

‘HIGH-TONE-JUNCTION-CONTRACTING VERBS’ IN YORUBA

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The term ‘high-tone-junction-contracting verbs’, which serves as the title of this paper, is borrowed from Bamgboṣe¹ who used it to label the class of Yoruba verbs listed more or less in full below:

ḡíwó	to stop (doing something)
mḡ	to know
yé	to stop, to desist from (doing something)
kó	to learn, teach
kú	a verb used only in greetings
lí	to have
bèrè	to start
sú	to bore, be tired of, be fed up with
ḡe	to do
wù	to appeal to, to please
kpé	to be late
fé	to want
yá	to be fast or quick
ḡòro	to be difficult
gó	to tire out
dù	to be sweet, pleasant
tó	to be up to, be sufficient, be enough
wá	to come
lò	to go ²
dára	to be good

This same class of verbs has recently also been described as ‘verbs with lengthened vowels’.³ The question arises, however, as to whether these two terms, based as they are on surface structure considerations only, constitute an accurate characterization of these verbs. It is the contention of the present paper that not only is this not the case, the two terms have also in turn inspired further misleading empirical claims about the structure of the language.

Thus, on the basis of his observation that these verbs contract a ‘high-tone junction’, as in

- (1) a mḡ oko ó kó⁴
lit. ‘We know farm hoeing’
i.e. ‘We know how to hoe’

¹ Ayo Bamgboṣe. *A GRAMMAR OF YORUBA*, West African Language Monographs, no. 5 (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 77.

² On the inclusion of this verb here, see E. C. Rowlands. *TEACH YOURSELF YORUBA* (London: English Universities Press, 1969), p. 66.

³ See loc. cit.

⁴ This transcription does not indicate tone change and (vowel) elision.

