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# THE POSSIBLE SOURCE(S) OF /z/ IN ÀÒ

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## Abstract

*The place of Àò among Yorùbá dialects has been clearly identified in previous research. Its location within the South Eastern Yorùbá (SEY) of Awobuluyi (1998) has been incontrovertibly established. However, the dialect has two phonemic consonants which distinguish it from the other dialects of Yorùbá. These are /z/: The voiced alveolar fricative, and /ʒ/: The voiced post-alveolar fricative. This paper focuses on the possible source of /z/ in the sound system of Àò. Three possibilities are explored. These are: spirantisation, affrication and the effect of neighbouring Edoid languages. On the basis of phonological plausibility, the researcher cleaves to the first possibility spirantisation, otherwise known as frication.*

## Introduction

Much work has been done on dialects of Yorùbá, especially the ones spoken in Nigeria by linguists/dialectologists. Some of these scholars are Adetugbo (1967), Oyelaran (1976), Akinkugbe (1976), Awobuluyi (1998) and Adéníyì (2005). A brief exposition of these scholars' classifications is necessary here. Adetugbo (1967) classifies Yorùbá dialects into three major groups. These are: North West

Yorùbá (NWY), South-East Yorùbá (SEY), and Central Yorùbá (CY). Akinkugbe (1978) classifies the dialects of Yorùbá into five major groups, these are: North Western Yorùbá, North Eastern Yorùbá, Central Yorùbá, South Western Yorùbá and South Eastern Yorùbá. Awobuluyi's (1978) classification is very similar to Akinkugbe's (1978) in that he also has the same five groups in his classification. The only difference is in terms of geographical coverage. Awobuluyi includes the dialects of Yorùbá spoken in Akoko area in his South Eastern Yorùbá. Table 1 below shows this.

**Table 1**

<b>North-Western Yorùbá</b>		<b>North-Eastern Yorùbá</b>
Èkó, Àwòrì, Ègbádó, Òyó Òṣun, Ònkò, Ìbòlò, Ìgbóminà		Ìyàgbà, Ìjùmú, Òwòrò, Owé
	<b>Central Yorùbá</b>	
	Ifẹ, Ìjẹṣà, Èkìtì, Mọba	
<b>South-Western Yorùbá</b>		<b>South-Eastern Yorùbá</b>
Saabe-kétu (Anago) Ifẹ (Togo)		Ègbá, Ìjẹbú, Ìlàje, Ìkálẹ, Òndó, Òwò, Òba-Ìkàrẹ, Ào.

Adapted from Awóbùlúyì (1998)

Awóbùlúyì does not include Ào in his classification. Táíwò (2007) includes it, stating in details the reasons for his submission. We present his tree diagram below:

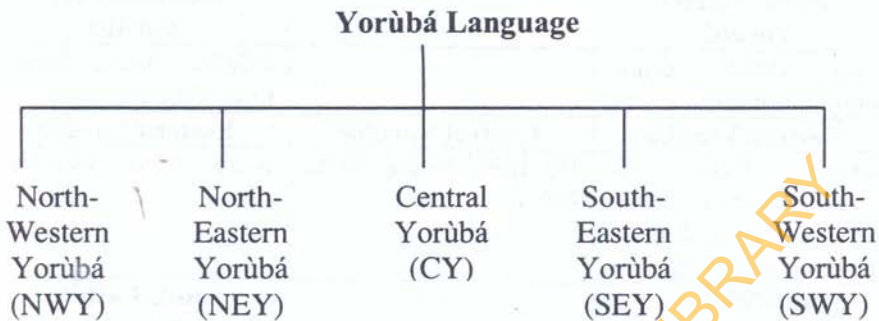


Fig. 1: Adapted from Táíwò (2007)

None of the scholars classified Ào into any of the groups. However, Taiwo (2007) in his work on Ào put the dialect under Awobuluyi's South Eastern Yorùba (SEY). According to him, SEY and more particularly Òwò and the Oba-Ikare subgroups are closest to Ào in terms of geographical location.

Adéníyì (2005) is the most recent classification documented (to the best of our knowledge). As a result of this, his classification is more comprehensive in that he acknowledged what other scholars had done before him and added a little modification. He has seven classifications as reflected in table 2. Going by his classification, Ào would belong to the Eastern Yorùbá, though he does not reflect this; but when we harmonise his work with Táíwò (2007), this becomes clear. See Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

<b>North-Western Yorùbá</b>		<b>North-Eastern Yorùbá</b>
Òyó, Ònkò, Òşun, Ìbòlò, Ìgbómìnà.		Ìyàgbà, Bùnù, Ìjùmú, Owé, Gbèdè, Àyèrè.
<b>Western Yorùbá</b>	<b>Central Yorùbá</b>	<b>Eastern Yorùbá</b>
Ànàgò, Kétu, Ifè (Togo), Òhòrí, Isabè (as well as other dialects spoken outside Nigeria)	Ifè, Ìjèşà, Àkùré, Èkiti, Mòbà	Ìkàré, Òba, Ido-Ani, Ào.
<b>South-Western Yorùbá</b>		<b>South-Eastern Yorùbá</b>
Èkó, Àwóri, Ègbá, Yewa		Ìjèbù, Òndó, Ìkàré, Ìlájè, Òwò, Ìjò (Apor)

Adapted from Adéníyí (2005)

The non-inclusion of Ào in the works of other scholars might be due to the non-availability of data. (See Taiwo 2007)

### **Ào and its speakers**

According to Ajongolò (2005), Ào is spoken in a number of towns and villages in Ondo State, Nigeria. These are Idoani, Àfò, Ìdógùn, Ikun and Imeri, which are located in Òsé Local Government Area; Ifira and Ipesi in Àkókó South East Local Government Area. Mutual intelligibility is high among speakers of Ào in these different locations. The name Ào was derived from the speakers' general greeting forms equivalent to Standard Yorùbá's 'È pèlè o' which can roughly be translated as "Hello". Speakers of Ào live in the far eastern part of Ondo State. They are surrounded by Edo-speaking people of Sésan, Ìpè and Ibilo (Elugbe (1973), Ajongolò (2005), Taiwo (2007). Figure 2 provides a map of Ào speaking area.





## Ào's Consonants

Ào has twenty phonemic consonants. These consonants are presented below on a chart.

Place → Manner ↓	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labialised Velar	Labio-velar	Glottal
Plosives	b		t d			k g		kp gb	
Nasals	m		n						
Syllabic Nasals	[m]					[ŋ]			
Affricates									
Fricatives		f	s z						h
Approximants (i) Lateral			l						
(ii) Central			r		j			w	
(iii) Nasalized			[ɾ]		[j]			[w̃]	

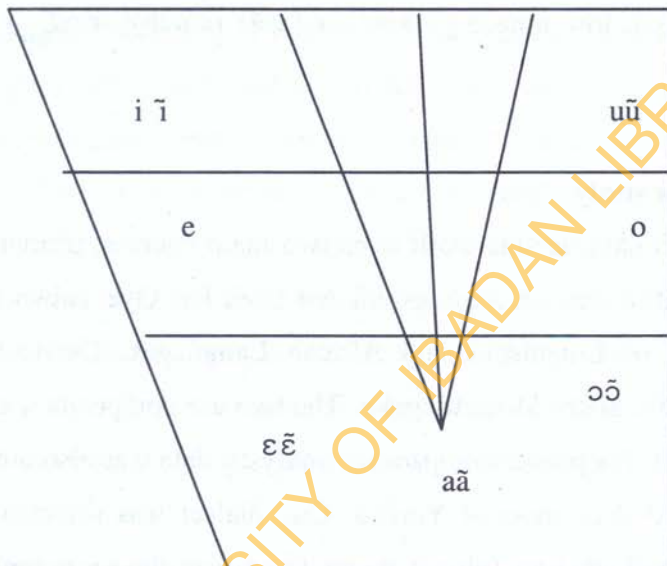
Adapted from Ajongolo (1991; 2005)

**Note:** Consonants that are non-phonemic are put in square brackets.

For details on the distribution of these consonants, see Ajongolo (1991 and 2005).

## Vowels

Ào shares the same number of vowels with the standard Yorùbá. It has both oral and nasal vowels. It has seven oral vowels and five nasal ones. These are shown below on a chart.



Adopted from Ajonglo (1991; 2005)

**Note:** /e/ and /o/ are not significantly nasalised.

For details on the distribution of these vowels, see Ajonglo (1991)

## Tones

Just like standard Yorùbá, Ào has three level tonemes. These are:

High / ˈ /

Mid / – /

Low / ˋ /

The high tone has the falling tone [  $\hat{\text{~}}$  ] as its allotone, while the low tone has the rising tone [  $\check{\text{~}}$  ] as its allotone. The falling tone occurs when a low tone follows a high tone e.g. /kpúkpo/ → [kpúkpô] (plenty); /kúro/ → [kúrô] (leave). The rising tone occurs when a high tone follows a low tone e.g. /àzè/ → [àzě] (witch); /éze/ → [èzě] (vow), etc.

### **Data for the study**

We obtained data for this work from two main sources, primary and secondary. The data on Ào was elicited from Dr. Oye Taiwo of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan and his sister Mrs. Adegoke. The two are competent speakers of the dialect. For proper comparative analysis, data was also obtained from other dialect areas of Yorùbá. One dialect was selected from each group reflected on Table 2 above. Òşun was chosen to represent the North Western Group; Bùnù represents the North Eastern Group; Yewa represents the South Western Group; Ìlàḡe represents the South Eastern Group and Ìḡeşà represents the Central Yorùbá Group. Overall, eight informants provided the data for this work. The secondary data was extracted from literature mainly Ajongolo (1991; 2005) and Taiwo (2007).

### Our informants

Dr. Oye Taiwo who is our principal informant on Ào, was 48 as at the time the data for this work was elicited from him. He teaches Syntax and Morphology in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan. He has worked extensively on Aó (Ajonglo 1991; 2005; and Taiwo 2007 etc). His B.A. project as well as his Ph.D thesis bear Ajonglo, whereas his paper Ào in 2007 bears Taiwo. This is as a result of change of name. Data on the other dialects: Ìjèṣà, Ìlàṣe, Yewa, Bunu and the Standard Yorùbá was supplied by Mrs. Yémisí Fádorò (40), Miss Grace (20), Mrs. Dúpé Abidèmi (42), Mr. Tùndé Yínúsà (25) and Dr. Dáre Fádorò (47) respectively. These informants are competent speakers of their respective dialects because they grew up in those areas.

### Data presentation

/z/ occurs in two environments. First, it occurs at word-initial position. Secondly, it occurs at the word medial position. It does not occur at the word-final position. This is not peculiar to Ào, neither is it peculiar to the sound in question. Yorùbá language does not allow consonants in word-final position. /z/ occurs before and in-between different kinds of vowels as shown below. Twenty-three items are elicited, 8 of them are verbs (monosyllabic); while 15 are nouns (disyllabic).

(a) **Word-initial position**

Ào (EY)	Standard Yorùbá (SY)	Ìjẹ̀ṣà (CY)	Ìlàjẹ̀ (SEY)	Yewa (WY)	Bunu (NEY)	Gloss
zε	d3ε	d3ε	d3ε	d3ε	d3εũ	eat
zó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	dance
zó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	d3ó	burn
zǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	wake
zǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	shake
zà	d3à	d3à	d3à	d3à	d3à	fight
zǐ	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	d3è	d3ǐ	d3ǐ	deep
zɔ	d3ɔ	d3ɔ	d3ɔ	d3ɔ	d3ɔ	resemble

## (b) Word-medial position

Ào (EY)	Standard Yorùbá (SY)	Ìjẹ̀ṣà (CY)	Ìlàjẹ (SEY)	Yewa (WY)	Bunu (NEY)	Gloss
ùzà	idzà	ùdzà	ùdzà	idzà	idzà	fight
azá	adzà	adzà	adzà	adzà	adzà	dog
àzé	àdzé	àdzé	àdzé	àdzé	àdzé	witch
ùzòjẹ	idzòjẹ	ùdzòjẹ	ùdzòjẹ	olójẹ	idzòjẹ	chief
iíze	oúndze	idzidze	iíde	oundze	óundze	food
εza	edza	edza	edzà	edza	edza	fish
ɔzà	ɔdzà	ɔdzà	ɔdzà	ɔdzà	ɔdzà	market
èzé	èdzé	èdzé	èdzé	èdzé	èdzé	vow
èzè	èdzè	idzè	èdzè	èdzè	èdzè	blood
εzó	edzó	edzó	edzó	edzó	edzó	case
ozú	odzú	odzú	odzú	odzú	odzú	eye
èze	edze	èdze	èdze	èdze	èdze	seven
èzì	edzi	èdzi	èdzi	èdzi	èdzi	two
ezì	òdzò	òdzò	òdzò	òdzò	èdzi/òdzò	rain
	(edzi)					
bàzé	bàdzé	bàdzé	bàdzé	bàdzé	bàdzé	rotten

## **The puzzle**

The pertinent question that calls for attention at this stage is: What is the source of /z/ in Ào since it does not occur in Standard Yorùbá or in any other dialect. In answer to this, we posit three possibilities. These are spirantisation, affrication or the effect of neighbouring Edoid speakers. We shall attempt to discuss each of these one after the other.

### **(i) Spirantisation**

As hinted in the introductory part of this paper, Ào is the only dialect of Yorùbá that attests /z/. All the other dialects have /dʒ/. If this is the case, then it will be logical to say that /dʒ/ in standard Yorùbá and other dialects alternates with /z/ in Ào. That is, the voiced palato-alveolar affricate /dʒ/ becomes the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ in Ào. That is,  $dʒ \sim z$ . When a plosive or an affricate becomes a fricative, we talk of spirantisation or frication. This position is plausible when we look at our data above. All occurrences of /z/ in Ào alternate with /dʒ/ in Standard Yorùbá and other dialects. There was no single instance of its occurrence that does not correspond to /dʒ/ in the other dialects. Our chief informant, Dr. Oye Taiwo confirmed this, when we called his attention to it.



### Africation

Africation is a phonological process that makes a non-affricate sound to become an affricate. For instance, when a fricative becomes an affricate, that is affrication. In our data, we have instances of /z/ in Ào manifesting as /dʒ/ in standard Yorùbá and all the other dialects. If we take /z/ as the 'original' i.e. the proto-sound (which is a possibility), then the data will be taken as a case of affrication. Ào /z/ alternates with /dʒ/ in standard Yorùbá as well as the other dialects of Yorùbá. That is,  $z \sim dʒ$ .

### The effect of neighbouring Edoid

The fact that Ào speakers are surrounded by Edoid speakers is very obvious. Taiwo (2007) states this clearly. Ào is located in South Eastern part of Àkókó. (See Fig. 1 above). The presence of Edoid in Ondo State has been recognised by scholars for some time. The North Central Edoid peoples of Ondo State are identified as Ijagbe (Ijagba) and Uhobe (Sobe) in Bradbury (1957), Oke (1970) identifies more communities such as Akotogbo, Gbelubu, and Iju-Osun in the Okitipupa area of Ondo as Edoid-speaking. That there are North-Western Edoid peoples in Ondo State was first clearly pointed out by Williamson (1968) who explained that the NWE peoples occupy parts of the old Àkókó and Òwò Division contiguous with the North Western Area of (Old) Bendel State. Òkè (1970) identified Epinmi,

Ishua and Idoani as speaking 'non-Yorùbá mother-tongues. Ào's location among Edoid Speakers opens the door to the possibility of /z/ being a feature of Edoid borrowed into the dialect. Since /z/ is a very common sound in Edoid and it is not attested in any other dialect of Yorùbá, it is logical to postulate that /z/ was borrowed into Ào from her neighbouring Ediod. For example, the word for 'blood' is pronounced with [z] in most of the Edoid speech forms, with very few exceptions.

### **Conclusion**

Each of the arguments presented above is linguistically plausible. However, the one that appeals to the researcher most is spirantisation. Since spirantisation is a weakening process, it is more phonologically plausible for an affricate (e.g. /dʒ/) to deaffricate and weaken to /z/. To stick to the opposite of this is to argue in favour of affrication, which is hardening. Hardening is a more complex phonological process than weakening.

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