



## Yorùbá Films and the Problem of Toneless Orthography By

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### ABSTRACT

Much research attention has been devoted to Yorùbá films, and the prominent position they now occupy in Nigeria (Jeyifo (1972), Opubor and Nwuneli (1979), Ògúndélé (1997), Balógun (2002) and Àlámú (2010) etc) However, to the best of our knowledge, none of these research works has attempted to take a critical look at the problem associated with the use of tones and diacritics in Yorùbá films. The major issue that engages our attention in this work is the problem of ambiguity occasioned by producers' refusal to make adequate use of tones and diacritics in writing the titles of their films. Through the purposive sampling method, fifteen films were carefully selected and watched. In a tabular form, the researcher listed out these titles, their possible interpretations, the intended titles and the procedure of getting the real titles was analysed.

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## Preamble

The development of the film enterprise in Nigeria cannot be complete without stating the fact that the Yorùbás were among the front runners in its development. With the shifting of emphasis from the Colonial Film Unit to Nigerian Film Corporation, the fact remains that some Yorùbá producers, the likes of À ládé Arómìrè and Adébéyò Sàlámi broke the monopoly of film making from the celluloid stock to video technology with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme. Many film artists rose after this experience, just as more opportunities were opened for young talents. This however, is after Chief Hubert Ògúndé, Olá Balógun, Moses Olá-Ìyá, Adémólá Afoláyan, Ojekeke Ajangila (the masquerade chant drama guru) and a host of other leading Yorùbá artists have opened up great opportunities through their ventures into celluloid films and their theatricality. With the setting up of the Nigerian Film Corporation, post production that was always done in London was shifted to Nigeria, though they may not be seen as defining the genre outside the shores of Nigeria.

## Background to the Study

The fact that Yorùbá language is a tone language has been well researched by Yorùbá scholars. Some of the scholars are Bámgbòş e (1965, 1990), Awobuluyi (1998), Akinkugbe (1978), Owolabi (1994), etc. Three level tones which are high, mid and low have been identified. Any orthography that disregards the use of these tones will create ambiguity. Over the years, several Yorùbá films have been produced with ambiguous titles which were direct result of the fact that they were either not tone-marked at all or not properly tone-marked. In addition to this, diacritics which are also semantically significant in Yorùbá are either sparingly used or not used at all. This study examines cases of ambiguity as a result of the refusal of producers of Yorùbá films to use tones and diacritics. It underscores the indispensability of these items to good Yorùbá orthography.

## Yorùbá Orthography

Orthography consists of the symbols and rules that are followed in writing a language. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Yorùbá was written in the Àjámì script, a form of Arabic script. Modern Yorùbá orthography evolved in the early work of CMS missionaries working among the Akú (Yorùbá) of Freetown. One of their informants was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who would later proceed to work on his native language himself. In early primers and translations of portion of the English Bible, Ajayi Crowther used the Latin alphabet largely without tone marking. The only diacritic used was a dot under certain vowels to signify their open variants /ɛ/ and /ɔ/, viz (ẹ) àn (ọ). Over the years, the orthography was revised to represent tone, among other features. In 1875, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) organised a conference on Yorùbá orthography. The standard devised there was the basis for the orthography of a steady flow of religious and educational literature over the years.

The current Yorùbá alphabet used in Nigeria was from a 1966 report of the Yorùbá Orthography Committee along with Ayo Bamgbose (1965) Yorùbá orthography, a study of the earlier Latin alphabets and an attempt to bring Yorùbá orthography in line with actual speech as much as possible. Largely similar to the older alphabet, it employs the digraph (gb) and certain diacritics, including the traditional vertical line set under the letters (ẹ), (ọ) and (ş). In many publications, the line is replaced by a dot. The vertical line had been prescribed to avoid the diacritic being obscured by the underline. The alphabets are as follows:

<b>CAPITAL:</b>	A	B	D	E	Ẹ	F	G	GB	H	I
	J	K	L	M	N	O	Ọ	P	R	S
	Ş	T	U	W	Y.					
<b>SMALL:</b>	a	b	d	e	ẹ	f	g	gb	h	i
	j	k	l	m	n	o	ọ	p	r	s
	ş	t	u	w	y.					

## The Films in Question

As indicated above, fifteen films were selected for this study. It is apposite to talk about these films briefly before we proceed in the work.

### 1. Agbára (Power)



The film centers on a Chief, Balógun who killed the Ìyalóde as a result of contention over the issue of who was to be chosen as the king . Before Ìyalóde's death , she placed a curse on Balógun and his children. Balógun's portion was that he would live the rest of his life in the bush while his children would never be happy and would struggle in vain all through their lives . This was not really known to Banjókò and Àyindé, Balógun's children. Banjókò became a politician who later contested a gubernatorial election . He has two sons who were very wayward . This was used as propaganda against him by his opponent and he eventually lost the election to this opponent. Banjókò's failure took him to a herbalist who revealed the secret to him. Banjókò sought out his brother, Àyindé who was also going through tough times . Together they did the necessary rituals to break the curse and became successful.

## 2. Opó (Widow)

This play presents the plights and hazards of widowhood . Ìbùkún lost her adulterous husband – Sinaayomi as a result of his infidelity. The family of her husband suspected and accused her of killing the husband. As a result of this, they tormented her and subjected her to a lot of ridiculous rituals. If not for her mother who rescued her; they would have got rid of her.

## 3. Olúwó Èkó (The Rich Man of Lagos)

The story revolves around Àjàyí, an employee who embezzled the money of the company in which he was working and got sacked. He went to a herbalist who encouraged him to make money rituals . Àjàyí did, but he failed to fulfil the obligations associated fully. Each time he slept, he would have a dream in which he would see himself as the richest man in Lagos, but in real life, he remained poor. Eventually, he consulted another herbalist who told him to go and sleep with a prostitute. He did so and contracted HIV/AIDS and later became insane.

## 4. Ète Obìnrin (Tricks of Women)

Doyinsólá, a beautiful lady was dating as well as working as a secretary for Àkànjí , a married man who owns a company. Through the help of a herbalist , Doyinsólá became Àkànjí's second wife and connived with Àkànjí's lawyer to kill him. Through the help of the lawyer, most of Àkànjí's property was willed to Doyinsólá at the expense of Àkànjí's first wife and children . Àkànjí's lawyer later became a thorn in Doyinsólá's flesh through his extravagant demands . As a result of this , Doyinsólá sent assassins after him and successfully eliminated him. However, the assassins were arrested and sentenced with Doyinsólá, their employer. Àkànjí's property was later restored to his first wife and children

## 5. Ilé Aláyò (House of Joy)

The story revolves around a big compound located in a ghetto area. It was an abode for notorious tenants made up of prostitutes, gossips, cheats, fraudsters, cannabis sellers, smokers, thugs and armed robbers, etc. The compound was always very noisy and rowdy. However, there were two distinct personalities who were not involved in the atrocities being perpetrated – old soldier and Alfa. When things were almost getting out of hand, the landlord and his son came and sent the dubious characters packing. They affirmed that their house is an abode of joy and not an abode of wickedness.

## 6. Nítorí Òlá (Because of future)

This play centres on two young lovers – Gbémisólá and Káyòdé. Gbémisólá went into film acting and she suddenly became a star. She started flirting around with most film producers and directors. Despite Káyòdé's warning, she continued her immoral activity and soon contracted HIV/AIDS. Káyòdé got married to another lady.

## 7. Ilé Owó (House of Money)

This play reveals the deadly repercussion of doing money rituals . Chief Àkàndé was involved in money rituals which were associated with weekly 're -servicing' of a kind . At a point, he forgot to re-service the rituals in a certain way. He went to a night party and returned home heavily drunk. The 'spirit' involved in the rituals killed Chief Àkàndé in his drunken stage and afflicted his wife and children, who did not know anything about the rituals.

## 8. B'òòkú (If you don't die)

This is the story of a lady , Bọwọfólúwa, who was engaged in prostitution . She met Tùmínínú , a young man who impregnated her and managed to convince her not to abort the pregnancy under the



pretence of his willingness to marry her. Bòwòfólúwa later gave birth to a baby who was used by Tùmínínú and Pémísíre, his doctor, to renew the money ritual they had made earlier. Bòwòfólúwa eventually died of food poison. The story portends the price of prostitution.

### 9. Àgbọn Méta (Three Coconut Fruits)

This play centers on Pèlúmi, a young man who was experiencing mysterious misfortunes in his life. The situation was so critical that he had to consult a pastor who was able to detect the source of Pè lúmi's plight – the water with which Pèlúmi was bathed when he was born was poured on a coconut tree as a kind of ritual. To overcome his problems, Pèlúmi was told to go and buy three coconut fruits and used as instructed by the pastor. At first, he bought three coconut fruits which, unknown to him, were stolen, so there was no relief for him. Later he was able to buy another set of coconut fruits which he used as he was instructed and then overcame his problems.

### 10. Tani Olè? (Who is a Thief?)

The story captures a married woman, Ìyá Bùkólá, who misguided her husband to be involved in a fraudulent business in order to boost their financial status. They did the business successfully however, the other person that partnered with them wanted all the money for himself so he sent an assassin who got rid of the husband. The wife escaped but left their only daughter, Bùkólá, behind. Bùkólá was later adopted by an unknown poor woman who could not cater for her properly. She ended up joining a gang of armed robbers.

### 11. Èwà (Beauty)

Èwà is the story of a beautiful young lady who believed her beauty was a money-making asset in her hands. She was bent on living her life to the fullest. However, when the mother saw the direction she was heading to, she redirected her by narrating the story of how her own beauty ruined her.

### 12. Ikún (Bush Rabbit)

This film captures the plight of three graduates who were unemployed, thereby becoming financially handicapped. They were flirting around with ladies and drinking alcoholic drinks. A lady insulted one of them and they thought of using her for money rituals. However, one of them, Bosun rejected the plan. The remaining tried to go ahead but unfortunately, they met their untimely death.

### 13. Ègbà Ọrùn (Necklace)

The film shows the danger involved in accepting a gift such as jewelry, especially, when the source of the gift is not known. A young married photographer, Kúnlé collected a necklace from one of his female customers with whom he was involved in secret extramarital affairs. The necklace was bound with spiritual powers that were capable of defertilising whoever wears it, while it would increase the wealth of the person who gave it out. As long as Kunle was using this necklace, he could not impregnate his wife. However, through the intervention of a pastor, the yoke was broken and Kunle was set free.

### 14. Kanna Kánná (Crow)

Kannakánná is the story of a young man named Kúnlé who wanted to sell a crow. He was warned against it because of its damning consequence; however, he did not yield. He sold the bird and became a notorious armed robber. He was caught and jailed as a result.

### 15. Síbẹ̀ Síbẹ̀ Awolaṣe (Still, we are all initiates)

Oládẹ̀jì, a young man lost his parents and the family's property was highjacked by the uncle who maltreated him and subjected him to incredible sufferings. Oládẹ̀jì ran to Lagos and joined a gang of armed robbers. In spite of the oath he had taken with them, he could not continue with them because his conscience did not allow him to do so. After he had left them, the gang was arrested and he was implicated. He got five years imprisonment for this.

## Methodology

Fifteen Yorùbá film were purposively selected for this study. These films are: Nítórí Ọ̀lá, Bòdúkú, Ilé Aláyò, Àgbọn Méta, Ilé Owó, Tani Olè, Èwà, Ikún, Ègbà Ọrùn, Kanna Kánná, Síbẹ̀ Síbẹ̀ Tawolàṣe, Agbára Opó, Olówó Èkó and Ete Obinrin. These films were carefully watched in order to determine their appropriate titles. Having examined the different possible interpretations that they could be given by those who have not



watched them, the researcher identified the appropriate titles and discussed how he arrived at their intended meanings.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

S/N	Title	Possible Interpretations	Meaning	Correct Title	How we arrived at Correct Title
1.	Agbara	(i) Agbára (ii) Àgbàrá	- Power - Erosion	Agbára (power)	The title emerged from the last scene when Balógun and Ìyálóde engaged each other in a battle of supremacy and demonstrated a show of power.
2.	Opó	(i) Opó (ii) Òpó (iii) Òpò	- Widow - Pillar - Plenty	Opó (widow)	The title emerged when Ìbùkún lost her husband and she became a widow.
3.	Olowo Eko	(i) Olówó Èkó (ii) Olówó Èkọ (iii) Olówò Èkọ	- The rich Lagos man. - The rich pap seller. - The one who does pap business.	Olówó Èkó (the Rich Lagos man.)	The title emerged when À jàyí, a man who lives in Lagos dreamt and he became very rich and was being addressed as the rich Lagos man.
4.	Ete Obinrin	(i) Ète Obinrin (ii) Ètè Obinrin (iii) Ètẹ̀ Obinrin (iv) Ètẹ̀ Obinrin	- Tricks of Women. - Lips of Women - Disgrace of Women. - Leprosy of Women.	Ète Obinrin (Tricks of Women)	The title emerged when Doyinsólá tricked her husband's lawyer and seduced her to have sex with her.
5.	Ile Alayo	(i) Ilé Aláyọ̀ (ii) Ilẹ̀ Aláyọ̀ (iii) Ilé Aláyò	- House of Joy - Happy Land - Home of Games	Ilé Aláyọ̀ (House of Joy)	The title emerged when Èṣẹ̀lágba (the Landlord was trying to caution his tenants to desist from quarrelling and he said that the house is a house of joy.



6.	Nitori Ola	(i) Nítorí Òla (ii) Nítorí Òlà  (iii) Nítorí Òlá	- For the sake of future. - For the sake of wealth. - For the sake of honour.	Nítorí Òla (For the sake of future).	This title emerged towards the end of the film when Káyò dé cautioned that whatever we do, we should be mindful of the future.
7.	Ile Owo	(i) Ilé Owó (ii) Ilẹ̀ Owó (iii) Ilẹ̀ Ọwọ̀ (iv) Ilẹ̀ Ọwọ̀ (v) Ilé Ọwọ̀	- House of money. - Land of money - Land of respect - Land of broom - House of hand.	Ilé Owó (House of Money).	The title emerged when Àkàndé went to do money rituals and the herbalist told him to prepare a separate room where he would put the items for the ritual and that room was referred to as Ilé Owó (house of money)
8.	Booku	(i) Bóòkú (ii) Bóókú	- If you don't die - If you die	Bóòkú (If you don't die).	The title emerged when Tumínínú's urge to get rich quickly led to his premature death.
9.	Agbon Meta	(i) Àgbọ̀n Mèta (ii) Agbọ̀n Mèta (iii) Agbọ̀n Mèta	- Three coconuts. - Three baskets. - Three wasps.	Àgbọ̀n Mè ta (Three Coconuts)	Pèlúmi was told by a prophet to go and get three coconuts in order to overcome his problems.
10.	Tani Ole	(i) Tani Olè (ii) Tani Òlẹ̀	- Who is a thief? - Who is lazy?	Tani Olè (Who is a thief)	The title emerged when Ìwàlẹ̀wà asked her parents who was the thief among the three of them, her and her parents.
11.	Ewa	(i) Èwà (ii) Èwà (iii) Èwá	- Beauty - Beans - Ten	Èwà (beauty)	The title emerged when Èwà was warned by her mother not to commercialise her beauty.
12.	Ikun	(i) Ikún (ii) Ikùn (iii) Ikun	- Bush rabbit - Stomach - Mucus	Ikún (An animal that looks like rabbit).	The song "Ikún ní jò gèdè, ó ní rẹ̀díí, ikún kò mò pé ohun tó dùn ní ńpa ni."  (The bush rabbit is eating banana and it is dancing, it does not know that sweet things are deadly emphasised the title).
13.	Egba Orun	(i) Ègbà Ọ̀rùn (ii) Ègba Ọ̀run (iii) Ègba Ọ̀rùn	- Necklace - Heavenly Cane - Neck Cane	Ègbà Ọ̀ rùn (necklace)	The title emerged from the story line which is based on a particular necklace presented by a herbalist to his client to



					give to whoever she liked.
14.	Kanna-Kanna	(i) Kanna-Kánná (ii) Kànnà Kànnà	- Crow  - Catapult	Kanna-kánná (Crow)	The title emerged when a boy was warned not to sell a crow, that whoever sells a crow will continue to steal till he dies.
15.	Sibe Sibe Awolase	(i) Síbè Síbè Awolàṣe (ii) Síbè Síbè Awóláṣe	- Still we did initiation. - Still Occultism is authoritative.	Síbè, Síbè Awolàṣe (Still we did initiation)	The title is taken from the music played at the end of the play, which suggests that we are all initiates.

## Conclusion

A careful look at the analysis above reveals that tones and diacritics are essential components of Yorùbá orthography. Their effective use will result in coherence and perfect understanding, whereas any refusal or failure to use them will result in ambiguity. Whoever looks at these titles as presented by the producers would be kept in suspense until such a person watches them carefully. This is a challenge to Yorùbá film producers to pay serious attention to the use of tones and diacritics in writing out the titles of their films. If necessary, they should engage the services of professional Yorùbá writers or linguists. If this is done, it will no doubt improve the quality of their work.

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