambiguated by the use of a brief pause, graphically marked by a comma, before and after *òun*.

The logical conclusion evident from these data in (22a-d), (23a-d), and (24a-e) is that Yoruba dialects like Ào, Òmùò-Árárọ̀ mí, and Òǹdó have another *òun* in their lexicons which functions as a nominal coordinator. However, the syntactic behaviour of that item clearly shows that it is different from the 3sg pronominal *òun* (which those dialects also have). Unlike the pronominal *òun*, this conjunction has no phi-feature properties with which it can establish any kind of agreement relation with any nominal item. It can even co-occur side by side with the 3sg pronominal in its coordination function in Ào (22d) and Òǹdó (24e). It should also be noted that while the conjunction *òun* in Òmùò-Árárọ̀mí can coordinate other pronominals with any other nominal constituent (23a-c), it cannot be used to coordinate the pronominal *òun* along with any other nominal constituent (23d). The conjunction *pẹ̀lú* has to be used for that purpose.

If these observations are true for the conjunction *òun* in Ào, Òmùò, and Òǹdó dialects, then the natural conclusion that logically follows is that the established structural fact of these dialects in respect of the conjunction *òun* cannot be generalised to SY and other Yoruba dialects that behave like it in this case. This is because there are fundamental syntactic differences between the so-called conjunction *òun* in SY and the conjunction *òun* employed in Ào, Òmùò, and Òǹdó. Unlike the conjunction *òun* in these dialects, the assumed conjunction *òun* in SY is constantly anaphorically bound in line with the binding rule and binding principle 'B' by the first of the nominal constituents it supposedly coordinates in the context where it is presumed to be a conjunction. This is a crucial fact which clearly shows that this SY *òun* is not a conjunction, but a nominal constituent, in that context. On the other hand, while the conjunction *òun* in Ào, Òmùò, and Òǹdó can coordinate the 3sg pronominal *òun* with any other nominal constituent (pronominals inclusive), its assumed counterpart in SY cannot be so used. That explains why coordinated nominal constructions of the type in (22b-d), (23a-d), and (24a, b, d, e) are

ill-formed in SY and Ìlàjẹ (25d). It would therefore be structurally misleading to equate the conjunction *òun* in Ào, Òmùò, and Oǹdó with its assumed counterpart in SY.

Related data from Ìlàjẹ, another South-Eastern Yoruba dialect spoken in the Niger Delta area of Ondo State, just like SY, equally indicate a complete departure from what obtains in Ào, Òmùò, and Oǹdó. In this other dialect, what appears like the conjunction *òun* behaves exactly the same way that the so-called conjunction *òun* does in SY. In other words, the first of its two purportedly coordinated constituents must possess the third person singular phi-features before such coordination can converge. This is evident in (25).

Ìlàjẹ:

(25) a. àghan$_k$ *àti/*   **òun*$_i$ bàbá
        3pl   and   3sg   father
        'they and father'

    b. èmi$_k$ *àti/*   **òun*$_i$ Olú
        1sg   and   3sg   Olu
        'Olu and I'

    c. Akin$_i$ *àti/*   *òun*$_i$ Rótìmí
        Akin   and   3sg   Rotimi
        'Akin and Rotimi'

    d. òun   *àti/*òun*   àghan
        3sg   and   3pl
        'he/she and they'

It is pertinent to point out here that native speakers of contemporary Ìlàjẹ hardly use *àti* in contexts like (25a-d). They usually elide the coordinator in (25a, b, d) but obligatorily use *òun* in (25c) if *àti*

is not used. Therefore, (25a, b, d) is more conveniently rendered as (26a, b, d) by native speakers of Ìlàjẹ dialect. This is reminiscent of the SY examples provided earlier in (19a-f).
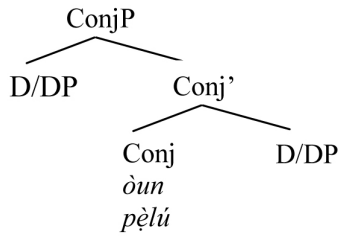
(26) a. àghan   bàbá
       3pl   father
       'father and them'

   b. èmi   Olú
      1sg   Olu
      'Olu and I'

   c. *Akin   Rótìmí
      Akin   Rotimi
      '*Akin and Rotimi'

   d. *òun*   àghan
      3sg   3pl
      'he/she and they'

(26c) is not a well-formed coordinated nominal phrase, not because *òun* is dropped, but, because of our earlier observation that it is only when a pronominal is the first constituent in such coordination that the conjunction *àti* can be dropped/omitted without any meaning loss in the resultant expression. That requirement is not met in (26c) (cf. 20b, 20d) and that straightforwardly accounts for its ill-formedness. Therefore, while the schema in Figure 1 equally takes care of dialects like Ìlàjẹ, it has to be amended, as in Figure 2, to capture the structural facts of such coordinated nominal expressions in dialects of the Ào, Òmùò-Aràrọ̀mí, and Oǹdó type.

   The lesson that could be drawn from the foregoing is that Yoruba dialects like Ào, Òmùò, and Oǹdó evidently have two homophonous *òun* in their lexicons, one of which is the 3sg

pronominal found in the pronoun system of all Yoruba dialects, SY inclusive. The other is a nominal conjunction which is conspicuously absent in the lexicon of SY and those of other related dialects, such as Ìlàjẹ. While dialects that strictly pattern like Ào do not use any other nominal conjunctions except *òun*, some liberal ones in that group like Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí still make use of *pẹ̀lú* along with *òun*.

Figure 2. Projection of Òun Coordinated Nominal Phrases in Ào/Oǹdó

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                    ConjP
                   /     \
            D/DP          Conj'
                         /      \
                      Conj       D/DP
                      òun
                      pẹ̀lú
```

4. Conclusions

   This paper has critically examined the dual categorical status accorded *òun* in Yoruba grammar, especially its assumed status as nominal conjunction. It presented structural evidence to show that the item in question does not in anyway perform the claimed conjunction function in the context where it is often assumed to do so in Standard Yoruba and other dialects that pattern like it in this respect, e.g., Ìlàjẹ. Given the fact that the assumed conjunction *òun* in SY and such dialects is constantly referentially bound by the first of the two nominal constituents it purportedly coordinates, the paper argued that the so-called conjunction *òun* in SY school grammar is one and the same 3sg pronominal found in the pronoun system of the language. The paper also adduced data from Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí and Oǹdó dialects to show that there are

other dialects in the language which behave like Ào in the use of the conjunction *òun*. It however demonstrated that these other dialects evidently employ two homophonous *òun*, one of which is a conjunction that is lexically and structurally different from the pronominal *òun*, which is the only type found in SY. It therefore concluded that the veracity of the facts about the conjunction *òun* in these other dialects (i.e., Ào, Òmùò-Arárọ̀mí, and Oǹdó) cannot be generalised to SY and other dialects that evidently lack it.

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