# TWO IFÈ PARTICLES AND THEIR DISCOURSE FUNCTION

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This paper examines the discourse function of two particles in Ifè. Although one of the particles in particular appears to have some characteristics of a topic marker, it is demonstrated that its main functions are that of a) identification of known information and b) marking background information. The second particle additionally marks surprising or unexpected information.

Cet article traite de la fonction de deux particules ifè au niveau du discours. Bien qu'une de ces particules possède quelques caractéristiques d'un topicalisateur, l'article démontre que ses fonctions principales sont a) d'identifier l'information déjà connue et b) de signaler l'information d'arrière-plan. La seconde particule signale en outre qu'il s'agit d'une information surprenante ou inattendue.

## 0. INTRODUCTION

As is the case with many West African languages, Ifè of Togo[1] is characterized by the presence of many grammatical particles. Two particles in particular will be addressed in this paper. They are the particles **é/á**[2] and **yí.** These particles occur at the end of noun phrases, adverbial phrases and certain types of clauses, so for purposes of identification they will be called terminal markers (TM). First we will address the function and meaning of the terminal marker **é/á.**

## 1. FUNCTIONS OF **é/á**

### 1.1 OVERVIEW OF SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS OF **é/á**

As a marker of noun phrases, **é/á** functions like a definite article. After the first mention of an entity, any further reference to it by means of a noun phrase will be marked by **é/á**, as with **ọgu** 'salt' in (1).

(1) **nbèé** ***ọgu*** **kò** **wà** **ńnè**
now salt NEG[3] be in^it

***ọgu*** ***é*** **wà** **ńnɔ́-agolo-kà̀** **tsí** **rákì** **ńǹgbèrísi**
salt TM be inside-gourd-one and be^attached on^high DUR
Now, there was no salt in it. The salt was in a gourd stuck up high (in the rafters).

The particle **é/á** also functions as the terminal marker of some preposed adverbs and adverbial phrases. Normally these adverbials occur at or near the end of the clause and have no terminal marker (examples (2a), (3a), (4a)). When they are placed at the beginning of the clause, they often (but not always) have the terminal marker **é/á.**

(2) a. **bí** **à** **nákó** **tse** **fáà** ***báàyí***
how 3p[4] PRED do QUERY now
What are they going to do now?

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[1] Ifè of Togo is a Yoruboid language spoken in south central Togo and western Benin. Data in this paper is from the Tschetti dialect as spoken in the region of Akparé.

[2] The variation between **é** and **á** is phonologically conditioned. If the preceding word-final vowel is **a**, the terminal marker will be **á**. In all other environments, it will be **é**.

[3] Abbreviations: BENE benefactive case marker; CONT continuous aspect; DEM demonstrative; DUR durative aspect; EGR egressive; FOC focus particle; HAB habitual aspect; IND independent pronoun; ING ingressive; NEG negative; POSS possessive pronoun; PRED predictive mood; REFL reflexive pronoun; REL relativizer; SBJ subjunctive mood; TM terminal marker.

[4] Pronouns: 1s first-person singular; 2s second-person singular; 3s third-person singular; 1p first-person plural; 2p second-person plural; 3p third-person plural.

b. ***báàyí*** **èɖ̀** **wà** **ɖá** **wa**
now heart CONT cut 1p
Now, our hearts were cutting us (we were scared).

***báàyí*** ***é*** **àŋa** **méèdzì** **méèdzì** **ɛ́** **kpó** **dzì** **ŋ́gbe**
now TM 3S^IND two two TM all set^out in^shout
Now, they both began to shout.

(3) a. **kíbí** **ólú** **rîi** **é** **ó** **mú** **odzú** **bɔ** **ilè** ***gbòkấ***
when chief see^3s TM 3s take eye touch earth at^once
When the chief saw her, he lowered his eyes at once.

b. ***gbòkấ*** ***á*** **ègìɖấ** **ké** **òkpò** **lákű-kà̋** **bané**
at^once turtle take club large^one hold
Immediately, turtle took hold of a large club.

(4) a. **arɔkɔ-ɔnɔkɛ̀ɛ̃** ***náàtsɛ̀tsɛ̀*** **fú** **owó**
in^law-male in^first give money
The father-in-law first gives some money.

b. ***náàtsɛ̀tsɛ̀*** ***é*** **àa** **nákó** **lɔ** **káà** **kpa** **ìɖì-àkéte-kà̋**
in^first TM 2p PRED go EGR hit place^of-termite-one
First of all, we will cut the weeds around a termite mound.

Another function of the particle **é/á** is found in relative clauses. Relative clauses in Ifè follow the head noun. They are introduced by a relative pronoun and the terminal boundary is marked by **é/á**.

(5) **àɖɛ́** **yèé** **wà** **nágbè** **si** ***é***
oil REL be in^bottle DUR TM
the oil which is in the bottle

In clauses with constituent focus, this particle marks the terminal boundary of the nonfocused part of the clause. The entity in focus is preposed and followed by the focus particle **ní**. This is the part of the clause that contains the most important information as estimated by the speaker. In the example below, it is information that is new to the hearer (the hearer knew that I had a brother, but didn't know that it was this person). Then follows the remainder of the clause with the particle **é/á** marking its terminal boundary. This is less important information (in this example, it is known information), and is backgrounded in comparison with the entity in focus.

(6) **òŋu** **ní** **dzɛ́** **ìfó-mi** ***é***
3s^IND FOC be elder^brother-1s^POSS TM
It is he who is my elder brother.

This particle is also the terminal marker of certain types of subordinate clauses. The first of these are circumstance clauses introduced by the connective **kíbí** 'when' or 'since'. This type of clause gives background information that is relevant to the information in the main clause. It often repeats or summarizes preceding actions.

(7) **kíbí** **ó** **gú** **àgú** **ɛ́** **tā́** ***á*** **ó** **tórí** **ɔbɛ̀** ***ɛ́***
when 3s pound fufu TM finish TM 3s taste sauce TM
When he finished pounding the fufu, he tasted the sauce.

(8) **kíbí** **ó** **wà** **sɔ́má** **oɖò** ***é***
when 3s CONT approach stream TM

**ó wà gbé igbe-ɔma tsígíɖí-kã̀**
3s CONT hear cry^of-child small-one
As she was drawing near the stream, she was hearing the cry of an infant.

Subordinate clauses introduced by the connectives **tã́ná** 'before' or **títí** 'until' normally follow the main clause and do not have a terminal marker (examples (9a) and (10a)). When they are preposed they always have the terminal marker **é/á** (examples (9b) and (10b)).

(9) a. **bí ìwèrè-dzídzɛ tó à náa káà wòó wérí**
if time^of-food arrive 3p HAB EGR search^3s everywhere

***tã́ná kó wáa dzɛŋ́é***
before 3s^SBJ ING eat^thing
When it was mealtime, they always went out and searched for him everywhere before he would come and eat.

b. ***tã́ná ò ma ìkòkò é nàa lɔ káà wo amà***
before 2s shape clay^pot TM 2s^PRED go EGR search clay
Before you make a pot, you go out and look for some clay.

(10) a. **ó sɛ̃̀ maɖé *é títí* ó ɖonùgbó**
3s feed child TM until 3s become^old
She raised the child until it was grown.

b. ***títí* ɔɖɛ̃̀ kó sɛ̃̀ nyí wò ró *é***
until hunter SBJ repeat turn search again TM

**ɛfã̀ á ɖi aya fúu**
buffalo TM become wife BENE^3s
By the time Hunter turned around and looked again, the buffalo had turned into a wife for him.

Conditional clauses are introduced by the connective **bí** 'if/when' and precede the main clause. Most often they do not have the terminal marker **é/á**, but in some cases the marker is there. Unmarked conditional clauses either state a general truth that "if this is true, then that will happen" (example (11a)), or they give the condition for an as-yet-unrealized event in the main clause (example (11b)).

(11) a. **bí ò wà wo íbàɖí fú enìkéèdzì-éɛ**
if 2s CONT search bad BENE friend-2s^POSS

**ìwɔkéè gbo nà dzì ńnè**
2s^REFL also 2s^HAB fall in^it
If you set out to harm your friend, you will fall into it yourself.

b. **bí ǹ lɔ nádzà màa ra tìmátì**
if 1s go to^market 1s^PRED buy tomato
If/When I go to market, I will buy some tomatoes.

Conditional clauses that have the terminal marker, on the other hand, contain information that is already known to the hearer. They are frequently used in procedural texts, where they give a résumé of the previous step before moving on to the next step in the process.

(12) **kíbí ò tsùú si é**
when 2s make^ball^3s DUR TM

**nàa** **lu** **ifò** **ńnɔ́-è**
2s^PRED puncture hole in^stomach-3s:POSS

**bí** **ò** **lu** **ifò** **é** **tā́** ***á***
when 2s puncture hole TM finish TM

**nàa** **kpé** **fífà** **wá** **ńńgbèrí**
2s^PRED begin drawing come on^high

**bí** **ò** **fàá** **tā́** ***á***
when 2s draw^3s finish TM

**nàa** **wáa** **tse** **etí-è**
2s^PRED ING make ear-3s^POSS

When you have formed the balls (of clay), you make a hole in one of them.
When you have finished making the hole, you begin drawing (the sides) up.
When you have finished drawing it up, you then make its rim.

## 1.2 ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE FUNCTION OF **é/á**

After looking at the data, it appears that the particle **é/á** has two functions, both of which are related to what the speaker thinks the hearer knows or needs to know.

The first function is one of identification. As a terminal marker of noun phrases, this particle acts like a definite marker in that it identifies an entity as being the one both the speaker and hearer know and can identify. Chafe (1976) in fact says when describing the classification of definiteness that identifiable would be a better term than definite for this role.

As a terminal marker of relative clauses, the particle also has an identificatory function. It marks information which the speaker thinks the hearer needs to know in order to identify the head noun. This information will always be known to the hearer, either from the context or from general knowledge, since relative clauses in Ifè never contain new or unknown information (Devine 1993).

The second function of this particle is as a marker of background information. Preposed adverbial phrases and subordinate clauses give the hearer background information that the speaker thinks is necessary to understand the information in the main clause. They provide the hearer with a framework in which to interpret the information that follows. Often the information contained in these clauses is a repeat or a summary of what has been said before. In constituent focus clauses as well, the part of the clause marked by **é/á** is background information.

One question that comes to mind is whether or not this particle is a topic marker. Topics are frequently preposed. Dik (1981), who calls this particular function "theme", says that the theme function "presents a domain or universe of discourse with respect to which it is relevant to pronounce the following predication." Chafe (1976) defines topic as "a spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds." Marchese (1977) argues that in Godié, another West African language, conditionals, relative clauses and some types of preposed subordinate clauses function similarly to single noun topics. Since the types of clauses marked by **é/á** look like topics from a syntactic point of view and seem to fall within the definition of topic given by Dik and Chafe, it leads one to ask whether or not this particle is a topic marker.

To answer that question, we need first to look at some clear examples of topic in Ifè. In the usual topic-comment construction, the noun phrase topic is preposed and there is usually a pronoun reference to the topic in the main clause. The noun phrase is often, but not always, marked by the particle **é/á**.

(13) **òdzò / ó wà rɔ̀**
rain / 3s CONT fall
Rain, it was falling.

(14) **itsu / *é́* ó wù tsí ta omírɛ̀̃**
yam / TM 3s sprout and produce another
The yam, it grew and produced another (yam).

A look at the context from which these examples were taken explains the use of the terminal marker in (14). In (13), the topic, rain, has never been mentioned before in this story. In (14), on the other hand, the yam is already part of the story and so is known information. From this and other examples of noun phrase topics, it appears that **é́/á** is functioning here as a definite marker, identifiying information already known to the hearer, rather than as a topic marker. If it were truly a topic marker, all examples of noun phrase topics should be marked by this particle. The fact that many topic NP's do have this particle is a function of the fact that topics tend to be information that the speaker marks as definite rather than that they are topics.

Another example of topic-like phrases that are not marked by the particle **é́/á** is certain adverbial phrases. As mentioned above, some adverbials do have a terminal marker when they precede the main clause. Many, however, do not, and yet they seem to function in much the same way as the marked adverbial phrases. The following examples seem to be giving a framework within which the main clause is to be understood, just as (2c), (3b) and (4b) above are doing.

(15) **ńn̄wèrè-ìɖádzá ɔ̀nyà-kɛ̃̀ wáa tó**
in^time^of-dawn person-one ING come
Just before dawn, someone came.

(16) **ó ɖi nɔ́dzɔ́-ŋè ègìɖɛ̃́ kò né iŋé-ɔbè-kɛ̃̀ kpókpó**
3s become day-DEM turtle NEG have thing^of-sauce-one any
One day, turtle didn't have any sauce ingredients.

It seems then, that the particle **é́/á** is not a topic marker but a marker of known information. That does not exclude the possibility that the preposed adverbials and subordinate clauses that it marks are functioning as topics.

In looking at neighboring languages, it seems that Ewe, another language spoken in southern Togo, has two terminal particles that have a similar syntactic function to the **é́/á** particle in Ifè. Ameka (1992) concludes that these particles in Ewe have a discourse function of marking background information units. It seems, then that this may be a feature of several West African languages.

## 2. FUNCTIONS OF **yí**

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE SYNTACTIC FUNCTION OF **yí**

The second particle mentioned at the beginning of this paper is the terminal particle **yí**. Syntactically, this particle replaces the **é́/á** particle in some relative clauses, constituent focus clauses, and subordinate clauses introduced by **kíbí**. If **é́/á** is marking information that the speaker thinks the hearer knows or needs to know in order to understand the main predication, what is **yí** doing when it takes the place of **é́/á**?

First, some examples of occurences of **yí**.

(17) **ɔma yèé ɔ̀ŋu bí *yí* iɖà-oyè ni**
child REL 3s^IND bear TM knife^of-kingdom FOC
The child that he had given birth to was to be very great!

(18) **kíbí ǹ ríɛ tsí ò tse si *yí* àkɔ̀rɔ̀ ní ò dzɛ́ é**
when 1s see^2s and 2s do DUR TM sick^person FOC 2s be TM
Now that I see the condition you are in, you are sick!

(19) **kíbí ó tsíi gé é**
when 3s open^3s only TM

**ègìdɑ́ ònu àkpárò ní dziná si *yí***
turtle and partridge FOC be^cooked DUR TM
When he opened it, turtle and partridge were cooked!

In all three of these examples there is an element of surprise, as indicated by the exclamation point in the English gloss. In (17) and (19), the surprise is a positive one that surpasses expectation. The child in (17) turned out to be no ordinary child, but a great chief. Cane rat, the actor in (19), hadn't dared to hope for anything so good, but when he took the lid off the pot, there was a delicious meat sauce inside.

In example (18), on the other hand, the speaker didn't realize that his friend was sick, and is surprised and concerned to see that indeed he is quite ill.

The following is a résumé of a story that ends with dashed expectations.

(20) Kofi and his little brother went to the fields. Their father said to them that he was going to town and that they should stay in the field until evening. At 10 a.m. Kofi and his brother returned home. Kofi said to his brother that he should check and see if their father had really gone.

**títí ɔ̀màná-è kó tó náàbɔ̀ɔ́mí é**
until younger^sibling-3s SBJ arrive at^open^place TM

**boba-ŋa ní sɔ̀̃ si náàbɔ̀rɔ̀ŋgó si *yí***
father-3s^POSS FOC lie DUR on^lounge^chair DUR TM
As his younger brother arrived in the public square, there was their father, stretched out on a chair!

The two brothers had hoped to get away with kipping work for the day, but their hopes were dashed when they saw their father still in the village.

## 2.2 ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE FUNCTION OF **yí**

It seems then, that **yí** is marking unexpected or surprising information. The speaker thinks the hearer needs to know that the information is surprising or unexpected in order to correctly understand the speech situation. In English, the speaker would convey this by intonation, but in Ifè it is conveyed by the terminal marker **yí**.

Both of the particles in question, then, are marking information that the speaker thinks the hearer knows or needs to know. This may be for purposes of identification of an entity or as background information for what follows. In the case of **yí**, there is the added element of unexpectedness or surprise.

## 3. CONCLUSION

The particle **é/á** occurs at the end of some noun phrases, adverbial phrases, and subordinate clauses and at the end of all relative clauses and constituent focus clauses. The particle **yí** replaces **é/á** in some relative clauses, constituent focus clauses and subordinate clauses introduced by **kíbí**. Both particles have been shown to be marking information which the speaker thinks the hearer knows or needs to know. This information can either function to identify an entity or to provide needed background information to the hearer. The **yí** particle in addition marks the information as surprising or unexpected.

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