

# THE PRAGMATIC IMPORT OF ‘ORÍ’ IN YORÙBÁ CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

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*Summary:* Among the Yorùbá of Nigeria, of all the parts of the human body, *Orí* [English: *head*] features most frequently in linguistic thought and action, but although numerous researchers have considered its spiritual values, *orí*'s conversational worth has been greatly overlooked. While acknowledging the spiritual associations of this top part of the body, this paper uses fragments of naturally occurring speech-in-context – surreptitiously collected among several Yorùbá interlocutors – to generate a tentative typology for *Orí* and concludes that the invocation of the head, whether in reference to one's own or to that of another, has socio-pragmatic significance, and can serve various discourse functions, e.g., as a strategy for opening, commenting on, marking, and closing talk sequences. The discussion identifies perspectives – other than spiritual – from which this vital detail of the human frame could be examined, given its frequency in much Yorùbá conversational discourse.

*...When we study conversation, we are investigating the actions  
and activities through which social life is conducted*  
[Drew & Heritage 2006: 2]

## 1.0. Introduction

The frequency with which the Yorùbá refer to their *orí* (that is, *head* in English) in nearly all talk rooted in personal or societal expectations, divine guidance and intervention, and good and evil calls for some scholarly attention. To this end, it is possible to suggest a discussion that will expound the pragmatic and socio-cultural associations encoded in conversational invocations of this vital part of the human body. Thus, the investigation presented here is a description of *how* and *what* the Yorùbá mean when the head is mentioned in talk – given the cultural, philosophical, metaphysical, spiritual and physical significance of the head among the Yorùbá. From the outset, we would like to suggest that the word invocation will be understood both in its literal sense and in its spiritual connotation. Several Yorùbá scholars have been concerned with *orí*, but essentially from the spiritual or metaphysical perspective. The position of this paper is that such a consideration of the subject – detailed, though – robs the subject of much scholarly attention, as there is a lot more to *orí*, particularly when studied in the context of interactive talk.

The analysis contained in this paper is ethnomethodologically based, taking as its descriptive model the approach advanced by conversation analysts, particularly as it combines a concern with the contextual sensitivity of language use with a focus on talk as a vehicle for social action. Following such a framework, this paper examines the significance of *orí* in talk-in-context – in addition

to numerous scholars' characterisation of the subject in metaphysical terms. The data used was tape-recorded surreptitiously during chat and similar interaction among several native speakers of the language. It was collected over many days and contains speech fragments of no fewer than 200 subjects, including university students and their teachers, traders, and professionals in various fields. Regular patterns of usage were isolated and analysed in accordance with native-speaker expectations but with the contexts as guide for a good understanding of forms.

To present a balanced perspective, the paper gives a broad discussion of *ori* as conceived in Yorùbá thought; that is, as an omniscient and omnipotent spiritual/metaphysical entity. Such a view of the subject is presumably central to all other mentions of it in talk and texts whether these are literary, situated or desultory. Against this backdrop, it is very easy for the analyst to distinguish between the cultural and speaker meanings of *ori* in context.

The second-language speaker/learner of Yorùbá needs to be conscious of the details discussed here what with the innuendos that may be glossed during the learning process. For instance, it is to the advantage of the learner to know that *ori* does not only refer to the physical, external structure borne by the neck but also to a metaphysical, inner, and unseen force that can be invoked for various socio-pragmatic purposes.

To achieve its objective, the paper analyses real fragments of naturally occurring speech among real culturally attentive speakers of Yorùbá.

## **2.0. The Yorùbá of Western Nigeria**

As Gordon [Gordon 2005] asserts, "there are 18.8 million first-language speakers of Yorùbá in Nigeria. It is also spoken in Benin, Togo, United Kingdom, and the U.S. The total number of native speakers of Yorùbá is estimated at 19.3 million. In addition, there are 2 million second-language speakers of the language." As the accounts in the *Art and Oracle: A Scholarly Resource on African Art and Rituals of Divination* indicate, the origins of the Yorùbá may be traced to the ninth century A.D. From the beginning, Yorùbá culture has been characterized by an urban lifestyle and a political system of sacred rulers. By the twelfth to the fifteenth century, the political/cultural position of the Yorùbá city of Ile-Ife had developed to a point where an artistry of extraordinary technical skill and imagination created the famous Ife bronze and terracotta sculptures, and there were other artistic centres at Esie in the northeast and Owo in the southeast. By the seventeenth century, Oyo, a city in the north-central Yorùbá region, was emerging as a significant political power that over the next century would establish itself as the centre of an empire.

Concerning their spread, Morton's [Morton 2000] account of the Yorùbá people indicates that they constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Africa – 25 million people whose cultural history extends across a large area of West Africa – and that "today, it is not easy to define the area of Yorùbá cultural influence." However, he affirms that on account of common language, traditions, origins of the traditional ruling class, political institutions and organizational patterns, religion, morals and the geographical contiguity of the lands occupied by the different Yorùbá groups, a measure of agreement may be presumed about the definition and boundaries of the core. At other parts of his work on the

Yorùbá, Morton [ibid.] asserts that the historical origins of the Yorùbá people and their culture cannot be traced precisely although one Yorùbá oral tradition claims that the Yorùbá have inhabited their homeland since the creation of the world. Some scholars, however, have concluded that, while it was possible that Yorùbá had contact with Mecca or other parts of Arabia before they migrated, their real place of origin was either Egypt or Nubia. In any case, as Morton concludes, all Yorùbá traditions acknowledge *Oduduwa* as the spiritual leader and founding father.

Yorùbá is spoken as a first language in virtually the whole area of the old Western Nigeria, particularly in such states as Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, and Ekiti. It is also spoken as a first language in Kwara and as a second language by many Itsekiris [Ajila 2004]. As Akinkugbe [Akinkugbe 1978] points out, the exact number of Yorùbá dialects is not known but the most well known and documented is the variety referred to as Standard Yorùbá, used as a lingua franca among speakers of all the other varieties, which include varieties known as Oyo, Ijesa, Ondo, Ekiti, Owo, Ikale, Ijebu, Egba, and Akoko.

The Yorùbá are a highly religious people, confirming Abimbola's [Abimbola 1976: 151] observation that these people have a strong belief in the existence of supernatural powers. This is because these supernatural powers are believed to affect the everyday life of man – the political, social, moral, legal, physical, economic, psychic, etc. – for good or for ill. Pemberton's [Pemberton 1977] research confirms that the Yorùbá conceptualize the universe in terms of two halves of a closed calabash. These represent the realm of living beings (*ayé*), comprising all humans, animals, and plants; and the realm of spiritual powers (*orun*), which includes the 401 deities (*òrìsà*) and the ancestors (*ará orun*), literally 'the living dead'. To Balogun [Balogun 1993: 74], in traditional Yorùbá philosophy, an individual and his/her destiny are two inseparable factors. The Yorùbá believe in the concept of *orí* (head) as a vital principle of human destiny. They maintain that whatever happens to a person has been pre-ordained or pre-determined. This belief carries a concept of a Supreme Being or God.

The individual has his own place in the Yorùbá community. According to Adewoye [Adewoye 2006], the Yoruba perception of the individual as a spiritual being underscores the ground for believing that the individual was accorded recognition and rights in the society. As he advises,

For a proper understanding of the position of the individual in the traditional Yoruba society, one must appreciate the environment in which he functioned. In that society, there was a moral, spiritual order, and there was a legal order. The socio-cultural atmosphere was dominated by a belief in the existence of supernatural powers, and "a social structure controlled by a hierarchy of authorities." To the Yoruba, *ìwà*, good character, is of supreme importance, and everyone is enjoined to cultivate it. It is the very stuff which makes life a joy because it is pleasing to God, providing sufficient armour against any untoward happening in life. Good character also makes for good social relations, and hence it is laid upon every member of the community to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole body [ibid.: 2].

Adewoye's view on *Iwa* seems to resound, so to speak, in Idowu's [Idowu 2005: 188] observation that:

The concept of *Iwa* is a standard or aspiration in-built into the framework of societal institutions. In other words, *Iwa* must be reflected in the laws of the society... in Yorùbá land, the basic standard for which every attempt at and enterprise of communal and collective is to be evaluated and judged consist in the approximation and reflection of the concept of *Iwa*. This is true in marriage, dressing, in communal service, kingship matters and legislation, religious worship and family affairs.

Gbadegesin [Gbadegesin 1997] states that a discussion of Yorùbá oral tradition requires an understanding of the history and identity of the Yorùbá. To him "to identify an oral tradition as Yorùbá, we need to know who the Yorùbá are" – although he laments that our knowledge of Yorùbá history is also derived from oral tradition. He is quick to add, however, that we get a sense of Yorùbá history, culture and identity from its historical and mythical legends, folktales and verbal arts.

To sum up, the Yorùbá are a people of rather unique peculiarities, given their history, names, religions, politics, sociology, lifestyle, music, art, trade and numerous other features by which peoples and societies are identified, labeled or characterised. In fact, without living among the Yorùbá, no one can be said to have authoritative knowledge about their culture, tradition, philosophy and thought.

### **3.0. *Ori* in Yorùbá thought**

Many scholars have devoted a lot of research time and space to the discussion of the prime position of *Ori* (i.e., the head) as regards the determination of virtually all man's actions and thoughts. In view of the Yorùbá philosophical and spiritual belief that in everyone's life, *ori* affirms, designs, and charts the course of two interchangeable concepts – *kádàrà* (English: *destiny*) and *ipin* (English: *fate*) – it would not be amiss to say that it *is* a prime mover in Yorùbá cosmogony. As will be seen in this section, there are many opinions about the essential and existential nature of *ori*, a situation aptly presented by Balogun [Balogun 2007]:

The debate on the philosophical nature of the beliefs in *Ori* and human destiny in traditional Yoruba thought has for some time now, been controversial. Several metaphysical interpretations have been given by various African philosophers on the nature and the meaning of *ori* and human destiny in traditional Yoruba thought. Some of these interpretations have been in tune with fatalism, predestinationism, and hard determinism.

Such considerations of *ori* are somehow unacceptable to Balogun; thus, he sets out to demonstrate that "the concepts of *Ori* and human destiny in traditional Yoruba thought fit very well into the framework of soft-determinism." To him, such a metaphysical interpretation can help to account for "the inconsis-

tencies and antimonies associated with the earlier metaphysical interpretations of the Yoruba concept of *Ori*; providing a philosophical justification for punishment and moral responsibility in traditional and contemporary Yoruba society” [ibid.].

But the human person, according to the Yorùbá, is not made up of only his *orí*; rather, as Hallen and Sodipo [Hallen & Sodipo 1986: 105] note, a person is made up of three important elements: *ara* (body), *ẹmí* (life giving element), and *orí* (spiritual head, which is thought to be responsible for human destiny). A fourth element, *ese* (English: *leg*), is introduced by Kola Abimbola [Abimbola 2006: 80] to illustrate “the principle of individual effort, strife or struggle before the potentialities encapsulated in one’s *orí* can be actualized.” Of these four, the third is of the utmost importance to this paper. According to Idowu [Idowu 1962: 70], for the Yoruba, *orí* is believed to be not only the bearer of destiny but also to be the essence of human personality which rules, control and guides the life and activities of the person.

The Yorùbá imbue numerous aspects of their cultural life with differing degrees of sacredness, not the least the myths by which phases of living are explained. One such myth is Ayanmo which, according to Gbadegehin [Gbadegehin 1997]:

indicates belief in predestination. The belief in predestination is expressed in the concept of *orí*, and it seems to suggest that the Yoruba have some anxiety about human helplessness in certain situations. However, it also expresses the people’s conviction that human existence has meaning; that human beings are not on a purposeless mission in this world; that they have a mission to fulfill, and a message to deliver – which is the meaning of their existence – and that this mission has been fully endorsed by the creator.

But then, humans do not just possess *orí*; there are, according to the Yorùbá, supernatural forces behind the acquisition of *orí*. In line with the creation myth – as pointed out by Morakinyo [Morakinyo 1983] – before coming into the world, the human-to-be is obliged to go and choose an *orí* from a large number stored in Àjàlá’s warehouse. As a potter, Àjàlá’s duty is essentially to mould human heads and the process of human creation is incomplete without his input. It is believed that Orisanla (the Arch-divinity) is the maker of *ara* (body), the lifeless form that is passed on to Olodumare (Supreme Deity) for the impartation of *ẹmí* (life giving entity), and that Àjàlá is responsible for the creation and fitting of *orí*. However, as indicated in the creation myth, although a skilled potter, Àjàlá is a drunkard, a debtor and an irresponsible and careless workman. Through sheer negligence, he moulds heads of diverse traits and qualities, at times fortunate *orí* (Yorùbá: *orí rere*), at other times, unfortunate *orí* (Yorùbá: *orí burúkú*).

One of the most intriguing facts about creation is the process or procedure by which humans choose their *orí*. In accounts provided by Bolaji Idowu [Idowu 1962: 173-174] and Morakinyo [Morakinyo 1983: 72], the acquisition of one’s *orí* is done by kneeling before Olodumare (Supreme Deity), who confers

on humans their *àyànmọ*, a kind of blueprint of their life and living. As pointed out by Idowu [Idowu 1962: 173]:

the choice of one's destiny could be one of these three ways: A person may kneel down and choose his destiny, this is called *Àkúnleyàn* (that which is chosen while kneeling). He may kneel down and receive his destiny – that is called *Àkúnlegbà* (that which is received kneeling). Or he may have his destiny affixed on him – for this, [the] Yoruba give the name *Àyànmọ* (that which is affixed to one).

As these accounts (and others written by other Yorùbá scholars, e.g. Mbiti [Mbiti 1992], Awolalu [Awolalu 1979], Awolalu and Dopamu [Awolalu & Dopamu 2005]) clearly show, *orí* is the ultimate property of a person's being, a fact stressed at length by Dopamu [Dopamu 2006]:

the Yoruba think of *orí* as the soul, human's double, a semi-split entity or a person's guardian angel. A fortunate person is called *Olorí-ire* (One who possesses good *orí*) while one who is unfortunate is described as *Olorí-buruku* (One who possesses a bad *orí*). The Yoruba pray for a person going on a journey or undertaking an enterprise: *Ki orí ki o sin e lo o* (May *orí* go with you; or May *orí* prosper you). A newly married woman is instructed to take *orí* along, and not just beauty because beauty is ephemeral, but it is *orí* that abides with one in the husband's house. Parents also pray for their children in the belief that their *orí* will affect them positively. An example is: *Orí mi a sin o lo* (May my *orí* go with you). In other words, "May my *orí* guide you and bless you." If a person miraculously escapes from harm, he will say: *Orí mi yo mi* (My *orí* has saved me). When something has been accomplished the Yoruba say: *Orí mi ba mi se*. (My head has enabled me to do it). Here, the person is referring to the fact that it is the person's double that has helped him. The illustration is not exhaustive...

Olugbile's [Olugbile 1997: 100] observation confirms the facts contained in Dopamu's comments above. As revealed in Olugbile's findings,

the only way the Yorùbá explain the success or failure, affluence or poverty, fortune or misfortune of a particular individual is to say that he has made the choice [of *orí*] in heaven. It is a personal and most important deity. It is also called *Àyànmọ* (Choice); *Ìpín* (Predestined share); *Kádàrà* (Divine share of a man) or *Ìpọnrí* (Inner head).

As said earlier, numerous scholars have written on *orí*, and not one of them has any divergent thing to say about the exclusive place of this part of the Yorùbá person. The entirety of these views may be as offered by Ademuleya [Ademuleya 2007: 216]:

*Orí* in Yorùbá belief is the man's personality soul, his guardian angel and his personal deity, which is elevated to the level of a divinity, and thus wor-

shipped by a man for things to be well with him. For a man's designated role in life – his destiny – to be well fulfilled, it becomes necessary for him to be on good terms with his *ori*. This demands its being kept in good condition, well respected, and propitiated from time to time... For the Yorùbá *ori* is the most important part of man.

So, in sum, we may say that *Ori's* know-how knows no bounds. To the Yorùbá, one's *Ori* is omnipotent, although such a 'fact' does not prevent any member of the community to allude to another's *ori's* breakdown or general uselessness should that other member behave or talk in a manner warranting negative remarks about his or her *ori*. Depending on situational factors, one's *ori* may be regarded as a warrior or as one's foe (*Ori e mba e ja ~ Your head is warring against you.*); a counsellor (*O je ba ori re s'oro ~ You'd better consult your head*); as one's adversary (*Ori omo yen l'alatako e ~ That child's head was his antagonist*); one's guardian angel (*Ori mi, ma pada l'ehin mi ~ My head, do not forsake me*), etc. So versatile is one's *ori* that the Yorùbá attach to it certain pre-eminence that transcends the individual's personal involvement even in his own affairs. Life and living is simply viewed as being vectored by *ori* and events are nearly always interpreted in terms of one's – and, sometimes, another person's – *ori's* intervention: *ori iya mi l'o ba mi se; mo ti ku tan ~ But for the intervention of my mother's head, I was as good as dead.*

As seen in all the cited works above, a prominent feature of *ori* is its spiritual and/or metaphysical value and the power that *ori* exerts on human (especially, personal) affairs. However, given the frequency of mention of this vital force during conversational interaction among the Yorùbá, it is necessary to see what discourse values may be associated with *ori* – whether in reference to one's own or to others' during talk. We turn attention to this examination presently, but first, we need to look at one or two theoretical issues.

#### 4.0. Some theoretical considerations

The analysis of talk-in-context becomes a lot more convincing and practicable if a methodology specifically designed for the meaning of utterances in context is adopted. An example of such an approach is Conversation Analysis, CA. As Hammersley [Hammersley 2003: 751] notes:

There are many different approaches to the study of discourse. Here I want to focus on just two: ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA) and Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis (DA). In my view, both of these make important contributions towards understanding human social life. CA, in particular, represents one of the few examples in the social sciences of a genuinely cumulative empirical research programme.

Both DA and CA disregard *a priori* judgments about linguistic data, a fact buttressed by Hammersley's two methodological standpoints which are found relevant to this paper: (i) a refusal to attribute to particular categories of actor distinctive, substantive psychosocial features – ones that are relatively stable across time and/or social context – as a basis for explaining their behaviour; and

(ii) a refusal to treat what the people studied say about the social world as a source of information about it. Of the two, the latter is more relevant to this work. Sharing Hammersley's conviction, this paper believes that such a perspective of talk underscores the researcher's "unwillingness to view actors as controlled" or even as guided in their behaviour ... and to regard actors as *employing* cultural resources that are *publicly available*, and doing so in *contextually variable* ways. As a result, what they do is not seen as relying on anything specific about *them*: what they do is what any 'member' could or would do." In other words, "everyday accounts of language in use must be included within the analytic focus, treated as topic not resource. They must be examined for the ways they are *constructed*, and the social phenomena they portray thereby *constituted*; and for what this can tell us about the cultural resources available to members and/or about the practices in which members participate" [Hammersley 2003: 752].

Hammersley's perspectives may not go down well with many discourse and conversation analysts. For example, there are scholars [e.g., Moerman 1988] who argue for 'culturally-contexted conversation analysis,' an approach which draws on conventional ethnographic work. In accordance with this view, the description of *ori* in this paper rests on contextualized data that contains instances of occurrence of *ori*, subjected to both ethnographic and conversation-analytic investigation. In any case, scholars like Hammersley and Moerman would be agreed on the fact that the analysis of language by whatever theory or methodology necessarily evokes attention to the context in which the interaction takes place. As Abrams and Hogg [Abrams & Hogg 1990: 219] put it, "the analysis of text is of only limited value unless it is placed in the context of what people are doing with it." This cannot simply be inferred from the text itself; it requires systematic observation and analysis of social behaviour. There is a little variation in the consideration of context when we consider Schegloff's [Schegloff 1992: 197] view that "it seems at least as appropriate, and perhaps more so, to speak of talk or other conduct invoking its contexts than it is to speak of context impacting on talk or other conduct." As Tracy [Tracy 1998] observes, these scholars position context differently. To her, Abrams and Hogg think that context is the ground that makes the text understandable; for Schegloff, however, the relationship is reversed: talk is where analysts seek an identification of context. In the view of this paper, context is indispensable to the understanding of talk.

Two other notions that make conversation analysis relevant to the analysis of much language use – and, especially this paper – are sequence structure and turn-taking. From the perspective of CA, sequence structure provides a natural environment for all interactions [Schegloff 1995]. Crucial to an understanding of this notion is the observation that participants rely on the placement of an utterance as a resource for understanding of what is going on in the talk. Talk and action are inextricably tied to the structure of their occurrence [Schegloff 1997, 1993, 1986]. The notion of turns, on the other hand, states that at least two turns are central to an understanding of the connection between talk and action, namely, current and next turns. A current turn will project a range of next or second actions. This feature of mundane conversation is referred to as



the ‘sequential implicativeness’ [Schegloff & Sacks 1973] of a turn-at-talk whereby a next turn is heard as some sort of analysis, appreciation, understanding, or the like, of the just prior turn at talk.

However, conversation analysis alone cannot adequately account for the forms studied, especially considering the relevance of the cultural context of communication. To this end, it is worthwhile to see what an approach like the Communicational Ethnography can add to the explanation of such forms. According to Cameron [Cameron 2001], ethnography of communication can be thought of as the application of ethnographic methods to the communication pattern of a group. Also, Littlejohn and Foss [Littlejohn & Foss 2005: 312] recall that “Dell Hymes suggests that cultures communicate in different ways, but all forms of communication require a shared code, communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a setting, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message.” When these views are applied to studies like the present one, we see that ethnography can be used as a means by which we understand interactions among members of various cultures: being able to discern which communication acts and/or codes are important to different groups, what types of meanings groups apply to different communication events, and how group members learn these codes. All of these points provide insight into particular communities, particularly the Yorùbá speech community as in the present case. To say the least, the ethnography of communication is a method of discourse analysis in linguistics, which draws on the anthropological field of ethnography. It takes both language and culture to be constitutive as well as constructive.

Perhaps one should mention that a study of a people’s perception of life and their attribution of life’s events to the workings of a part of the body (such as *orí* among the Yorùbá in the present paper) could be said to mirror what Nofsinger [Nofsinger 1991: 143] calls the ‘ontological blueprint’, a term he uses to summarize Heidegger’s existential analysis of being human. As Nofsinger paraphrases,

To be human is to understand and interpret: to have an understanding...of our own being, and of the world we are in. We encounter entities with a kind of concern that grasps them and puts them to use, not with a bare perceptual cognition. To understand an entity...is to grasp it in practical activity: to project it into and onto the world that is the situation or context...

The application of views like these to the study of *orí* points up interesting facts about Yorùbá conversational discourse. As in other cultures, talk among the Yorùbá is grounded in certain socially recognized formats, e.g., the communicative context. Again, to apply some insight from Nofsinger:

To understand an entity like an utterance is to be aware of its point, by grasping the utterance and projecting it. The way the utterance is projected depends on (1) the ongoing conversation of which it is a part, (2) the context: the here-&-now, and (3) familiarity with the public conventions of language.

Thus, to understand an 'entity' like *orí* as found in Yorùbá cultural discourse, it is important to factor in the three structural details suggested above. One immediate reason for this is that the Yorùbá do not use *orí* in entirely the same way as the English word *head* is conceived of by [the native] speakers of English. In fact, apart from its conceptual meaning of *head*, *orí* has no direct translation in English. Thus, any understanding of the 'phenomenon' beyond the physical and literal meaning would be achieved only through recourse to the cultural perspective – the viewpoint of the present description. In line with the tenets of conversation analysis, the researcher's goal is to understand and articulate the way that participants at talk understand their interaction; thus, without instituting cultural grounding, a discussion of *orí* (not merely as English *head* but as the prime mover in the consciousness of a people) is bound to run at cross-purposes with the Yorùbá construction of sociocultural reality.

### 5.0. *Orí* as conversational resource

There exist numerous structural functions performed by *orí*, functions that establish *orí* as a unique resource in linguistic interaction among the Yorùbá. In the following two sub-sections, the paper looks at the structural uses of *orí* when invoked by participants at talk, especially in discourse opening and closing, and as a discourse marker.

### 5.1. *Orí* as discourse opening/closing device

Among the Yorùbá, it is natural to ground one's contribution to a conversation with an appeal to *orí*, especially when the 'invoker' seeks the listener's attention, support or understanding. This strategy is all the more useful even in conversation involving two or more unfamiliar persons. To say the least, talk anchored on *orí* is readily highly regarded by one's listeners – and, sometimes, by eavesdroppers. This is due to the much-repeated cultural acknowledgement of *orí* as a prime spiritual force. Usually, such a first-speaker is not interrupted and, by reason of the weight of [the content] of the talk, his or her listeners would generally concur with him or her and help co-construct the discourse. As a matter of fact, no one invoking *orí* in an opening turn does so frivolously as such a turn usually contains a solemn observation on existence.

#### Fragment A

- |               |      |  |
|---------------|------|--|
| Alagba Alabi: | 1.   | Gbogbo nkan l'aye yi                             |
|               | → 2. | owo <i>orí</i> lo wa.                            |
| Alagba Audu:  | 3.   | Ko sí'ro n'be.                                   |
| Alagba Alabi: | 4.   | E wo arakunrin t'o wa moto nla koja lo laipe yi. |
|               | 5.   | O ti sare di chairman local government.          |
|               | 6.   | Bee ke, iwoyi odun meta sehin                    |
|               | 7.   | igbale ati oogun eku l'o nta jeun.               |
| Alagba Audu:  | 8.   | O se'so ni?                                      |
| Alagba Alabi: | 9.   | Ni mo fi so pe gbogbo nkan wa l'owo <i>orí</i> . |

10. E ranti election odun to koja?
11. O tan o.
12. Ore e kan to wa ni AC lo ba s'eto pe ko wa ri chairman party,
13. a fi bi won se ni ko wa supply igbale fun gbogbo campaign states marun.
14. Ka to mo nkan t'o sele, o ti fee ma pe landlord e ran ni'se.
- Alagba Audu: → 15. *Ori* ko gbe gbogbo wa ko're.
- Iya Aafin Ojo: 16. Amin, o Baba l'oke.

*Gloss:*

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Mr. Alabi: | 1. Everything in life  |
|            | 2. <i>ori</i> decides it.  |
| Mr. Audu:  | 3. Absolutely.   |
| Mr. Alabi: | 4. Look at the gentleman that just drove past in that expensive car.                           |
|            | 5. He's now the chairman of a local government area.   |
|            | 6. Just about three years ago  |
|            | 7. he sold brooms and rodenticides for a living.   |
| Mr. Audu:  | 8. Did he do any dark ritual?  |
| Mr. Alabi: | 9. My very reason for saying all things rest on <i>ori</i> .                                   |
|            | 10. Remember last year's election?   |
|            | 11. That's all.  |
|            | 12. A friend of his in the AC party invited him to see the party chairman,                     |
|            | 13. and in no time, he'd been asked to supply brooms for the party's campaigns in five states. |
|            | 14. In no time at all, even his landlord had started to curry favour with him.                 |
| Mr. Audu:  | 15. May <i>Ori</i> bless us all.   |
| Mrs. Ojo:  | 16. Amen, Father in heaven.  |

Background to Fragment N:

(1) Messrs Alabi and Audu were waiting to collect their cheques at a state's Pensions Scheme office. At such times, talk is usually phatic because of the gruelling protocol associated with pensioners' names, etc. (2) The Action Congress Party – AC – had the broom as its symbol, signifying their intention of a 'clean sweep' and everyone attending the party's campaign rallies was expected to hold a broom as a mark of solidarity. (3) If anyone was given the contract for brooms in about five states, a simple arithmetic of profit per broom would show that that single assignment could make the supplier a millionaire.

As pointed earlier, the invocation of *ori* as an opening device ensures that the speaker will have the floor until he is through with the reason for his invocation – at least, to underscore the cultural importance of *ori*. Therefore, it is usually not expected that the speaker would be interrupted, but as seen in Mr. Audu's contribution, anyone 'interrupting' would only be injecting into the current turn an encouraging or concurring expression, e.g. *Ko si'ro nbe* (English, literally: *There's no lie in that*), regarded in discourse analysis as back-channelling. Perhaps it ought also to have been pointed out that it is communicatively expected that any talk anchored on the invocation of *ori* be proof-positive of spiritual or metaphysical involvement. Thus, to the Yorùbá, a member that *Just about three years ago... sold brooms and rodenticides for a living* (A: 6-7) but has become *now the chairman of a local government area* (A: 5), driving an *expensive car* (A: 4), is a good illustration of Ori's intervention in, or control of, human affairs.

Also, because of the general cultural acknowledgement of Ori's spiritual power, members not involved in an exchange, but who are within the auditory range of the talk – e.g. [eavesdropper] Mrs. Ojo – can enter at the appropriate transition relevance place: A: 16 (*Amen, Father in heaven*). The pragmatic value of Mrs. Ojo's 'entry' into the conversation is two-fold, at least: first, it confirms that she acknowledges Ori's involvement in human affairs; second, it points up a curious feature of conversation conducted in one's tongue: even when one is on the fringe of the discourse, inasmuch as one can understand the contents of the exchange, one is *culturally* invited.

As a closing strategy, the invocation of *Ori* need not be the prerogative of the initiator of the exchange but may take its function in this regard from an interlocutor's acknowledgement of the initiator's opening premise. Furthermore, while the initiator may need to invoke *Ori* to ground [his] upcoming talk, any interactant in the discourse is culturally empowered to sum things up with a similar invocation – although not before certain conversational expectations have been satisfied. For instance, such summing-up can only come up at a point when there is sufficient fulfillment of discourse goal, e.g., at the point when Ori's involvement in human affairs has been suitably justified (A: 14). After such a point in the conversation (e.g., at A: 15), any other member may select himself or herself and buttress (or refute) the initial assumption of the conversation or apply the general details to their own life or situation.

However, as with other forms of talk, more than one interlocutor can, by adopting Sacks' 'stepwise transition' strategy, bring *ori* into the closing segment of current talk, as in this fragment of a news broadcast, where the initial premise might not have contained any invocation of *ori*:

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Onirohin: | 125. ...   |
|           | 126. L'oro kan, won yo oju re mejeeji ki won to paa. |
| Alhaji:   | 127. Ah-a, omo araye!                                |
| Baba:     | 128. Abi e r'aju aye l'ode bayi?                     |
| Alhaji:   | → 129. Ki <i>ori</i> wa sa ma fi wa si'le.           |
| Baba:     | 130. Amin e po.                                      |

Gloss:

Newscaster:	125.	...
	126.	In short, his two eyes were gouged before he was murdered.
Alhaji:	127.	What! Humans!
Baba:	128.	Such is life.
Alhaji:	129.	May <i>our head</i> not desert us.
Baba:	130.	Amen and Amen.

### 5.2. *Orí* as both discourse marker and expletive

Interlocutors discount others' contribution to talk by many means. Among the Yorùbá, a participant at talk may write off any segment of ongoing discourse by the use of certain culturally attested markers of disdain, e.g., the negative mention of (somebody's) *orí* in response to a segment of the discourse. There are, however, numerous expressions that can be used to fulfill this purpose among the Yorùbá, but we will examine such use of *orí* as a discourse marker. According to Redeker [Redeker 1990], discourse markers are linguistic expressions used to signal the relation of an utterance to its immediate context, with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context.

Structurally, discourse markers can be single lexical items or phrases, with the sole function of marking boundaries in discourse. In addition, they do not belong to the syntactic or semantic structure of an utterance. Studies on the subject [e.g., Stenstrom 1994; Lenk 1998; Schiffrin 1987] describe discourse markers as having functions in different levels of analysis: topic changes, reformulations, discourse planning, stressing, hedging or backchannelling – functions that can be classified into three broad groups: a) relationships among (parts of) utterances; b) relationships between the speaker and the message, and c) relationships between speaker and hearer. Indeed, as Stenstrom [Stenstrom 1994: 17] remarks, a conversation is “much less lively and less ‘personal’ without [discourse markers] signalling receipt of information, agreement and involvement.” Lenk [Lenk 1998: 167], however, thinks that discourse markers “actually highlight the fact that something is now being said that might not have been expected in this context but that is relevant nevertheless.”

While common discourse markers used in the English language include *you know*, *actually*, *basically*, *like*, *I mean* and *OK*, there are so many words and phrases (e.g., those containing negative mentions of *orí*) that the Yorùbá skillfully employ to express the functions identified above with discourse markers. As observed in the English language, Yorùbá discourse markers serve to indicate the speaker's attitude or orientation toward the discourse. For instance, a speaker may introduce a discourse marker to indicate a contradictory stance toward what the other has stated.

*Expletive*, on the other hand, is a term in linguistics for a meaningless word filling a syntactic vacancy (examples of which are called “syntactic expletives”). Outside linguistics, the word is much more commonly used to refer to

“bad language”. Some linguists use it to refer to meaningless, “filler” use of “bad language” (technically, “expletive attributives”), distinguishing this from meaningful use. Syntactic expletives are words that perform a syntactic role but contribute nothing to meaning. Expletive subjects are part of the grammar of many non-pro-drop languages such as English, whose clauses normally require overt provision of subject even when the subject can be pragmatically inferred, as in: “It is important that you work hard for the exam.”

When used as a discourse marker or as an expletive during talk, the mention of *ori* readily displays to one’s interlocutor (or other participants in a conversation) one’s attitude either to the whole conversation or to a segment of it. This function derives directly from *ori*’s ontological value among the Yorubá although not all such comments have spiritual interpretation. Consider the fragment below:

### Fragment B

- Dolapo: 57. Se o ti gbo nkan ti won so pe governor state yin so?  
Bisola: 58. Mo ngbo.  
Dolapo: 59. O so pe gbogbo omoge ti won ba ti 25 and  
above nlati marry larin odun meji si’ sinyi.  
Bisola: → 60. *Ori e.*  
61. Oo ri bi oko se nseleya ni titi.

Gloss:

- Dolapo: 57. Have you heard what your state governor said?  
Bisola: 58. Tell me.  
Dolapo: 59. He said ladies who are twenty-five years old or  
more should get married within the next two years.  
Bisola: 60. *His head.*  
61. Why, there are husbands everywhere!

### Fragment C

- Ola: 8. Bábá mi, mo fẹ bá àwọn ọrẹ mi tí wọn wà nínú  
mọ̀tò n’íta yen lo si party l’ale yi.  
Baba: 9. L’oru yi?  
10. Ki l’aago so?  
Ola: 11. Aago mewa.  
Baba: → 12. *Ori ẹ ò tii so nkan t’oun fe gba fun e.*

Gloss:

- Ola: 8. Dad, I’d like to go to a party this evening with  
those friends of mine in the car outside.  
Baba: 9. This night?

- Ola:                           10. What time is it?  
                                   11. Ten o'clock.  
 Baba:                        → 12. Your head is yet to tell you what it requires of  
   you.

If taken literally, the idiomatic expression *Ori e o tii so nkan t'oun fe gba fun e* (C: 12) would be understood to mean that *Ori* (that is, the addressee's head-as-deity) needs appeasement so that the person would have sound judgement. However, although the use of *ori* in this kind of expression presupposes a deity, the expression is mostly used by the Yorùbá to indicate negative disposition to the crux of ongoing talk which, in Fragment C is "Ola's intention to go to a party at 10 p.m." In other words, whereas the mention of *ori* in Fragment C is presumably spiritual, its conversational import is simply that of indicating a father's disapproval of his daughter's objective.

In Fragment B, as well, *Ori e* (English, literally: *his head*) – (utterance 60) – is totally conceptually irrelevant but conversationally functional. In other words, even though the addressee understands the conceptual meaning of the expression, that interpretation cannot be assigned to the present exchange. Therefore, like many discourse markers, *Ori e* is used to indicate negative disposition to the topic at hand: "what the governor said." By virtue of its semantic vacuity, however, *ori e* may also be said to fulfill the function of expletive expressions – a possibility with many such phrases with similar discourse functions. For 'stylistic' purposes, *ori e* may be replaced by culturally relevant, pragmatically contrived correlates such as *Boya ori e kun*  $\approx$  *Maybe he needs a haircut*; *Ori e o da l'orun e*  $\approx$  (English: literally) *His head is unfit for his neck*; *Ori e l'o nse*  $\approx$  *His head is at war with him*, etc. Any of these expressions may be used to discount talk – but without necessarily calling up their spiritual value.

## 6.0. *Ori*: Tokens of invocation

A superficial consideration of the accounts of *ori* in Section 3.0 above might suggest that the Yorùbá consider the subject from a purely spiritual/metaphysical viewpoint. On the contrary, given the numerous contextual details that characterise each mention of *ori* in interpersonal conversation, we see that there are at least four other perspectives from which *ori* can be considered. The discourse fragments below are tokens of *ori* not only as a spiritual entity but also as a source of conversational seasoning among the Yorùbá.

### 6.1. *Ori*: Token of spiritual existence

As proof of the person's spiritual existence and destiny, *ori* is considered omnipotent; thus, the Yorùbá person invokes it for innumerable reasons, e.g., for protection, prosperity, safety, and vengeance. The following are examples of situations that illustrate this plane of invocation of *ori*.

**Fragment D**

- Iyabo:           1. Mo gbo pe moto gba omo yin kan lana.  
                    2. Iro abi ooto?  
Bunmi:           3. Emi ko;  
                    → 4. *orí* mi o gba'bi.  
                    5. Alaafia l'awon omo temi wa.

*Gloss:*

- Iyabo:           1. I'm told one of your children was knocked down  
                    by a vehicle yesterday.  
                    2. Is that so?  
Bunmi:           3. Not me;  
                    → 4. my head rejects calamity.  
                    5. My children are all safe.

Among the Yorùbá, the expression *orí mi ò gba'bi* (English: *my head rejects calamity/evil/misfortune*, etc.) – utterance D: 4 – is a typical response to any hint of evil associated with oneself or a member of one's family or loved ones. However, the affected member could reinforce the rejection of evil by invoking the *orí* of a [dead] older relation, sometimes the father or the mother. Thus, in place of utterance (D: 4) Bunmi might have said *Orí iyá mi kó má padà lehin mi* (English: *May my mother's head not desert me.*). Such a rejoinder, encoding reference to one's ancestors, culturally emphasizes the power inherent in *orí*, and shows that one's parents' *orí* could be more powerful than one's own and therefore be one's guardian angel.

But then, situations in which one invokes one's *orí* against an assailant, a thief or an oppressor underscore the potency of one's own *orí* against the immediate foe, especially one that seems to be more physically, socially or politically more powerful:

**Fragment E**

- Adio:           24. Oga, five thousand naira ni e promise mi,  
                    25. owo mi ku three thousand naira sir.  
Oga:           26. Kilo se ti mo fi maa fun e ni five thousand?  
                    27. Ti two thousand o ba to e, lo p'olopa a wa.  
                    28. Wo o, wa bi gba  
                    29. mo ni'se se.  
Adio:           → 30. Ko buru o  
                    31. laipe, *orí* mi a mu yin.



Gloss:

- Adio: 24. Oga, you promised me five thousand naira;  
25. There's three thousand naira more to give me, sir.  
Oga: 26. What did you do to make me give you five thousand?  
27. If you're dissatisfied with two thousand, call the police.  
28. Please leave me alone,  
29. I have things to do.  
Adio: 30. That's fine;  
→ 31. Before long, my head will catch up with you.

As pointed out earlier, among the Yorùbá, the spiritual plane is perhaps the most significant traditional/cultural recognition of one's *orí*; hence its invocation in cases requiring adjudication against one's intimidator or tormentor.

In the following fragments, the conversational tenor shifts from the spiritual to the secular. This latter plane may involve reference to the physical head, its psychological import as the seat of thought, or a general mention that bears on ordinary verbal abuse. Whatever the case, the next four subsections illustrate the Yorùbá invocation of *orí* along non-metaphysical, non-spiritual planes.

### 6.2. *Orí*: Token of the mind

During conversation, allusions to good or bad judgment somehow reflect the Yorùbá acknowledgement of *orí* as encasing the mind or being the repository of the indicted participant's ratiocination. While making such invective mentions, the speaker may point to his own head ostensibly to indicate the other person's own:

#### Fragment F

- Saula: 47. Ojo, wa nkankan fi si agolo yi fun mi.  
Ojo: 48. E je ki nlo spanner yi wo.  
Saula: → 49. Se *orí* e pe sa?  
50. Spanner lo fe fi si agolo milk?  
Ojo: 51. Iku wo ni ko ro adie lorun?  
52. Sebi k'agolo ti dalu ni, abi?  
Saula: → 53. K'*orí* e ba e se ko danu.

Gloss:

- Saula: 47. Ojo, get something to open this tin for me.  
Ojo: 48. Let me try this spanner.  
Saula: → 49. Are you out of your mind?  
50. How can you open a tin of milk with a spanner?  
Ojo: 51. What does it matter how it's opened?  
52. The important thing is to open the tin, isn't it?  
Saula: → 53. Let your head cause you to spill it.

This fragment presents a dual application of *ori* although without any overlap. Saula's use of *ori* in utterance (F: 49) appeals to Ojo's state of mind (English: *Are you out of your mind?*) – an example of non-metaphysical, non-spiritual invocation of *ori* – unlike the mention at (F: 53) which neatly acknowledges the guidance and direction of *ori* in human affairs. The metaphysical inference of utterance (F: 53) is that Ojo's *ori* [as a *supernatural force*] should guide him with the assignment.

So much is the socio-pragmatic 'responsibility' that the Yorùbá seem to have placed on *ori* that should anything not go according to societal expectations that the human subject's head becomes the object of criticism. For example, in situations reporting irresponsibility – whether corporate or individual – the 'culprit's' head is negatively mentioned:

### Fragment G

- Oniroyin:           33. Gomina na so wipe awon ara ilu gangan ni won mba ilu je.  
                          34. O so wipe ebi ko je ki elomiran mo otun re yato si osi.
- Aliyu:               35. O ma se o.  
                          → 36. O dabi pe *ori* opolopo ninu awon olori yi ti yi.  
                          37. Se awon ara ilu ni o nfi ebi pa ara awon?

#### Gloss:

- Newscaster:       33. The governor said that the citizens are to blame for our social problems  
                          34. and that hunger has robbed a lot of people of discernment.
- Aliyu:               35. What a shame.  
                          36. It seems many of these leaders are insane.  
                          37. Would the citizens make themselves poor and needy?

As seen in fragments F and G above, among the Yorùbá, explanation for errant or aberrant behaviour among members may be achieved through a querying of the culprit's *ori* (that is, ratiocination), regardless of his or her social rank.

### 6.3. *Ori*: Token of temperament

Perhaps on account of its well-regarded position in defining 'the person' among the Yorùbá, *ori* is sometimes factored into accounting for people's occasional fits of temper. Indeed, anyone expressing anger or displeasure in Yorùbá most often first asks about the offender's *ori* – for example, if *all is well with [your] head*. Conversely, anyone accounting for another's display of temper customarily would refer to that other's *ori* – or something about it, as seen in the fragments below:

**Fragment H**

- Rabiu: 93. Ogbon ni aye gba.  
94. Eeyan a maa fi'kan s'ile gbo kan ni;  
95. ise kan pere o le la enikankan l'Eko yi.  
96. Eemeta pere l'ose ni mo maa maa wa 'bise  
lat'oni lo,  
97. emi ti ri'bi ile gbe l'oju ni'bomii.  
Ajani: 98. Ore, nkan ti o da ni o nfi sere  
→ 99. ti manager ba mo, aa ya'ri fun o gidigidi.  
100. Mo fe ki o roo daadaa.

*Gloss:*

- Rabiu: 93. Living requires acumen.  
94. One needs to shuffle ones duties;  
95. it's hard to live on just one job in Lagos.  
96. From now on, I'll only come to work three  
times weekly;  
97. I've found a job opportunity elsewhere.  
Ajani: 98. My friend, you're taking a risk;  
99. if the manager knows about it, he'll be cross.  
100. You need to consider it very well.

In Yorùbá, anger is expressed through the use of expressions containing different connotations of *orí*. The form *ya'ri* (contraction of *ya orí* – English, literally: *split head*) is one of numerous idioms indicating annoyance and the culturally mature Yorùbá person may be assumed to know their conversational relevance. In the next fragment, the allusion to *orí* indicates the member's resoluteness or obstinacy, a temperament not kindly considered among the Yorùbá:

**Fragment J**

- Iya Aina: 68. Oko mi, Aina ma so wipe oun ti to lati l'oko.  
Baba Aina 69. Ta wa l'oko oun o?  
Iya Aina: 70. Olowo *orí* mi, oju kan l'ada ni. Olufemi naa ni.  
Baba Aina 71. Boya lehin iku mi.  
Iya Aina: 72. Ah-a, a mbe Olorun o ngbo;  
73. fun bi osu mefa ni a ti wa l'enu oro yi  
→ 74. bee ni e f'aake ko'ri.  
75. Ki lo wa de, baale mi?  
Baba Aina 76. O le lo wa baba emii fun;  
77. t'emi ni mo ti so yen.

Gloss:

- Iya Aina: 68. My husband, Aina says she's looking forward to her marriage.  
 Baba Aina 69. And who's the suitor?  
 Iya Aina: 70. My beloved, there's only one such person, Olufemi.  
 Baba Aina 71. Over my dead body.  
 Iya Aina: 72. Ah-a, even God relents;  
 73. we've been on this issue for about six months  
 74. yet you've been resolute.  
 75. What else shall we do, dear?  
 Baba Aina 76. You are free to give her another father;  
 77. that's my position.

Among the Yorùbá, utterance (J: 74) – *f'aake ko'ri* (English, literally: *hang an axe on one's head*) – indicates resolve not to yield to anybody else's opinion or persuasion. Another remarkable way of expressing annoyance is for one's head to *become hot* (Yorùbá: *ki ori gbona*). Unlike many other idiomatic resources that are applicable to others, *ki ori gbona* can be used to refer to one's own displeasure:

#### Fragment K

- Secretary: 1. E kaaro, sir.  
 Manager: 2. Eh-en, kaaro.  
 3. Ewo ni gbogbo palapala ti gbogbo nyin nse laaro kutu yi?  
 → 4. E ma je ki *ori* mi gbona sii yin l'oni o.  
 5. Gbogbo iranu yi o ba mi l'ara mu rara.  
 6. K'olomo t'owo omo e b'aso o.  
 ...  
 Secretary: 67. Ni suuru,  
 → 68. ti *ori* e ba ti tutu, o le mu form fun ko sign;  
 69. bi beje ko, waa je iya oniya.  
 Clerk: 70. E seun, madam.

Gloss:

- Secretary: 1. Good morning, sir.  
 Manager: 2. Good morning.  
 3. What's going on here?  
 4. Let me not get angry with you all today.  
 5. I'm tired of all this hanky-panky.  
 6. Be warned.

- Secretary:           67.    ...
68.    Not now,  
                          69.    when his head is cool, you can give him the form to  
                          70.    sign;  
                          71.    Otherwise you'll suffer without cause.
- Clerk:                72.    Thank you, madam.

The secretary's hint at utterance (K: 68) – *ti ori e ba ti tutu* (English, literally: *when his head has cooled down*) – explicates the mood indicated in the Manager's turn at utterance (K: 4) – *E ma je ki ori mi gbona sii yin l'oni o* – English, literally: *Don't let my head get hot against you today*. Compared with *f'aake k'ori* (English, literally: *hang an axe on one's head*), the Manager's foul mood may be short-lived, a 'certainty' prefigured in the Secretary's turn at (K: 68). However, when conceived as an eruption or a fit, an idiom such as *ori kan'rin* (English, literally: *head makes contact with iron*) may be found applicable:

#### Fragment L

- Folabi:               16.    Wo o, sora fun arakunrin yen;  
                          17.    weere ni.  
                          18.    Ma tile sunmo rara.  
                          19.    T'óri e ba kan'rin, o ku eni maa mu.

Gloss:

- Folabi:               16.    Hey, watch out for that man;  
                          17.    he's insane.  
                          18.    Don't even get near him at all.  
                          19.    If he erupts in a rage, he's irrepressible.

As seen in these different contexts of loss of temper, the Yorùbá employ idioms containing various conceptualisations of *ori* (that is, *head*) to express members' disposition to various forms of rage and displeasure.

#### 6.4. *Orí*: Token of mental power

Of all the secular considerations of *ori*, its indication of mental powers possessed by an individual seems to be most recurrent in conversation. At certain points in interpersonal communication, people are advised to 'use your head' – perhaps because the head is the storage place for the brain. Thus, in matters relating to education and general acquisition or use of skills, the head is mentioned without a second thought:

**Fragment M**

- Olùkọ: 5. Mama, kii se enu iru mi l'o ye ki ati gbo  
6. amo emi a so otito fun nyin.  
7. E má wule f'owó sòfò mò;  
8. emi o ni p'ajá l'òbò fun yin,  
→ 9. sugbon o dabi pe *orí* omò yín ti òta.

Gloss:

- Teacher: 5. Madam, I consider it improper for me to tell  
you this,  
6. but I'd rather be truthful with you.  
7. I'd advise you to stop wasting funds;  
8. let me be honest with you,  
9. I think your son is incapable of retaining  
knowledge.

Using the 'adjectival' *òta* (English, literally: *become rusty*) to describe a learner's brain (or *orí*) is to write off the learning capabilities of such an individual – although not necessarily a young person. Adults, too, who fail to pick up on a form of [professional] training, can be so described, even with the use of a similar idiomatic phrase, as in the next instance:

**Fragment N**

- 1 Mechanic: 18. Kilo wa de t'o nsoro bee yen si omo'se e?  
2 Mechanic: 19. Ise wo ni'yen le ko?  
20. Odun keji re t'o ti nko bi a se nso engine motor  
kale;  
21. rada rada, randan randan lo nse kura.  
→ 22. O da mi l'oju pe *orí* e ti bu.  
1 Mechanic: 23. Aa to omo odun melo?  
2 Mechanic: 24. Ti ko ba to ogoji odun, die lo maa ku.  
1 Mechanic: 25. Adagba je Ràúfù kan niyẹn;  
26. o ye ko wa'se mii se nigbayen.  
2 Mechanic: → 27. A ní *orí* eeyan ti dógún iwo tun nsò pé kinní.

Gloss:

- 1 Mechanic: 18. Why were you so impatient with your apprentice?  
2 Mechanic: 19. What skills can that fellow acquire?  
20. This is second year he's been learning how to  
dismantle a motor engine;  
21. he's just been dithering.  
22. I'm sure his brain is addled.

- |             |     |   |
|-------------|-----|---|
| 1 Mechanic: | 23. | How old is he?                                      |
| 2 Mechanic: | 24. | About forty years.                                  |
| 1 Mechanic: | 25. | That's not fit for this kind of job;                |
|             | 26. | he ought to look for another profession.            |
| 2 Mechanic: | 27. | I say this guy is dumb; let's not argue about that. |

Like *dota* (*become rusty*), the adjectival forms *bu* (English, literally: *become mouldy*) and *dógūn* (English, literally also *become rusty*) are pragmatically fit expressions for *orí* that apparently is unsuitable for, or incapable of, learning or acquiring any skills. However, what with the social distaste associated with the expressions, parents would not employ such forms to characterise their own children.

### 6.5. *Orí*: Token of reproof and general disapproval

Among the Yorùbá, expressions containing specialised usage of *orí* are sometimes employed to chastise, admonish and warn erring members. Depending on the situation, however, the use of these forms may be found to illustrate different levels of seriousness. It is important to note, anyway, that both the spiritual and secular mentions of *orí* can be inferred from these reproof forms. Look at the three fragments below:

#### Fragment P

- |          |    |                          |
|----------|----|--------------------------|
| Awako:   | 3. | Kinni iyẹn ísọ lẹnu?     |
| Agbero:  | 4. | O ni Ikeja wa.           |
| Awako: → | 5. | <i>Orí</i> lo ńdūn.      |
|          | 6. | Nibo lo feti si lataaro? |

*Gloss:*

- |            |    |  |
|------------|----|--|
| Driver:    | 3. | What's that passenger saying?          |
| Conductor: | 4. | He says he'd like to get off at Ikeja. |
| Driver: →  | 5. | <i>His head hurts.</i>                 |
|            | 6. | Was he deaf all along?                 |

#### Fragment Q

- |           |     |                                       |
|-----------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| Segun:    | 18. | Se o fe load card yen ni?             |
| Gbenga:   | 19. | Ewo lo fa ibeere?                     |
| Segun:    | 20. | Emi o ba ni ki nload e s'inu phone mi |
|           | 21. | in case to ba lo je fake.             |
| Gbenga: → | 22. | <i>Orí</i> ẹ pẹ.                      |
|           | 23. | O ti rí ikókó.                        |
| Segun: →  | 24. | <i>Orí</i> tie gan pe;                |
|           | 25. | card la mba e so.                     |
| Gbenga:   | 26. | O ti si i.                            |

Gloss:

- Segun: 18. Are you trying to load that card?  
Gbenga: 19. Why do you ask?  
Segun: 20. I would suggest I load it on my phone  
21. in case it's fake.  
Gbenga: 22. *Your head is out of plumb.*  
23. You must think I'm a kid.  
Segun: 24. So is your head;  
25. let's talk about the card.  
Gbenga: 26. You've got it wrong.

Fragment R

- 1 Aladugbo: 49. Iwo ni ki o so fun iyawo ko gbele yin.  
2 Aladugbo: 50. Ara re ko ya.  
51. Mo ni wolewode iwo ati iyawo mi ko temilorun,  
52. o nso funmi pe iyawo mi ni ki nkilo fun.  
53. O ma go o.  
1 Aladugbo: → 54. *Ori* e baje,  
55. iwo agbaaya lasan lasan yi.  
2 Aladugbo: 56. Ko buru;  
57. laipe, gbogbo adugbo a mo eni ti *ori* re baje.  
58. *Mágùn* l'orọ e gba.  
59. Wáá kú bí èkúté ni,  
60. emi ni mo sọ bẹ.

Gloss:

- 1 Neighbour: 49. You tell your wife not to stray out of doors.  
2 Neighbour: 50. You must be sick.  
51. I tell you I don't like the libidinous relationship between you and my wife,  
52. and you're telling me to monitor my wife's whereabouts.  
53. You're very silly.  
1 Neighbour: 54. *Your head is rotten,*  
55. you wretched old buffoon.  
2 Neighbour: 56. No problem;  
57. before long, the whole neighbourhood will know who's a wretch.  
58. The *mágùn* spell is all it takes.  
59. You'll die like a mouse,  
60. I tell you.



Fragments P, Q and R illustrate points on the plane employing mentions of *orí* as strategies for reproof and disapproval. In utterance P: 5, for instance, the driver might have alluded to the passenger's *orí* under his breath, because of the absence of earlier altercation between the two of them. Thus, the tenor cannot be compared with the situation reported in fragment R – a serious relationship that promises grave consequences. Compared, whereas the mention of *orí* in fragment P may be considered reference to the physical head, the situation in R has a spiritual hint. However, owing to the genial relationship between the interlocutors in fragment Q, no one would read anything serious to the mention of *orí* in utterance Q: 22 – a highly innocuous remark among culturally competent Yorubá people. In fact, such a remark always goes 'unprocessed' by the recipient or, at most, is repeated in the immediately relevant turn, as in Q: 24.

Note, however, that mentions of *orí* sometimes have local – rather than global – relevance. In other words, *orí*, in *Mo ro pe orí e ti yi* (English: *I think you're insane*) need not be located in the context of the larger framework of ongoing talk but in the 'circumstance' of displeasure expressed by the participant whose turn contains the mention of *orí*. Thus, if, for instance, the addressee redresses the unpleasant content of the context of displeasure, it is possible that the displeased participant would produce *Orí e sese pe ni* (English, literally: *Now your head is in order*) – to signify a renewed disposition to the details of the talk – as would have been seen if Fragment Q had had the closing from Qa: 27 – 32), especially the mention of *orí* at Qa: 31.

**Fragment Qa (Hypothetical)**

- |           |     |   |
|-----------|-----|---|
| Segun:    | 18. | Se o fe load card yen ni?                             |
| Gbenga:   | 19. | Ewo lo fa ibeere?                                     |
| Segun:    | 20. | Emi o ba ni ki nload e s'inu phone mi                 |
|           | 21. | in case to ba lo je fake.                             |
| Gbenga: → | 22. | <i>Orí</i> e pe.                                      |
|           | 23. | O ti rí ikókó.  |
| Segun: →  | 24. | <i>Orí</i> tie gan pe;                                |
|           | 25. | card la mba e so.                                     |
| Gbenga:   | 26. | O ti si i.  |
| Segun:    | 27. | Se o daa ki ore e ma ni credit l' <i>orí</i> phone e? |
| Gbenga:   | 28. | Wo o, je nmi;   |
|           | 29. | o daa na, gba.  |
|           | 30. | Iwo na lo ra tie.                                     |
| Segun: →  | 31. | E-hen, <i>orí</i> e sese pe ni.                       |
| Gbenga: → | 32. | Ba'ra e da sohun, Ijebu.                              |

*Gloss:*

- |         |     |                                       |
|---------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| Segun:  | 18. | Are you trying to load that card?     |
| Gbenga: | 19. | Why do you ask?                       |
| Segun:  | 20. | I would suggest I load it on my phone |

- Gbenga: 21. in case it's fake.  
 22. *Your head is out of plumb.*  
 23. You must think I'm a kid.  
 Segun: 24. so is your head;  
 25. let's talk about the card.  
 Gbenga: 26. You've got it wrong.  
 Segun: 27. Would you watch your friend not to have any  
 credit on his phone?  
 Gbenga: 28. You don't give up, do you?  
 29. Here, take this money.  
 30. Go and buy yours.  
 Segun: → 31. Yes, now your head is in order.  
 Gbenga: 32. Just move on, you miser.

### 7.0. Ori in conflict talk (Who may invoke negative mention of Ori?)

This short section looks at the use of *ori* in conflict discourse. Generally, the tenor of interaction may be fixed or variable, e.g., formal or informal. In a formal setting, in most cases, it is the participant with the higher status (e.g., *Manager* rather than *Employee*) that may use negative reference to another's *ori*. In an informal context of exchange, negative mentions of *ori* are 'free for all'. Second, negative mention of the others' *ori* (especially when diabolical) is an indication of a special kind of interactional dislodgement, or communication breakdown. Here, however, the interactional imperatives are different for status-controlled exchanges. In Manager-Employee interactions, if the Manager negatively mentions the Employee's *ori*, the latter may *officially* ignore the mention and offer an apology for causing the higher member the displeasure to make the negative reference.

However, if the lower member thinks the higher ought not to have made such a reference – perhaps, given an awry set of circumstances between them – he may caution the higher member by using any culturally apt means of calling erring adult members to order (e.g., *Ogá, omọ yín ni mo jẹ; ẹ ma sọ pé ori mi o dāa ~ Sir, I'm like a son to you; please do not pronounce such a thing on me*). If the higher member persists, the lower sends a signal of upcoming retort: *Ogá, mo nso fun nyin o – Sir, don't make me break bounds!*). Following such a signal, the lower member feels empowered to make counter-reference – first, about the higher member's children's *ori*, or, should the higher member raise the scale of reference, his father's/mother's *ori*, depending on who in the lower member's family is invoked for the negative reference. Look at the fragment below:

#### Fragment S

- Osise: 1. Oga, e kaaro.  
 Oga: → 2. Ori e fo;  
 3. e kaaro ofo wo l'o nki mi?  
 4. Ojo wo l'o ti wa 'bi'se gbehin?  
 Osise: 5. Ko ri bee, sir.

- Oga: → 6. Nigba ti mo mbo ni last week...  
 7. *Orí* e l'ò daru.  
 8. Ojoojumo, excuse;  
 9. bi mo se so,  
 10. *orí* e daru.  
 Osise: → 11. Oga, e ma so pe *orí* mi daru rara.  
 Oga: 12. Ti mba so bee nko?  
 Osise: 13. Oun ni mo ti so yen,  
 14. k'enikankan ma so buruku nipa *orí* mi.  
 Oga: → 15. Al' *orí* e daru.  
 Osise: → 16. *Orí* omo yin l'ò daru.  
 Oga: 17. Alaileko;  
 18. Now, lo ko gbogbo eyi to ba je tie l'office yen  
 ki o wa'bigba;  
 19. as from today, ti mo ba ri ese e n'ibi,  
 20. olopa ni mo maa fi mu e.  
 Osise: 21. Aguda o je l'abe Kora; ise l'ò da won po.  
 Oga: → 22. Mo si nsoo, *orí* e ti daru.  
 Osise: → 23. *Orí* eyin na daru.  
 Oga: 24. Emi naa?  
 Osise: 25. Se eyin le gbadura ki *orí* omo yin daru?  
 ...

Gloss:

- Osise: 1. Good morning, sir.  
 Oga: 2. *Your head is broken*;  
 3. what kind of stupid greeting is that?  
 4. When last were you at work?  
 Osise: 5. Sir, I can explain.  
 6. Last week, on my way...  
 Oga: 7. *Your head is addled*.  
 8. Every day, excuses;  
 9. as I said,  
 10. *Your head is addled*.  
 Osise: 11. Sir, please don't say such a thing about my head.  
 Oga: 12. What if I do?  
 Osise: 13. There's a hint,  
 14. I don't take kindly to anyone saying evil things  
 about my head.  
 Oga: 15. I say, *your head is addled*.  
 Osise: 16. It's your children's heads, not mine.  
 Oga: 17. Bad-mannered, you;  
 18. now, go and pack your things out of that office;  
 19. as from today, if I see you here,  
 20. I'll call the police to arrest you.

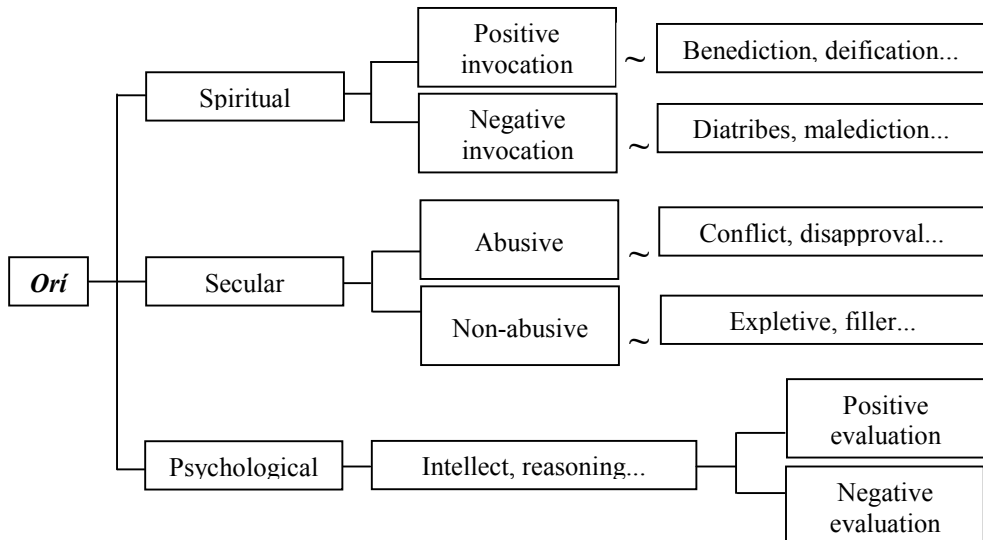
- Osise: 21. I'm no slave of yours, just a worker.  
 Oga: 22. I still say, *your head is addled*.  
 Osise: 23. Yours, too.  
 Oga: 24. Me?  
 Osise: 25. Could you pray that your children's heads be addled?  
 ...

What may be observed immediately in instances like the one depicted in Fragment S is that on account of the culturally grounded spiritual and meta-physical relevance of *ori*, the Yorùbá become very short-tempered particularly when their *ori* is negatively brought into play. However, such negative summons of *ori* result into communication dislodgement mostly among people of asymmetrical or impaired relationships. Among friends and cordial relations, such negative mentions of *ori* would be largely bantered without either (or any) party having any misgivings about *ori*'s non-literal connotations or associations.

Among peers, however, the negative mention of *ori* may be observed as an element of instituting or re-establishing camaraderie. Thus, except in mutually constructed or mutually misconstrued contexts, negative mentions of *ori* hardly result in communication breakdown. To underscore the unimportance of the negative comment, the receiving participant hurls the negative reference back at its producer. Compare Fragment S with the negative mention in the interaction between Segun and Gbenga, especially at utterances R: 22 and 24.

So far, the description has looked at a few planes of application of *ori* in conversational discourse, using as elements of analysis fragments of talk across native speakers of Yorùbá. Through these fragments, the analysis has brought to light how *ori* features in Yorùbá face-to-face interaction. From such a description, it is possible to extrapolate a typology of planes of reference to *ori* in Yorùbá discourse. The typology is discussed in the next section.

### 8.0. A tentative typology of *Ori* in Yorùbá discourse



In addition to the contextual exemplification in Table 1, this typology is a rough summary of the cultural applications of *orí* in spiritual, metaphysical, aesthetic, psychological and secular domains. In accordance with the description in the paper, these various applications should be regarded as typifying (rather than formalising) the cultural meanings of *orí* as found in talk. As such, the typology is not an absolute construct. As with many such typologies, there is room for amendments, especially given the evolving nature of languages and cultures.

One area of language use that may not allow the typology to have a fixed form is the field of idioms, proverbs, slang and aphorisms – aspects of use that are quite beyond the prescriptions of language purists. Owing to the expanding nature of these areas, no typology can capture in advance what may need to be included as the need arises. For this one reason, the typology (as well as the table) does not fully account for idiomatic phrases and those that may be classified *specialised usage*.

### **9.0. Implications for [Yorùbá] linguistic studies and pedagogy**

Learning (as well as teaching) a language like Yorùbá cannot be said to be an easy task by any manner of means, given the tonal nature of the language and, more importantly, the semantic challenges associated with such a feature. The learning situation becomes more complicated when the learner needs to find his or her way through numerous discursive mazes, particularly when interpreting elements of language in actual use – that is, for instance, discovering the ‘semantic nature’ of such elements, or deciding whether they have literal/non-literal meaning or whether they have spiritual/non-spiritual status in connected speech. One of the assignments of this short paper is to bring to light aspects of an important fabric of the Yorùbá culture: the concept of *orí* – discussed exhaustively to reveal its relevance beyond its spiritual/metaphysical applications. Thus, for the language learner at any level or stage, the need to realize that *orí* (as well as similar culturally-grounded units) has varying significance depending on contexts of usage, immediately informs him or her about a further need to apply a knowledge of both ethnomethodology and ethnography as a learning strategy – a task exemplified in the paper.

To help the learner and the teacher of the language, the paper advances a working typology for the classification of the various tokens and applications of *orí* in interactive discourse – a diversion from the established consideration of the subject in purely spiritual and metaphysical terms. Nevertheless, the typology is only indicative as it shows the way forward for further research in the area. Such typologies point up the possibility of creating a canvass of linguistic judgment for culturally acceptable (or unacceptable) structures. However, the typology is not an absolute entity and can be modified to suit other linguistic research – or, in fact, applied to languages other than Yorùbá, just as many foreign typologies have been used to characterise forms in Yorùbá.

Perhaps the most important fact about the paper is its presentation of Yorùbá as a living, dynamic language – one that can be analysed using different (sometimes, complementary) theoretical approaches. The spin-off of such a

method is to enable the researcher to have a full insight into the workings of the language when used by real people, about real issues and in real time.

#### **10.0. Conclusion**

The description in this paper may be said to be composed roughly of a fourfold objective: (i) to demonstrate the conversational value of *orí*, as opposed to its spiritual/metaphysical and artistic worth in the consciousness of the Yorùbá people of Nigeria; (ii) to describe how particular emotional states are aroused by the negative mention of *orí* in an interactive encounter and the strategies adopted to counter-invoke a participant's *orí*; (iii) to present different planes along which *orí* can be discursively relevant and functional; and (iv) to present a typology of the mentions of *orí* in its cultural contexts of usage.

While many researchers have looked at *orí* from purely spiritual, metaphysical, and aesthetic perspectives, this study presents a rather different picture of the subject. The implications of such an *atypical* slant to the examination of *orí* are diverse. First, this kind of approach demonstrates to Yorùbá scholars that we are still several research papers away from a full analysis of entities like *orí* in accounting for the interrelationships between the tongue and its culture. As linguistic anthropologists would confirm, the intricacies of mapping the full range of the mutual influence between a language and the culture it represents is a Herculean task; thus, the description here is only a tip of the iceberg, as it were. It is therefore a challenge to other researchers, linguists and analysts whose interests constitute part of, and are also constituted by, possibilities of talk in one's native language.

Talk in one's native language may not be easy to conduct, particularly if one is not 'very culturally entrenched' in that language – a situation characterising many Yorùbá today. Thus, not only learners but also native speakers of Yorùbá whose competence in the language is influenced by their competence in a non-native tongue (e.g., English) need to pay more attention to the demands of using the Yorùbá language in specialised contexts, such as are presented in this paper.

On the whole, given the dynamism of both the language and its culture, the paper cannot be said to have concluded observations on Yorùbá; hence, responses to the paper and its projections are welcome, especially in regard to the typology it advances.

Appendix – Table 1: Ori: Planes of invocation

Utterance tokens	Spiritual		Secular		Psychological	
	Positive invocation <i>Deification, benediction...</i>	Negative invocation <i>Diatribes, malediction...</i>	Abusive <i>Conflict, Disapproval...</i>	Non-abusive <i>Expletive, filler...</i>	Positive evaluation	Negative evaluation
	A bi orí e mba e ja? <i>Is your head at war with you?</i>		✓			
Boya orí e ti gbale. <i>Maybe his head has hit the ground.</i>			✓	✓		
Enikeni ba ro'bi si mi, orí ara e lo robi si. <i>He who wishes me evil, afflicts his own head.</i>		✓	✓			
Eyin eeyan, e je ka fi orí pipe se ise yi. <i>Let's apply some sense to this job.</i>					✓	
Ma je ki nya'ri fun e o. <i>Let me not get annoyed with you.</i>			✓			
O dabi pe orí re nwaya. <i>It seems you're courting trouble.</i>			✓			
O je lo we orí fun oko re. <i>You'd better go and propitiate your husband's head.</i>	✓					
Olori-ma-jediyé ni iwo ntié. <i>You have a head that rejects what's due to it.</i>	✓					
Olorun ma je k'a wa'ye wa sin orí olori. <i>May God forbid that we serve others' heads.</i>	✓					
Omo yen o l'orí rara. <i>That's a thoughtless child</i>						✓
Opolopo minu awon omo ile-iwe isinyi l'orí won ti dota. <i>Many of students nowadays are dullards.</i>						✓
Orí arakumín yen ti dota. <i>That man's head is rusty.</i>						✓
Orí e ti pe ju. <i>You're so smart.</i>					✓	
Orí e. <i>Your head.</i>				✓		

Ori gbogbo yin o pe. <i>You're all thoughtless.</i>					✓				✓
Ori inu wa ko ma ba t'ode je. <i>May our inner head not destroy the outer.</i>	✓								
Ori iyawo oga yen ti lo wa ju. <i>That man's wife is very clever.</i>								✓	
Ori la fi nmeran lawo. <i>You're what your head decides.</i>	✓								
Ori lo ndun gbogbo yin. <i>You're all not serious.</i>								✓	
Ori lo yo baba yen; i ba ti d'ewon ni'yi t'a nso yii. <i>But for that man's head, he'd be in jail now.</i>	✓								
Ori mi tete la. <i>My head, prosper early in life.</i>	✓								
Ori mi, oro mi d'owo e. <i>Over to you, my head.</i>									
Ori ndun iya baba e. <i>Your father's mother's head hurts.</i>								✓	
Ori o j'ori. <i>No head is superior to another.</i>	✓								
Ori omo yen a daa fun gbogbo yin. <i>That child's head will judge against you.</i>	✓								
Ori ore mi lo nse alatako e ni gbogbo igba. <i>My friends head is his accuser every time.</i>							✓		
Oriburuku lo ma gbehin emiti o ji mi l'owo. <i>Whoever stole my money will have misfortune towards the end of his life.</i>							✓		
Se ki nse pe ori e nyi? <i>Are you insane?</i>									✓
Se ori re ku ni? <i>Are you so clueless?</i>									✓
Ti ori iya yen ba kan rin, waa gba. <i>If that woman loses her temper, you'll be in the soup.</i>								✓	



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