



A DESCRIPTION OF CONSONANT DELETION IN STANDARD YORUBA

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Abstract:

This study is a descriptive analysis of consonant deletion at the synchronic level in the standard Yoruba language. The study investigates those consonants that usually undergo deletion, and the grammatical environments and conditions that permit their deletion. Data were gathered from Yoruba native speakers who are proficient in the use of the standard form of the language. Resource persons or language helpers were sourced from Oyo, Ofa, Ibadan, Ilesha and Ado Ekiti. These are major towns in Yoruba land where speakers of the standard dialect live in their thousands. The study is descriptive in orientation; thus, data are presented, analyzed and discussed. The study reveals that consonant deletion is not restricted to specific consonants, as almost all the consonants in the language can be deleted in specific environments. Any consonant, for instance, be it plosive, fricative, approximant, trill and others, undergoes deletion in nouns that are derived through reduplication and vowel affixation. There are other constructions that also permit deletion of some consonants. The study further reveals that the process of consonant deletion appears not absolutely obligatory in a number of environments where it operates. It is further revealed that vowel assimilation invariably applies obligatorily in almost all cases where consonant deletion operates. The study gives a better understanding of consonant deletion in the Yoruba language by showing that the process is neither robust nor systematic in the language.

Keywords: consonant deletion, dialect, vowel assimilation, standard Yorubá, reduplicated consonants, Moba dialect, descriptive analysis

1. Introduction

Consonant deletion in rapid speech is a common phonological process in human language. It is a linguistic activity whereby a consonant in a linguistic construction is omitted or elided in normal speech without any loss in meaning. Different scholars have reported the operation of

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the process in different languages of the world. Schane (1973) reports it in the French language. Some of her examples include:

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|---|------------|-------------|
| (1) | pətit # garcon | → | pətigarcon | "small boy" |
| | groz # garcon | → | grogarcon | "big boy" |

The examples in (1) show that a consonant is deleted before a word boundary in cases where the word to the left of the boundary ends with a consonant while the word to the right of the boundary begins with a consonant. The scholar attributes the deletion to the prohibition of consonant clusters across morpheme boundaries in the French language. The process, according to a number of scholars, operates in the English language. Yule (2010: 47) confirms that the alveolar plosive, /d/, is usually deleted in the word /and/ in the phrase *you and me*, which is usually rendered /juənmi:/. The scholar gives other examples that include:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--------------|---|---------|------------------|
| (2) | friendship: | /frɛnd-ʃɪp/ | → | frɛnʃɪp | (/d/ is deleted) |
| | aspects: | /æspe:kts/ | → | æspe:ks | (/t/ is deleted) |
| | he must be: | /hi-məst-bi/ | → | hɪməsbi | (/t/ is deleted) |

The process is also reported in the Yoruba language. Early Yoruba language scholars, including Ward (1952), Courtenay (1858), Crowther (1852) and others, reveal the operation of the process in the language. Subsequent scholars, among them, Bamgbose (1965), Oyelaran (1971, 1972), Akinlabi (1993), Owolabi (1989), and Yusuff (2005) all testify that consonant deletion operates in the language. The present study agrees with the various submissions of earlier scholars on the operation of the process under study; however, these previous studies do not provide a comprehensive discussion of the different domains or grammatical structures and phonological conditions that permit consonant deletion. Whereas Abimbola and Oyelaran (1975) and Akinlabi (1993) explain clearly the phonological conditions that guide the deletion of the alveolar trill /r/, the deletion of other consonant have not been given due attention. In addition, the fact that the deletion of consonants leaves out a number of exemptions is not clearly discussed. The present study gives attention to those issues not fully covered by earlier scholars in the area of consonant deletion in the language under study.

2. Purpose of Study and Methodology

Scholars, as already mentioned above, have long recognized the operation of consonant deletion in Standard Yoruba. A few important aspects that appear to be missing in previous studies of the process are that there is no comprehensive presentation of the grammatical structures that permit the operation of the deletion, there is also no clarification of what consonant undergo deletion, and there is also no clarification of what consonant undergo deletion under specific grammatical constructions. For instance, Abimbola and Oyelaran (1975) and Akinlabi (1993) give a robust discussion of phonological environments that permit the deletion of /r/, such an explanation is not provided for the deletion of other consonants. The present study, therefore,

becomes necessary in order to put in proper perspective the operation of the process, and also to provide a comprehensive account of the process.

To ensure comprehensive and reliable data, the study relied on pieces of data on the standard form of the language. The standard form is the lingua franca among the different Yoruba linguistic regions; it is the codified form used as language of instruction in schools, and also in writing academic and non-academic texts. Data were sourced from five different cities in the southwestern part of Nigeria where Yoruba is the native language. Fifty fluent speakers were selected as resource persons across Oyo, Ofa, Ibadan, Ilesha and Ado Ekiti towns. Data collected from these major towns were used for the purpose of the study.

3. Related Works

Early scholars are unanimous that consonant deletion is operative in the Yoruba language (Courteny, 1852; Bowen, 1858; Ward, 1952; Crowther, 1958). These scholars rightly observe the operation of the process; they also provide ample data to illustrate the operation. The scholars, however, fail to provide an explanation of the phonological or grammatical environments and conditions that permit the process.

Oyelaran (1971) and Abimbola and Oyelaran (1975) affirm the position of the earlier scholars to the effect that consonant deletion occurs in standard Yoruba. They provide substantial data in support of those provided by earlier scholars. The scholars go further to provide explanations on specific grammatical environments and conditions that guide the process.

The position of the scholars is summarized thus:

- (4) i. consonants are deleted inter-vocally;
- ii. the two vowels before and after the deleted consonant must be identical;
- iii. when the vowels are not identical, one of the vowels must be [+high].

The claims of the scholars, as enumerated above, are correct when the discussion of consonant deletion is limited to a specific set of data. As will be shown in this study, the claims in (4) need to be revised when more data are considered. For instance, the idea that vowels before and after a consonant must be identical to attract deletion is not true in the face of available data, and the issue of the presence of a [+high] vowel in the environment of a consonant to attract deletion is equally not real. Their study, however, leaves out other important phonological issues that deserve to be mentioned.

Akinlabi (1993) also discusses consonant deletion in Yoruba with specific focus on deletion of /r/. The study focuses more on theoretical issues by investigating how accurately and effectively the theories of radical underspecification and restricted underspecification account for segmental phonology. The scholar says in respect of the study that, *"the primary goal of this study is not to review the phenomenon or data discussed in both theories in relation to Yoruba, but to provide further support for underspecification theory."* The present study, as earlier stated, is descriptive in orientation. In view of this, Akinlabi (1993) will not be discussed further.

Abiodun (2014) gives further examples of consonant deletion in grammatical constructions not covered in the works of earlier scholars. For instance, the scholar reports deletion of the initial consonant when the adverb [púpo] ‘very’ is used to modify a verb, e.g.:

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------|---|--------|-------------|
| (5) | ga púpò | → | gaápo | very tall |
| | gọ púpò | → | gòpò | very stupid |
| | dáa púpò | → | dáaápo | very good |

In a similar vein, deletion of the initial consonant of an adjective is observed when a noun is modified, as witnessed in (6) below:

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|---|-----------|----------------------|
| (6) | ọbẹ́yíyò | → | ọbẹ́yò | drawing soup |
| | omi gbígbóná | → | omiígbóná | warm water |
| | ewé dúdú | → | ewéédú | type of drawing soup |

Abiodun (2014) does not discuss the phonological conditions that trigger or permit the deletion of consonants in the examples in (5) and (6). This perhaps is because the study focuses more on syntactic issues rather than consonant deletion. Other scholars, such as many others, mention consonant deletion and provide ample examples without attention to the phonological environments and conditions that trigger the process.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section focuses on the presentation and explanation of phonological conditions that allow for the deletion of consonants

4.1 Deletion of /r/

As already mentioned severally in this study, r-deletion is robust in standard Yoruba, and scholars have given sufficient attention to the process (Oyelaran, 1973; Abimbola & Oyelaran, 1975; Akinlabi, 1993). For the avoidance of repeating earlier scholars, the present study presents a few examples to demonstrate the deletion of /r/

- | | | | | | |
|------|-------|--------|---|-------|------------------|
| (7)a | i. | orúkọ | → | oókọ | ‘name’ |
| | ii. | òrùka | → | òòka | ‘ring’ |
| | iii. | oríkì | → | oóki | ‘eulogy’ |
| | iv. | òrìsà | → | òòsà | ‘gods’ |
| | v. | orókún | → | oókún | ‘knee’ |
| | vi. | àkàrà | → | àkàà | ‘beans cake’ |
| | vii. | àkùrò | → | àkùò | ‘palm nut’ |
| | viii. | àdùrà | → | àdùà | ‘prayer’ |
| | ix. | agbára | → | agbáa | ‘strength’ |
| | x. | àkèré | → | àkèé | ‘flying toad’ |
| | xi. | àbùrò | → | àbùò | ‘younger person’ |

	xii.	àgbàrá	→	àgbàá	'erosion'
(7)b	i.	dúró	→	dúó	'wait'
	ii.	kúrò	→	kúò	'leave'
	iii.	dára	→	dáa	'good'
	iv.	seré	→	seé	'play'
	v.	bẹ̀rẹ̀	→	bẹ̀	'start'
	vi.	káre	→	káe	'hailing speech'
	vii.	yára	→	yáa	'hurry up/quickly'

The examples provided above confirm the claims of earlier scholars that:

- (8)
- i. r-deletion only occurs intervocalically
 - ii. r-deletion occurs between identical vowels
 - iii. where the vowels are not identical, one of the vowels must be /i/ or /u/, i.e. [+high] vowel.

One important observation in this study is that r-deletion is not obligatory in Yoruba. Resource persons for this study produced the examples in (7a, b) without deleting the /r/ sound. When the researchers gave other examples with /r/ in place, they agreed that they were correct productions of the items so produced. The implication of this is that the deletion of /r/ in standard Yoruba is not obligatory.

The (present) study further observes that the deletion of /r/ has extended beyond (8ii and iii) because examples reveal that /r/ is deleted between vowels that are not identical, and where a [+high] vowel does not occur before or after /r/. The following examples testify to the claim above:

- (9)
- | | | | |
|-------|---|------|---------------|
| káre | → | káe | 'an applause' |
| gbera | → | gbéa | 'rise up' |
| jàre | → | jàe | 'please' |

These examples were produced mainly by Oyo, Ofa, Ibàdàn speakers. The resource persons from Ado- Ekiti and Ilesa claimed they were aware of such production; they claimed they hardly produced the items with the /r/ sound deleted. The realization of examples like the ones in (9) suggests that deletion of /r/ between non-identical vowels, and where /i/ or /u/ does not occur before /r/ is developing further in the language. One may hypothesize that the deletion of /r/ may spread further to other words in the language.

It is further observed that vowel assimilation occurs when /r/ is deleted, particularly when the /r/ is deleted between the first two vowels that begin a word, as in:

òrùka	→	òùka	→	òòka	'ring'
òrìsà	→	òìsà	→	òòsà	'gods'

A number of examples reveal that r-deletion is not a generalized operation in the Standard Yoruba. The examples in (10a, b) do not permit r-deletion.

(10)a	i.	àparò	→	*àpaó	‘partridge’
	ii.	apári	→	*apái	‘bald headedness’
	iii.	èbùré	→	*èbùé	‘be calm’
	iv.	ìbúra	→	*ìbúa	‘oath (of office)’
	v.	ìtura	→	*ìtua	‘relaxation’
	vi.	ìrèlè	→	*ìelè	‘humility’
	vii.	èrúkó	→	*èúkó	‘hoe handle’
	viii.	ahéré	→	*ahée	‘hut’
	ix.	ewùrà	→	*ewuá	‘water yam’
	x.	ewúré	→	*ewue	‘goat’

(10)b	i.	bèrù	→	*bèu	‘be afraid’
	ii.	tòrò	→	*tòò	‘be clean (of water)’
	iii.	bàrà	→	*bàà	‘melon seed’
	iv.	wàrà	→	*wàà	‘cheese/ milk’
	v.	réré	→	*rée	‘goodness’
	vi.	gboró	→	*gboó	‘get tough’

The examples in (10a, b) confirm the exemptions to the deletion of /r/. Even where /r/ occurs between identical vowels, and where a high vowel occurs before or after /r/, the consonant remains undeleted. Noting the fact that the process is not obligatory in those examples where the deletion occurs, and equally noting the number of exemptions that fail to obey the process, one may argue that the process is not productive in the language.

4.2 Deletion of /w/

Deletion of /w/ is not robust in the standard dialect. Few examples relating to personal names are attested. Some of the few examples found in the course of the research are shown below:

(11)	i.	òwúró	→	òúró	→	òóró	‘morning’
	ii.	Akéwúsolá	→	akéusolá			‘personal name’
	iii.	Adébòwálé	→	Adeboale			‘personal name’
	iv.	Ọláfáwálé	→	Ọláfáale			‘personal name’
	v.	Abòwábá	→	Aboǎba			‘personal name’
	vi.	Adéwùmí	→	Adéùmí			‘personal name’
	vii.	Adéwuyì	→	Adeuyì			‘personal name’
	viii.	Adéwùyá	→	Adeùyá			‘personal name’

In (11, i), w-deletion is followed by vowel assimilation. The deletion of /w/ resulted in the juxtaposition of vowels /o/ and /u/, and this resulted in a regressive or backward assimilation resulting in /oo/ in [òóró] ‘morning’. It is noted that the deletion of /w/ in other examples in (11)

fails to result in assimilation. For instance, the deletion of /w/ in (11ii) resulted in the juxtaposition of /e/ and /u/, as contained in [akéúsoḷá] ‘personal name’, yet assimilation does not take place. The operation of assimilation in (11i) and the non-operation of the process in (11ii) will not be discussed further because the focus of the study is consonant deletion and not vowel assimilation.

4.3 Deletion of /y/

Standard Yoruba also permits the deletion of /y/ in a number of lexical items. The examples presented in (12) confirm the deletion of the consonant.

(12)	i.	báyìí	→	baìí	‘like this’
	ii.	èyí	→	èí	‘this’
	iii.	láyéláyé	→	láéláé	‘never’
	iv.	láyíwọlá	→	láíwọlá	‘personal name’
	v.	Adéyẹmí	→	Adéẹmí	‘personal name’
	vi.	Ọbayẹmí	→	Ọbaẹmí	‘personal name’
	vii.	Ogúnyẹmí	→	Ogúnẹmí	‘personal name’
	viii.	Ọláyẹmí	→	Ọláẹmí	‘personal name’
	ix.	Adéyeyè	→	Adéeyè	‘personal name’
	x.	Bóyẹjí	→	Bóẹjí	‘personal name’

As in the case in the deletion of /r/ and /w/, y-deletion also occurs intervocalically. However, the vowels before and after the consonant need not be identical, and one of them needs not be [+high]. The examples in (12 iii, v, vi, viii, ix, x) confirm the claims. Consonant deletion in Yoruba, therefore, does not only occur between identical vowels, and where a high vowel is present, as suggested in Oyelaran (1973) and Abimbola and Oyelaran (1975). Data in 12 reveals that it may also occur between any two non-identical vowels.

The operation of y-deletion as demonstrated in (12) is similar to the operation of r-deletion in the sense that it allows for a lot of exemptions. A host of items are not affected by the deletion process as witnessed in (13):

(13)	kúyè	→	*kúè	‘personal name’
	Ayéráyé	→	*aéraé	‘forever and ever’
	Oniyèyè	→	*oniyèé/oniyeë	‘funny person; unserious element’
	Àseyé	→	*àsee	‘social function’
	Àwíyè	→	*àwíé	‘clear statement’
	Adewoye	→	*Adéwọè	‘personal name’
	Iyìọlá	→	*ìọlá	‘personal name’
	Ayẹni	→	*Aẹni	‘personal name’
	Abioye	→	*Abíóè	‘personal name’
	Adéoyè	→	*Adéóè	‘personal name’
	Abídoye	→	*Abídoè	‘personal name’
	Kòlédoyè	→	*Kòledóè	‘personal name’

The examples in (13) and the observation that y-deletion in (12) is not obligatory in the language suggest that the deletion of /y/ is not fully developed in the language.

4.4 Deletion of /m/

The nasal consonant /m/ also undergoes deletion in two different environments in the Yoruba language. The consonant is often deleted between vowels in personal names, and also in the initial position of the first-person singular pronoun /mi/ in subject position. The two environments are discussed and illustrated below.

In personal names, the deletion is observed in the examples below.

(14)	i	Fúnmiláyò	→	Fúnunláyò	‘personal name’
	ii	Fúnmiké	→	Fúnunké	‘personal name’
	iii.	Fúnmilólá	→	Fúnunlólá	‘personal name’
	iv.	Fúnmisó	→	Fúnunsó	‘personal name’
	v.	Fúnmitó	→	Fúnuntó	‘personal name’
	vi.	Fúnmibí	→	Fúnunbí	‘personal name’
	vii.	Gbémilé	→	Gbéinlé	‘personal name’
	viii.	Yéwamidé	→	Yéwáindé	‘personal name’
	ix.	Bámidélé	→	Báindélé	‘personal name’
	x.	Gbémisólá	→	Gbéinsólá	‘personal name’

It is observed that /m/ is deleted, and a process of assimilation follows in (14i-vi). However, assimilation fails to operate in (14vii-x). This confirms the observation that it is not in all cases of consonant deletion that vowel assimilation follows.

The second environment of m-deletion is in the initial position. It occurs in the initial position of a clause, and also within a clause across word boundaries. The examples provided below confirm the environments of the deletion.

(15)a	i.	mi ò wá	→	in òn wá	I did not come.
	ii.	mi ò gbó	→	in òn gbó	I did not hear.
	iii.	mi ò ri	→	in òn rí	I did not see him/her/it.
	iv.	mi óò wá	→	in ínò wá	I will come.
	v	mi óò jísé	→	in ínò jísé	I will relay your message.
	vi	mi óò rí i	→	in ínò rí i	I will see him/her/it
(15)b	i.	mo ní mi ò wà	→	mo ní in òn wà	‘I said I will not come.’
	ii.	mo gbà pé mi ò lówó	→	mo gbà pé in òn lówó	‘I agree that I am poor.’
	iii.	won ní mi o gbon	→	wón ní in òn gbón	‘They said I am foolish.’
	iv.	Ó ní mi ó ga	→	Ó ní in òn ga	‘He said that I am not tall.’

A careful look at the examples in (15a, b) confirms the deletion of /m/ in grammatical contexts. The deletion is followed by vowel assimilation. It is equally observed that nasality

survives the deletion process. Both the negative marker /ò/ and the future marker /óò/ after /mi/ in (15a) are realized as /in/ at the surface level due to full assimilation that includes nasalization.

4.5 Deletion of /b/

As will be shown in this section, /b/-deletion is also manifested in personal names in the Standard dialect of the Yoruba language. The deletion is found mostly in personal names. The following examples attest to this.

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|-------------|---|----------|---------------------|
| (16) | i. | Babá mi | → | baa mi | ‘my father’ |
| | ii. | Babátunde | → | Baatunde | ‘personal name’ |
| | iii. | Babátolá | → | Baatolá | ‘personal name’ |
| | iv. | Baba iṣegun | → | Baasegun | ‘chieftaincy title’ |
| | v. | Babásolá | → | Baasoḷá | ‘personal name’ |
| | vi. | Babayemi | → | Baayemi | ‘personal name’ |

The examples gathered are few, but then, there is evidence of /b/-deletion. There is one particular example where /b/ is not deleted when /Baba/ is conspicuously present.

- (17) Babaloḷá → *Baaloḷá

The few examples attested, and the realization of an exemption suggests that /b/-deletion is not robust in the language.

4.6 Deletion of Reduplicated Consonants

Just as sonorants and some consonants are deleted in some grammatical constructions as discussed in section 4 – 4.5, any reduplicated consonant is also deleted in a grammatical construction where a gerund takes a prefix to derive a noun in this research. In the Yoruba language, gerunds are derived through a process of consonant reduplication. The initial consonant of a verb is reduplicated, and a vowel /i/ that carries a high tone is attached to the reduplicated consonant to derive gerunds, as witnessed below

- | | | | | | | |
|------|-------------|---|----------------------|---|----------------|-------------|
| (18) | Verb | | Reduplication | | Gerunds | |
| | lọ | → | l-lọ | → | lilo | going |
| | sún | → | s-sún | → | sísún | sleeping |
| | fó | → | f-fó | → | fífó | being empty |
| | dùn | → | d-dùn | → | dídùn | being sweet |

This process of deriving gerunds is very robust in the language as reported in Owolabi (1983), Awobuluyi (1986), Marantz (1982) and Abiodun (1997). It is further reported in Abiodun (2000) that some of the gerunds usually take prefixes to derive nouns. The following examples are taken from Abiodun (2000):

(19)	(i) Verbs	Gerunds Prefixation			Derived forms	
	tó →	tito	o + títo	→	òtito	'truth'
	fó →	fífo	o + fífo	→	òfífo	'emptiness'
	dú →	dídú	e + dídú	→	édídú	'charcoal'
	dun →	didun	a + didun	→	àdídùn	'sweet snack'
	kí →	kíkí	o + kíkí	→	òkíkí	'fame'

The scholar (Abiodun, 2000) makes a few important points that should be mentioned here to guarantee a good understanding of the behaviour of the nouns. The scholar notes the following:

- (20) i. as far as some of the derived nouns are concerned, the verb from which they are derived is already lost in present-day Yoruba. Even when a similar form of the verb is attested, it does not show a semantic relationship with the noun e.g.:

gun	→	gigun	→	egigun	'bone'
rí	→	rírí	→	èriri	'dirt'
pò	→	pípo	→	ekpìkpo	'back of a tree'
tán	→	títàn	→	àtìtàn	'rubbish heap'

- ii. where the verb root contains a [+high; +back] vowel, i.e /u/ the attached /i/ vowel assimilates the feature [+back] as shown below:

dú	→	dídú	→	edúdí
bú	→	bíbú	→	ebubu
tù	→	títù	→	otútù

- iii. where the verb root contains a [+high; +nasal] vowel, the attached vowel becomes nasalized

kùn	→	kikun	→	òkùnkùn	'darkeness'
fun	→	fifun	→	funfun	'white'
rin	→	ririn	→	òrìnrin	'cold'
sin	→	sisin	→	esinsin	'house fly'

- iv. Awobuluyi (1986) reports that in a number of cases, the tone of the inserted vowel may assimilate the tone of the prefix or the tone of the vowel of the root, e.g.

kí	→	kíkí	→	òkíkí	'fame'
kùn	→	kíkùn	→	òkùnkùn	'darkness'

While the points noted in (20) are important, they are not particularly relevant to the process of consonant deletion that forms the focus of this study. The important issue that is relevant here is the deletion of reduplicated consonants in gerunds that undergo prefixation to derive nouns. As would be revealed in the data (21) below, whenever the reduplicated consonant is deleted, an obligatory process of vowel assimilation applies to derive a grammatical surface form. The examples below confirm this:

(21)	òtító	→	òító	→	òóto	'truth'
	àtitan	→	àtàn	→	ààtàn	'rubblish heap'
	òtita	→	òità	→	òòtà	'kitchen stool'
	èkíkánna	→	èíkánna	→	èékánna	'finger nails'
	òyiyà	→	òiyà	→	òòyà	'local wooden comb'
	egbígbon	→	eígbon	→	eégbon	'tick'
	erirà	→	eirà	→	èèrà	'ants'
	esisin	→	eisin	→	eesin	'housefly'
	esísan	→	eísan	→	eésan	'palm kernel shell'
	egigun	→	eigun	→	eegun	'bone'
	èbíbì	→	èbí	→	èébì	'vomit (n)'
	otítù	→	oítù	→	oótù	'cold'
	ayíyán	→	aíyán	→	aáyán	'cockroach'
	èdídu	→	éídu	→	èédú	'charcoal'
	èbíbú	→	éíbú	→	èébú	'verbal abuse'
	epipo	→	eipo	→	eèpo	'bark of a tree'
	èríí	→	éíí	→	èéíí	'dirt'
	òrìrè	→	òìrè	→	òòrè	'far distance'
	èsìsì	→	èìsì	→	èèsì	'inadvertent mistake'
	òfifà	→	òìfà	→	òòfà	'pulley'
	orire	→	oire	→	oore	'kindness'
	erírú	→	eírú	→	eérú	'ashes'
	òkìkùn	→	òìkùn	→	òòkùn	'darkness'
	òkìkì	→	òìkì	→	òòkì	'fame'

The examples show that plosives, fricatives and approximants are deleted. The important point to note is that the consonants that are deleted are reduplicated forms of C₂ in VC₁ VC₂ V structure. This implies that the C that gets deleted is a reduplicated form of C₂.

As already mentioned, an obligatory vowel assimilation process must apply to derive the grammatical form; this is required in standard Yoruba. Some regional dialects such as Ekiti, Moba, Ikale, Ijesa, Ijebu do not operate the assimilation process (Afolabu, 1999; Olatayo, 2008; Oladeji, 2017; Aturamu, 2021; Oladimeji & Aina-Adebayo, 2025).

Further on the deletion of reduplicated consonants, Abiodun (2014) presents pieces of data where gerunds serve as modifiers of nouns, and the reduplicated consonants of the gerunds get deleted. The scholar focus more on describing the source of the verb-infinitive phrase marker, and pays little attention to the deletion issue. Some examples that show the deletion of reduplicated consonants of gerunds are presented below:

(22)	ewé dídu	→	ewé ídu	→	ewéédú	'type of soup'
	ọ̀bẹ̀. yíyò	→	ọ̀bẹ̀. íyò	→	ọ̀bẹ̀éyò	'drawing soup'
	ọ̀bẹ̀. gbígboná	→	ọ̀bẹ̀. igbóná	→	ọ̀bẹ̀égbóná	'hot/warmed soup'
	omi didùn	→	omi idùn	→	omiidùn	'sweet water'
	omi kikan	→	omi íkan	→	omiíkan	'sour water'

omi gbígbóná	→	omiigbóná	→	omiígbóná	‘hot water’
omi mímu	→	omiimu	→	omiímu	‘drinkable water’

Another set of examples where consonant deletion is observed is found where the adverb [púpò] modifies verbs. The reduplicated /p/ of [púpò], which occurs in the initial position of the word, is deleted in fast speech as shown below,

(23)	ó dun púpò.	→	ó dùn ún pò.	‘it is very sweet’
	ó ga púpò.	→	ó ga á pò.	‘he is very tall’
	wọn gò púpò.	→	wọn gò.ó pò.	‘they are very stupid’
	ó dáa púpò.	→	o dáa á pò.	‘it is very good’
	o sé púpò.	→	o sé é pò.	‘thank you very much’
	wọn gbọn púpò.	→	wọn gbọn ọn pò.	‘they are very clever’
	ó rẹwà púpò.	→	ó rẹwà á pò.	‘she is very beautiful’
	ó dúdú púpò.	→	ó dúdúúpò.	‘it is very black’
	ò n wòran púpò.	→	ò n wòran án pò.	‘you lose concentration too much’
	ó n sùn púpò.	→	ò n sùn ún pò.	‘you sleep too much’
	wọn sanra pupo	→	wọn sanra a pò.	‘they are very fat’

The pieces of data in (21), (22) and (23) clearly demonstrate deletion of reduplicated consonants. Deletion in (21) occurs across a morpheme boundary; those in (22) and (23) reflect consonant deletion across a word boundary. The illustrations below confirm the claims

(24)a	prefix		root					
	ò	+	tító.	→	òító.	→	òóto.	‘truth’
	ò	+	fífa	→	òífa	→	òòfà	‘pulley’
	è	+	bíbi	→	èbí	→	èébi	‘vomit (n)’

(24)b	ewé # dídú	→	ewé idú	→	ewéédú	‘type of soup’
	ọ̀bẹ̀ # yíyò.	→	ọ̀bẹ̀.íyò.	→	ọ̀bẹ̀ é. yò.	‘drawinig soup’
	ga # pipò.	→	ga ípò.	→	ga á pò.	‘very tall’

One notes that even when the deletion is across word/morpheme boundary, the deleted elements have a vowel before and after them. This implies that the elements are deleted intervocalically. Another important observation in respect of deletion of reduplicated consonants is that vowel assimilation follows the process of consonant deletion. This, apparently, is not the case in all the cases when /r/ or /y/ is deleted. The examples below confirm this.

(25)a	dúró	→	duo / *dúú; dóó	‘wait’
	èkùrò.	→	èkùò/ *èkùú; èkòò.	‘palm nut’

(25)b	èyí	→	èí / *èé; íí	‘this’
	layelaye	→	láéláé / *laalaa; Leelee	‘never’

The examples in (25a, b) show that assimilation does not automatically follow consonant deletion as suggested by the deletion of reduplicated consonants demonstrated in (21), (22), (23).

4.7 Deletion of /k/ in Negative Marker

The preverbal elements: /kò/ and /kì/ are used in Yoruba to negate verbs as demonstrated below:

(26)a	i.	Adé sùn	‘Ade slept’
	ii.	Adé kò sùn	‘Ade did not sleep’
(26)b	i.	Adé lọ si oja	‘Ade went to the market’
	ii.	Adé kò lọ si oja	‘Ade did not go to the market’
(27)a	i.	Olú n gbọ̀rò	‘Olu listens to advice’
	ii.	Olú kì í gbọ̀rò	‘Olu does not heed advice’
(27)b	i.	Olú n jẹ eso	‘Olu eats fruits’
	ii.	Olú kì í jẹ eso	‘Olu does not eat fruits’

Whereas the constructions in (26ai; bi) and (27ai; bi) are positive sentences, those in (26aii, bii) and (27aii, bii) are negative sentences because of the presence of [kò] and [kì], respectively. The /k/ of these negative elements may be deleted in normal speech without any consequence on meaning e.g.

(28)a	Adé kò sùn	→	Adé ò sùn	‘Ade did not sleep’
	Adé kò lọ si oja	→	Ade ò lọ si oja	‘Ade did not go to the market’
(28)b	Olú kì í gbọ̀rò	→	Olu ì í gbọ̀rò	‘Olu does not heed advice’
	Olú kì í jẹ eso	→	Olú ì í jẹ eso	‘Olu does not eat fruit’

The deletion of /k/ is also across word boundaries, and there is no vowel assimilation after the deletion of the consonant, as witnessed in the deletion of reduplicated consonants. It should be mentioned that the deletion of /k/ is blocked when /kò/ or /kì/ occurs at the beginning of a sentence, e.g.:

(29)	kò wá	→	*ò wá
	kì i wá	→	*í i wa

This means that the deletion of /k/ is only permitted when another vowel occurs before it.

4.8 Deletion of /f/ in [fún]

The word [fún] in Yoruba has different meanings depending on the context of speech. It could serve as a verb, as in:

- | | | | |
|------|------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| (30) | i. | Aye náà fún púpò. | 'The space is tight/not enough' |
| | ii. | O fún mi ni owó | 'He gave me money' |
| | iii. | Adé ra asọ fún Òjọ | 'Ade bought clothes for Òjọ' |

Whereas in (30i, ii) [fún] functions as a verb, it functions as a preposition in (30iii). It introduces the noun Òjọ as the recipient of the item bought in (30iii). In a very restricted construction, the /f/ of [fún] is often deleted when it serves as a preposition. The examples are limited to these two as far as the research shows.

- | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------|---|---------|------------------|
| (31) | i. | ya fun mi | → | yà á mi | 'leave the road' |
| | ii. | ṣe fún mi | → | se e mi | 'leave me alone' |

It is observed that the deletion of /f/ allows for vowel juxtaposition and eventual vowel assimilation, e.g.

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------|---|----------|---|---------|------------------|
| (32) | i. | ya fun mi | → | yà ún mi | → | yà á mi | 'leave the road' |
| | ii. | ṣe fún mi | → | se ún mi | → | se e mi | 'leave me alone' |

The assimilation process results in the loss of nasality because the surface forms in (32) do not reflect nasality on the element that undergoes assimilations.

5. Discussion

This study reveals that nearly all the consonants in Standard Yoruba can undergo deletion. This is particularly so when one considers deletion of reduplicated consonants as revealed in the discussion in the study. It is important to add that all initial consonants of verbs can be reduplicated to derive gerunds.

While it is true that nearly all consonants can be deleted, there is deletion of some consonants in specific grammatical constructions. For instance, /r/ is deleted intervocally in a large number of items as earlier scholars pointed out (Oyelaran, 1973; Abimbola & Oyelaran, 1975; Akinlabi, 1993), and as equally discussed in this study. It is reported in this study that a large number of items that meet the structural description of r-deletion do not come up with deletion of /r/ at the surface level, e.g.:

- | | | | | |
|------|-------|---|-------|---------------|
| (28) | ewúro | → | ewúro | 'bitter leaf' |
| | ewúré | → | ewúré | 'goat' |

The study reports that the deletion of each of /w, m, b, f, k/, where there is no reduplication, is restricted to a limited grammatical construction and with very few examples.

The important point to note here is that though the examples are limited to a few items, there is evidence of consonant deletion in the items.

One important observation in respect of the deletion process described in this study is that the process is not obligatory. The language resource persons consulted for data collection all agree that the process is not obligatory. They contend that non-deletion of consonants in the pieces of data supplied in this study does not impair effective communication. It is further observed in the study that for every piece of data presented, there are exemptions. There are exemptions to the deletion of /r, b, m, y, k, f/ and to the deletion of reduplicated consonants. Examples of deletion, as already reported in the study, are limited to a few examples.

From the foregoing in this section, it is possible to contend that consonant deletion in Standard Yoruba did not evolve fully, and this resulted in a non-symmetrical pattern whereby some consonants have robust examples to demonstrate their deletion, while some have highly limited and restricted instances. The realization of many exceptions in almost all instances involving the deletion of each of the consonants further suggests that the process did not evolve fully.

Noting further, the deletion of consonants in standard Yoruba is not restricted to intervocalic position as hitherto suggested in Oyelaran (1973), Abimbola and Oyelaran (1975) and Akinlabi (1993). These scholars focus more on the deletion of /r/, and this perhaps led to the conclusion relating to intervocalic position. As this study reveals, /m/ is deleted in the initial position of a clause, as shown in:

Mi ò gbọ́	→	in in gbọ́	'I didn't hear'
Mi ò wa	→	in in wa	'I didn't come'

The negative /o/ takes on the full features of the vowel of the first-person subject pronoun /mi/, thereby becoming /in/. Apart from the case of /m/, deletion of initial consonant occurs across word boundary as:

gò.púpò	→	gò.upò	→	gò.ó.pò	'very stupid'
ewé dídú	→	ewé ídú	→	ewé é dú	'type of soup'
ọ̀bẹ̀ yíyọ̀	→	ọ̀bẹ̀ íyọ̀	→	ọ̀bẹ̀ é yọ̀	'drawing soup'
dùn púpò	→	dùn úpò	→	dùn ún pò	'very sweet'

Another important point of interest is the assimilation process in a number of cases after the process of consonant deletion. It was reported that vowel assimilation occurs in almost all the cases where reduplicated consonants are deleted, and in the examples where /f/ of /fun/ is deleted. The study reveals vowel assimilation in the deletion of reduplicated consonant, and in the deletion of /f/ and /w/. The examples below confirm vowel assimilation in some instances.

òtító	→	òító	→	òótó	'truth'
òfifà	→	òifà	→	òòfà	'pulley'
ya fun mi	→	yà ún mi	→	yà á mi	'leave the road'
ṣe fún mi	→	se ún mi	→	se e mi	'leave me alone'

ga pipò	→	ga ipò	→	gaapò	‘very tall’
dùn púpò	→	dùn úpò	→	dùn ún pò	‘very sweet’

In other case however, assimilation fails to occur after consonant deletion. This is a pointer to the fact that assimilation is not obligatory after consonant deletion in all cases in the Yoruba language. The unpredictable nature of the assimilation process cannot be easily explained; it is, however, suggested here that further research is required to explain the interface between consonant deletion and vowel assimilation in Yoruba language.

7. Conclusion

This study takes a comprehensive position in looking at the process of consonant deletion in Standard Yoruba. The study is considered comprehensive because it goes beyond the discussion of *r*-deletion and deletion of reduplicated consonants that have received wide attention. The study investigates every possible instance of consonant deletion in the standard speech form of the language. The study reveals that consonant deletion is not predictable in the language because a number of exceptions are found in every case that involves the deletion of any particular consonant. The study concludes that consonant deletion in Yoruba has not developed fully based on its unpredictable nature in the language and the extent of exceptions found in every case involving different consonants.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest as far as this article is concerned. It has not been published by any journal. It is also original in scope and content. No section of the article is lifted from any published article.

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