

# A Few More Heteronyms/Heterophones to Buttress the Argument that Yoruba is a Language Isolate



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## Perspective

“The Yoruba language is very musical....to distinguish the tones thus becomes very indispensable” [1]. “In Yoruba, vowels are of greater importance than consonants, and tones than vowels; hence the peculiarity of this language, that musical sounds can be employed to convey a correct idea of words in speech” [2]. “The language however abounds in contractions and elisions; a whole syllable may be dropped but the tone remaining. This is the crux of difficulty with foreigners trying to speak the language. There is no word accent in Yoruba, the tone governs everything.... [3].

“No consonants are used to represent a vowel by perverting them from their legitimate consonanted sounds as ‘h’, ‘w’ and ‘y’ are sometimes used in English [4].

“The labours of Mr. Crowther who reduced the language and collected into a vocabulary several thousand words and of Mr. Bowen who increased the number to about eight thousand words show most conclusively its fullness and variety which, in the progress of time, must become more and more manifest

as continual study and investigation develop its resources. It is capable of almost indefinite expansion and is so constructed that a scholar familiar with all its principles could increase the number of words ad infinitum. It is a language of vowels having but very few consonants and is thus rendered more difficult to acquire, especially those whose language is differently constructed...The language is most difficult because of the innumerable contractions made by the natives in rapid speaking. Not infrequently contracted into three and seven into four and five, so puzzling the learner that he considers it next to an impossibility to catch the words with any distinctness. If, on the other hand he tries to speak it he will oftentimes find himself expressing an idea he never thought of by wrong accent.

The language is abundant in proverbs and such expressions as indicate thought” [5] A few more examples of Yoruba homographs and heterophones/ heteronyms include the following: kindly note that the alphabet ‘d’ stands for the sound ‘do’, ‘r’ stands for the sound ‘re’ and ‘m’ for ‘mi’ (Table 1).

Table 1:

Yoruba Word	Pronunciation	Meaning
Pade	Mm dm	Shut meet
Agbo	Dd dr	Ram Herbal brew
Alo	Dm Rr rd	Riddle Going Something ground
Apata	Dmr Rrr drd	Rock Shield butcher
koriko	Rmr drd	Grass Wolf
Won	M r	Scarce, rare, expensive Them
Osun	Rd dr	Camwood, sandalwood A river; A Yoruba Goddess
Aba	Rd Dm dd	Hamlet Suggestion/plan Ladder

Ori	Rm Dm	Head Shea butter
Ore	Rr Rm Dm	Gift Cane/whip Friend
Sa	M R M (with accent on 'S')	Run Hang to dry fade
ku	M d	Die Remain
Eni	Rm Rr	Mat Person
Gbe	M R M (with accent on 'e')	Dig Carry Dry
Egba	Rr Dm Rd	Cane/whip A Yoruba tribe Take! Receive!
kan	M D M	To break To touch To become sour or go off taste
Asa	Dm dd	Eagle Culture/tradition
Ede	Rr Dd	Name of a Yoruba town Language
Elede	Rmd (with accent on all three 'e's) Rmr Rmd	Pig Person from town called "Ede" Speaker of a certain language
Ji	m	Wake steal
aji	Rd dm	Second gap
Eje	Rd mr	Blood The numeral 7
Esan	Dr md	Reward, comeuppance The numeral 9
Ogbon	Rm rd	Intelligence The numeral 30
Ogun	Rm rd	Eighth month of the year according to Yoruba calendar A river
kere	Mm rd	Small Not intelligent
kokoro	Mmm Mmm (with accents on the three 'o's) ddd	Tubular snack Key Insect
koro	Rd (accent on both 'o's) Rd (no accents on 'o's)	Hidden place Bitter
Yiyo	Md Mr Mm	Slippery Removal Satiety
Were	Mm Rd Mm (accent on both 'e's)	A genre of vocal and percussive music Lunatic Quickly, suddenly
Oka	Rd Rm	Brew, porridge Python

wo	D R M M (with accent below 'o')	Watch Enter Demolish Skewed/tilted
Fi	D m	Tremble/shake put
Ero	Dr Rd	Engine Thought/thinking
Agba	Rr Dd Dm	Rope Adult/Senior citizen Canon
Ayan	Mr Rm dm	Anxiety, nervousness Cockroach Hardwood
Baba	Dm Mm Dd	Father Filled up Guinea corn
eri	Rd Rd (with accent on 'e') rm	Cornchaff Dirt head
Iko	Rm Rd dm	Cough State messenger Hook, suspension from hook
Bata	Dd dm	Shoe Drum/type of dance associated with said drum
Awo	Rm Rd Rr Dm Rd (accent on 'o')	Guinea fowl Fishing net Secret Crash Hue/tint/coloration
darandaran	Rrrr mdmd	Shepherd/pastoralism criminal
rinrin	Md rr	Walking Saturated/soaking/sodden
ijo	Rm dr	Dancing Assembly/congregation/church
ajo	Rd dr	Journey Common purse
ayo	Rd Rd (accent on 'o')	Board game joy
odo	Rd Dd dr	Stream Place The numeral zero
Riro	Md Mr (with accent on 'o') Mr Md (with accent on 'o')	Stirred Metal working Ache/pain soft
eto	Rd dm	Plan/schedule/process/procedure Rights, inheritance
ito	Rm Rd	Saliva/sputum urine
Aje	Dm rm	Witch/sorceress Trade
ete	Rd Rd (with accents on both 'e's)	Lips leprosy
oju	Rm mr	Eye Greater than

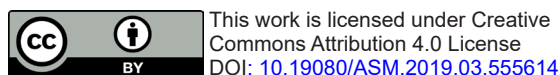
idi	Dm Rd Dr	Reason, buttocks Eagle Bunch of fruits
eku	Rr rm	Rat A greeting
ife	Mm dm	Whistle Love/desire/will
ebe	Rd Dr dd	Heap Porridge pleading
tete	Dd rd	Speedily Kind of vegetable
iwó	Dr Rd Dm Rd (with accent on 'o')	You, yourself To watch/view Name of a Yoruba town To wear clothes/jewelry etc
sisan	Md mr	Watery payment
Apa	Rm Rd dm	Arm Prodigal/miscreant scar
lilo	Mr md	To go To use
otito	Mrm dmm	Enough! truth
erin	Dm rr	Laughter Elephant
ola	Rm dr	Wealth Tomorrow, the future
eti	Rm rd	Ear A day of the week
titi	Md mm	Closed Evermore/until
sisí	Mm Rm md	Open Young lady Sixpence
nina	Mm md	Spending of money, energy etc To beat up
bibi	Mm md	To give birth to To vomit
eke	Dm Dm (no accent on the 'e's)	Cheek trickery
aya	Dd rr	Chest Wife/bride
fo	D M D (with accent on 'o')	Fly Break wash
ta	D r	Sell peppery
ki	R m	Thick greet
esin	Rr rd	Horse religion
ope	Dr rm	Palm oil praise
Ale	Rm rd	Night mistress

oye	Rd rm	Chieftaincy harmattan
Na	M D	Spend Stretch/elongate/tighten

Sese	dd	Fresh, recently,
	Dr	get injured/wounded
Lana	dd	make something possible/create opportunity
	Rm	malfunction (especially of equipment/machinery)
Sina	md	cause a breakthrough
	Dm	waywardness, wantonness, profligate

## References

1. Crowther Samuel (1852) A Grammar of the Yoruba Language Compiled by Samuel Crowther, together with introductory remarks, by the Rev. O. E. Vidal. London.
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3. Ibid Page xxx
4. Ibid Page xxvii
5. Clarke, William H (1972) Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland (1854-1858). University Press, pp. 269-271.



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