

A Linguistic Exposition of *NGBÓ* in Yoruba

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Abstract

Ngbó is an interactive resource for enabling social relations between in a discourse setting. There are various extant studies on syntax of various lexical and syntactic constructions in Yoruba with little attention paid to the syntactic status of 'ngbó' amongst the structural elements of a clause. 'Ngbó' is seemingly found around interrogative clause; however, there are divergent opinions on its functional role whether as a question marker, a complementizer, or a sentence modifier. Based on these backdrops, this study investigated the status of ngbó in Yoruba language with a view to ascertaining its syntactic and pragmatic functions in the structural formation of Yoruba expressions. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) served as theoretical framework. Through a purposive sampling technique, hypothetical data from day to day conversations among the native speakers of standard Yoruba and extracted samples of ngbó- expressions from Yoruba published literary texts formed data for this study. The finding revealed that the focused lexeme is not a question marker rather it is truncated clause used as sentence modifier specifically, as comment adjunct which evidentially expresses source of the clause proposition. Thus, ngbó exposes the speaker's background knowledge on the clause proposition. In addition to its evidential import on the clause content, it also encodes speaker's commitment to the truth of the clause proposition. In such a context, it is adjudged as an epistemic modality, which validates the speaker's personal responsibility for the evaluation of the information whether the information is actually shared or not by the readers.

Keywords: evidentiality, functional grammar, interrogative clause, Ngbó

1. Introduction

The perspective that regards language as the core or heart of communication is widely accepted. Language generates meaning by defining intent behind expressions in such that, production of any comprehensible statement is expected to have followed a systematic arrangement of words, adhering to established lexico-grammatical features, which typically predict the speaker's choice of words in building

the content of his/her communicative intention. With this understanding, it becomes evident that speech construction is not arbitrary; rather, it follows a systematic arrangement grounded in the grammatical framework of the language. In Yorubá syntax, it has been observed that *Ngbó* (its English translation is context-driven) often appears at the periphery or sentence initial position. The view of many people is that, occurrence of this lexeme typically defines interrogative expressions. This singular claim

has raised controversy among the native speakers on the syntactic status of *ngbó*. What are interrogatives and their markers in Yorùbá?

Numerous existing studies have explored diverse aspect of interrogatives in Yorùbá language. Notable works in this field include BamgboṢe (1990:183-86), Awobuluyi (2013), Yusuff (1995), Atoyebi (1998:195-00), Aboderin (2000: 43-8), Taiwo (2014), Taiwo & Olakolu (2020), Adejube (2013), Taiwo & Abimbola (2014), Olarewaju (2022: 24-6), and Afolayan (2022) among others (BámgbóṢé Ayo, 1990; Awobuluyi Oladele, 2013; Yusuff Ore, 1995; Atoyebi Lanre, 1998; Abòḍérin Oluwakemi, 2000; Taiwo Oye, 2014; Taiwo Oye. & Olakolu Oluwatoyin, 2020; Adéjùbèè Sunday, 2013; Taiwo Oye & Abimbola Olabode, 2014; Olanrewaju Emmanuel, 2022; Afolayan Olufunmilayo, 2022). Most of these studies agree that an interrogative is a statement designed to elicit information about something that is unclear. An interrogative sentence is used as a question. Any construction deemed interrogative contextually implies that the speaker is seeking a specific amount of information (Awobuluyi Oladele, 2013). Interrogative sentences are often derived from declarative sentences, typically utilizing a specific lexeme as a question marker or by employing a rising intonation. They can be classified into various types based on the type of response the speaker anticipates and their structural formation. Such classifications include polar questions, which require a yes or no answer; wh- or content questions, which demand a statement or explanation; alternative questions, which present options for a response; and rhetorical questions, which often expect no reply.

The question items that elicit responses in Yoruba include *Ṣé* and *ńjẹ* 'is it/ 'will I' for polar questions, and nominal expressions such as *ta* ('who'), *kí* ('which'), *èwo* ('which'), *èlò* ('how much'), and *ibo* ('where') for wh-questions (BámgbóṢé Ayo, 1990). Verbal expressions like *dà* ('where is it') and *ńkó* ('what about') appear at the end of sentences to indicate a question, while adverbial forms such as *bí* and *kẹ* also serve interrogative functions.

In the meantime, *ngbó* has been observed as one of the clausal elements especially, in the environment of interrogative clause. In other words, we do hear people express sentences such as those in (b) part of the sentences below:

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1) | (a) | <i>Ó sẹ́lẹ́</i> | Declarative |
| | | It happened. | |
| | (b) | <i>Ngbó, Ó sẹ́lẹ́.</i> | |
| | | Is it true, it happened! | |
| 2) | (a) | <i>Ṣé o sẹ́lẹ́?</i> | Yes/No interrogative |
| | | Did it happen? | |
| | (b) | <i>Ngbó, Ṣé o sẹ́lẹ́?</i> | |
| | | Is it true, did it happen? | |
| 3) | (a) | <i>kí ni ó lọ sẹ́lẹ́?</i> | Wh-interrogative |
| | | What happened? | |
| | (b) | <i>Ngbó, kí ni ó sẹ́lẹ́?</i> | |
| | | (is it true), what happened? | |
| 4) | (a) | <i>Jẹ́ kí ó sẹ́lẹ́.</i> | Imperative |
| | | Let it happen. | |
| | (b) | <i>Ngbó, jẹ́ kí ó sẹ́lẹ́!</i> | |
| | | (is it true), let it happen! | |

As the syntactic reading of each of the sentences in 'a' (1-4) above shown, the clauses are adjudged as declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences. Amazingly, sentences in 'b' (1-4) are constructed with the word *ngbó* along with other items in (a) counterparts. Following the earlier analyses that recognized the morpheme *Ṣé* 'is it' and *ta* 'who' as question marker (QM: hereafter) in each of the sentences in 2 and 3 above, the question that arises here is, 'what is the syntactic status of *ngbó* in such 'b' contexts' in the *b* counterparts? As suggested in the semantic contents of all the sentences in 1-4 'b', it is possible to get similar proposition suggested in sentences in 1-4 a' from all the sentences in 'b' regardless of the morphological realisation of the *ngbó* at their internal structures. In other words, the adjoined *ngbó* in the 'b' sentences does not semantically make the sentences' propositions in 'a' different from those sentences in 'b'. Thus, it possible to postulate that the presence of 'ngbó' at the beginning of the expressions in 'b' is seemingly being directed towards another interpersonal orientation different from questioning.

From the content meaning of the declarative clause in 1(b) above *Ngbó, Ó sẹ́lẹ́* 'Is it true, that it happened', the language function expresses by *ngbó* is actually to verify the truth condition of the clause content. That is, it seeks for verification or confirmation of the clause proposition. The utterance in (2b), *Ngbó, Ṣé o sẹ́lẹ́* 'Is it true, did it happen'? Instantiates yes/no

question. In such a context, the lexeme *ṣé* 'did it' represents the QM which confers questioning motif on the clause proposition. With this revelation, it can be deduced that rather than questioning, *ngbó* as part of the clause elements encodes something else especially, the speaker's commitment to the truth condition of the clause. In 3 (b), the QM *kí* 'what' denotes QM as against *ngbó*. This proposes that rather than questioning or expression of the truth condition of the clause content, *ngbó* articulates information related to the source of clause proposition. In the imperative clause in 4(b) *ngbó*, '*jé kí ó sélé*, (is that/true) 'Let it happen', *ngbó* is neither suggesting questioning nor truth value of the clause, it reveals the speaker's awareness on the background information regarding the clause's proposition. That explains reason why *ngbó* cannot contextually translate as *is it true*' in the clause but *if you wish/like*. From the structural description of the clauses in 4 above, *ngbó* cannot be adjudged as QM. The explanation shows that the language functions of *ngbó* is context driven and speaker oriented. Thus, the context will be needed to disambiguate its various structural functions as demonstrated in the following examples:

- 5) (a) *Ngbo, ki lo wi?*
Hey/listen, what did you say?
- (b) *Ngbo, won ko si nile.*
Is it true, they are not at home?
- (c) *Ngbo, wa nibi.*
Truly/really, come here.

The linguistic examination of the lexical item in sentence 5a reveals that it cannot be considered as a question marker (QM) due to the presence of *kí* ('what'), which is well established in Yorùbá as a QM for content-answer questions (BámgbóṢé Ayo, 1990; Awobuluyi Oladele, 2013; Taiwo Oye, 2014). The second part of sentence 5b, *won ko si nile* delivers information rather than posing a question, even with the presence of *Ngbo*, whereas the same lexeme co-occurs with an imperative command in 5c. This syntactic observation suggests that *Ngbo* can appear alongside any sentence type in Yorùbá. This affirms the ongoing controversy over the grammatical status of *Ngbo* in Yorùbá as QM.

Years back, few studies in Yorùbá have focused on the grammatical status of specific items. Abòdèrín (2000: 45-8) offers an extensive analysis of the syntactic role of *kílóde* ('why') and

nítorí kí ní ('because of what') in Yorùbá (Abòdèrín Oluwakemi, 2000). This asserted that these two focused expressions function as wh-reason QMs, differing both syntactically and morphologically. Specifically, *kílóde* ('why') was found to be a sentence that, over time, has lost its original sentential status. Conversely, *nítorí kí ní* ('because of what') is a single lexical item typically found in focus constructions. A separate lexical analysis of *Gboḍo* was conducted by Adewole (1990:74:82), taking excerpts from narrative texts (Adewole Femi, 1990). The study argued that *Gboḍo* is a modal, given that its semantic function comments directly on the speaker's attitude toward the utterance or the degree of commitment to the statement. This analysis provides valuable insight into the systemic function of peripheral items beyond their roles as subjects or predicates in sentences. Inferences from the earlier studies on syntactic status of some items in Yoruba (Abòdèrín Oluwakemi, 2000; Adewole Femi, 1990); together with the divergent views on the syntactic status of *Ngbo* in Yorùbá clausal structures, have motivated the researchers to examine the meta-discourse functionality of *Ngbo* and its role in Yorùbá communicative discourse. The study is specifically sets to:

- analyze the syntactic structure of *ngbó* specifically within interrogative constructions in Yorùbá language.
- assess the morphological derivation in determining the grammatical status of *Ngbo* in various Yorùbá expressions, using data collected from three published literary texts.
- describe the contextual functions of *ngbó* in Yorùbá discourse.

2. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative content analysis approach. Using a purposive sampling technique, the data for the study comprised hypothetical/anonymous examples from everyday conversations among native speakers of standard Yorùbá, as well as extracted dialogues from three published Yorùbá literary texts: *Reré rún* by Oládèjò Okediji, *Abé Àbò* by Akinwùmí Ìsòlá, and *Omijé Ayò* by Adekéyè Bólánlé (Òkèdìjì Oladejo, 1973; Ìsòlá Akinwumi, 1997; Adekéyè Foluke, 2012). Only conversations that feature the use of *Ngbo* were selected from these drama texts. In total, five conversations were analyzed (two from *Okediji*, one from

Akinwumi, and two from *Adékéyẹ*) due to their comprehensive exploration of *Ngbó* within their internal structures. Both the hypothetical data and the secondary data were translated from the source language (Yorùbá) to the operational language (English) to ensure ease of understanding and mutual intelligibility. The data were then subjected to textual analysis, followed by interpretation and discussion as appropriate.

3. Previous Studies on *NGBÓ*

As revealed in some of the reviewed existing works on the elements of Yorùbá sentences, only a few have focused on the linguistic status of *Ngbó*. Consequently, the grammatical status of this word has not received significant attention from earlier scholars. A summary of some earlier works on *Ngbó* is presented below:

Atoyebi (1998: 196) identified six different groups of question markers (QMs) in Yorùbá. The identified QMs were classified according to the contextual meaning of the answers they elicit (Atoyebi Lanre, 1998). He categorized *Ngbó* as one of the Yorùbá polar QMs, used to elicit information about the truth condition of a given statement. His classification is outlined as follows:

- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè Asoyé: 'Quantity question markers,' e.g., *èlò* ('how much'), *mélòò* ('how many').
- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè AṢàfihàn: 'Modifier question markers,' e.g., *wo* ('which'), *èwo/iwo* ('which one').
- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè Aṣòbùdó: 'Place question marker,' e.g., *ibo* ('where').
- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè Wíwà: 'Existence question marker,' e.g., *dà* ('where is it?').
- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè Aránnilétí: 'Reminder question marker,' e.g., *ńkó* ('what of/about?').
- Wúnrèn AṢèbèèrè Afídí-òótó-múlè: 'Truth conditional question markers,' e.g., *Ṣé* ('is it'), *ńjé* ('is it'), *bí* ('how'), and *ngbó/egbó* ('is it true').

Based on Atoyebi's classification, *Ngbó/egbó*, as applicable, is grouped with *Ṣé*, *ńjé*, and *bí* as truth conditional QMs. He referred to these collectively as 'truth conditional question markers.' However, if we examine the structural features of *Ngbó* in the context of interrogative constructions, we find that, contrary to Atoyebi's

analysis, the semantic implications of this lexeme extend beyond truth conditions and encompass other syntactic-pragmatic functions for the fact that, use of *Ngbó* sometimes in another communication setting, implies that the speaker has prior knowledge or background information about a past event. In essence, the communicative inference that a listener could draw from an interrogative sentence featuring *Ṣé* or *ńjé* is pragmatically different from what they would infer from an utterance containing *Ngbó*. Consider the following sentences:

Example 6

a. *Ṣé/ńjé ó ti wá?*

Has he come?

b. *Ngbó, ó ti wá!*

Is it true, he has come!

c. *Ngbó, ṣé ó ti wá?*

Is it true, has he come?

From the sentences above, it is evident that *Ngbó* can co-occur with other question items. Syntactically, *Ngbó* and *Ṣé/ńjé* can appear together in an interrogative construction, as demonstrated in example (6c). This syntactic arrangement supports the argument that the functional roles of *Ngbó* and *Ṣé/ńjé* are distinct. Based on their syntactic positioning, where *Ngbó* precedes *Ṣé/ńjé*, it would not be an overgeneralization to consider *Ngbó* as a modifier that potentially modifies the entire interrogative clause containing *Ṣé* or *ńjé*.

Similarly, Adéjube (2013) describes *Ngbó/egbó* as a complementizer, contrary to Atoyebi's classification of it as a truth-conditional question marker (Adéjube Sunday, 2013). Complementizers in Yorùbá syntax function to complete the meaning of the constituents they accompany. Does *Ngbó* fulfill this role? Is *Ngbó* necessary to complete the meaning of the clause? In the present researcher's view, *Ngbó* does not contribute to the completion of the sense in these sentences. Its presence or absence does not affect the overall meaning of the clause content, as illustrated by comparing sentences in 7 (a-c) with those in 7(d-f) below:

7)

a. *Ngbó, wọn pa ọmọ náà.*

Is it true, they killed the child?

b. *Ngbó, se wọn pa ọmọ náà?*

Is it true, did they kill the child?

c. *Ngbó, pa ọmọ náà.*
Is it true (if you like/wish), kill the child

d. *Wọn pa ọmọ náà.*
They killed the child

e. *Se wọn pa ọmọ náà?*
Did they kill the child?

f. *Pa ọmọ náà*
Kill the child.

As evident in 7 (d, e, & f) above, the omission of *Ngbó* does not, in any way, alter the clause proposition in each of the examples in 7 (a, b, & c). In other words, *Ngbó* has no interpretative impact on the illocutionary force generated by the sentences in (7a-c). This is because the mood of a clause can be distinguished from its structural composition. For instance, a declarative mood activates the statement in 7a, an interrogative mood forms the question in 7b, and an imperative mood delivers the command in 7c.

It is important to note that in an imperative clause, *Ngbó* is not linguistically translated as ‘is it true’; instead, it is construed as a conditional phrase that can be interpreted literally as ‘if you like’ or ‘if you wish.’ This underscores that the interpretation of *Ngbó* is context-dependent. Therefore, *Ngbó* cannot be categorized as a complementizer, such as *tí* (used in adjectival clauses), *ní* (focusing), *kí* (indirect command), or *bí* (conditional), contrary to Adejube’s argument. This is because the core meaning of each of the sentences in 7 (d-f) is already complete without the inclusion of *Ngbó*.

4. Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Grammar

Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) serves as the framework for this study. This model of grammar accounts for the three primary functions that language is believed to perform in use (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014). These functions, referred to as metafunctions, are ideational, interpersonal, and

textual. SFG views language, particularly at the level of the sentence, as performing these distinct meanings: ideational meaning, where an utterance represents ideas or experiences; *interpersonal meaning*, where a sentence functions as an interaction between a speaker and a listener; and *textual meaning*, which examines the cohesion and coherence of words to form a meaningful discourse. This study specifically focuses on the interpersonal metafunction of SFG in analyzing the status of *ngbó* in Yoruba syntax. The interpersonal metafunction addresses how language is used as a form of interaction between participants in communication, emphasizing the social meaning of language. According to Halliday and Hasan (1985: 183), this social meaning emerges from the exchange between a speaker and a hearer, aiming to maintain social interaction (Halliday Michael & Hassan Ruqaiya, 1985). Butt (2006) explains that “the interpersonal metafunction uses language to encode interaction and to show how defensible or binding we find our proposition or proposal (Butt David, 2006).” This highlights that the meaning of language is heavily dependent on the social function it performs.

Key components of the interpersonal metafunction include *Mood* and *Residue*. The mood of a clause is realized through the combination of the *subject* and *finite* elements, while the rest of the sentence is referred to as the residue. The three primary elements of the residue are the *predicator*, *complement*, and *adjunct*. The subject and finite elements together bear “the main burden of interpersonal meanings (Butt David, 2006).” The subject is typically represented by a nominal group or a personal pronoun, confirming the validity of the clause proposition, which can be either affirmed or denied (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014; Thompson Geoff, 2004). Finite operators include modality (mood and comment/modal adjunct), tense, polarity, and voice, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Mood-Residue structure for Declarative clause with *Ngbó*

Modal Adjunct	Subject	Finite				Predication	Complement	Adjunct
Ngbọ	Ó	Mod	Tns	Pol	Voc	sẹ́lẹ́		
	Mood				Residue			

Language is used to interact with others, establish and maintain relationships, influence behavior, express viewpoints, and elicit or change others' perspectives (Thompson Geoff, 2004). This idea is supported by Schleppegrell & Fang (2010:590), who emphasize that speakers use linguistic elements such as mood, theme-rheme structure, and new-given information to convey opinions and attitudes (Schleppegrell Mary & Fang Zhihui, 2010). If we analyze *Ngbó* using Thompson's perspective on language use, we must ask: Which of these language functions could *Ngbó* help achieve as a linguistic device? Is *ngbó* an interrogator, a complementizer, a modifier, a semantic truth-condition marker, or an evidential? What is its morphological purpose? Does it have any pragmatic impact on the overall interpretation of the utterance in which it appears? Do we need to rely on context to clarify the diverse structural functions of *ngbó*?

This study seeks to address these questions by examining the syntactic function of the lexeme *Ngbó* in Yoruba sentences through the lens of the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). It will explore the morphological realization of *ngbó*, analyze its syntactic positioning relative to other identified question markers in Yoruba, and determine its semantic and/or pragmatic contributions to the overall interpretation of a clause's proposition.

5. Morphological Account of NGBÓ

A linguistic examination of the morphological realization of *ngbó* also point to the idea that the item differs from other QMs. Considering its morpho-syntactic representation of two

morphemes, *n/ɛ-* and *gbó*, one might argue that it constitutes a simple clause that has, over time, lost its sentential value; and with that be described as a truncated clause. As we can see, *ngbó* is a contraction of the two morphemes, consisting of *n* or *ɛ* and *gbó*. The first morpheme serves as a pronoun, which can either be a singular personal or plural impersonal pronoun *ɛ*, depending on the age or social class of the speaker and listener, while the second morpheme is phonetically realized as the verb root 'to hear,' as in:

<i>N</i>	<i>gbó</i>	<i>ngbó</i>
1st per pro	verb	
<i>Ẹ</i>	<i>gbó</i>	<i>egbó</i>
2nd per pro	verb	

As illustrated in the data above, *ngbó* can be further analyzed as a simple clause consisting of a subject (which is always a pronoun) and the root verb *gbó*, which has gradually lost its clausal value, as demonstrated:

<i>N</i>	<i>gbó</i>
Subject	Predicate
You	hear

From the discussion above, it can be inferred that *ngbó* functions as a sentence on its own, which may explain why it is separated from the other constituents in the construction with a comma, even while co-occurring with other question markers. Moreover, the syntactic cluster observed can be analyzed in terms of the de-sententialization principle, as illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Mood-Residue structure for Interrogative clause with *Ngbó*

Modal Adjunct	Mood Adjunct	Subject	Finite	Predication	Complement	Adjunct
			Tns			
<i>Ngbó</i>	<i>Sé</i>	<i>Ó</i>	Non-fut	<i>lọ</i>	<i>síbẹ?</i>	
	Mood			Residue		

As shown in Table 2 above, *ngbó* is categorized as a modal adjunct, specifically comment adjunct that modifies the entire clause proposition. It occupies a syntactic position higher than the mood operator *sé*—the Yes/No question marker. There are two types of modal adjunct: mood and comment adjunct. The mood adjunct is specifically located within the mood

block, which encompasses the agreement between the subject and the finite verb. Thus, it contributes to the mood type of a sentence and includes *sé*, Wh-items, and the imperative marker *kí* (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014). The comment adjunct, on the other hand, may or may not necessarily fall within the residue; they are more mobile than

circumstantial and conjunctive adjuncts in the ideational and textual metafunctions, respectively.

Further elaborating on his explanation, Halliday (2014:183) notes that there are other elements that function in the structure of the clause as exchanges but fall outside the scope of mood and residue. These elements are relatively mobile and are more frequently found in 'demanding' clauses (interrogative and imperative) than in 'giving' clauses (declarative). They may occur thematically or at the clause-final position and share the same intonation pattern as comment adjuncts. Some examples of these elements include vocatives and expletives (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014; Butt David, 2006; Thompson Geoff, 2004).

Following the notion that the speech functions of a sentence are recognized by interpreting its meaning in context, the application of *ngbó*, as demonstrated in this work, is distinctly characterized as an adjunct that adds to the meaning of the clause it modifies. The differences between *ngbó* and other question markers can be summarized as follows:

- Every question marker seeks to elicit unknown information, whereas *ngbó* queries known information.
- *Ngbó* always precedes another question marker when it co-occurs with them.
- *Ngbó* is sometimes linked to the speaker's attitude, encoding the speaker's feelings toward the clause proposition, while question markers do not reflect the speaker's emotions.
- It has its own time reference that is distinct from that of the clause.
- According to the grammatical system of the language, it typically inflects for semantic extensions, which may refer to visual or auditory senses, inferences, and/or hearsay.

The linguistic status of an item can be determined by situating it in a given context and assessing the acceptability or judgment of such utterance (Newkirk, 2019:133-44). After determining the linguistic status of *ngbó* by situating it within a context, considering the utterance related to that context, and assessing the acceptability or judgment of that utterance within that context, *ngbó* can be treated as a

sentence modifier. It serves as a comment adjunct that enhances the meaning of the sentence it modifies.

Considering the extensive exposition of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014:159) and Matthiessen, Teruya, & Carzoug (2008: 146) on the system of modality, it is evident that the item is highly grammatical in the English language (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014; Matthiessen Christian, Teruya Kazuhiro. & Wu Carizoug, 2008); but not in Yorùbá. In some languages, comment adjuncts are classified under adverbials or modifiers. Similarly, in Yorùbá, comment/modal adjuncts are treated as modifiers, as demonstrated in Table 2 above. In Yorùbá constructions, modifiers are words that modify a head verb in a verb phrase (VP), a noun phrase (NP), or a qualifier in an NP, as well as the whole sentence (Taiwo Oye. & Olakolu Oluwatoyin, 2020). According to the tenets of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), *ngbó* is translated as a comment adjunct, while in Yorùbá, it is regarded as a modifier that modifies the entire sentence, as seen in *sé ó ló?*, outside the mood-residue structural information of the sentence.

To Halliday (2014), comment/modal adjunct is connected to the speaker's attitude (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014). This concept aligns with what scholars like Aikherivald (2006) and Juana (2011) referred to as epistemic modality (Alkhenvald Alexandray, 2006; Juana I. M., 2011). Epistemic modality is a linguistic device that addresses the speaker's evaluation or degree of belief regarding the knowledge upon which a proposition is based. Epistemic modality refers to the use of modality that reflects the speaker's assessment and judgment regarding the degree of confidence in the knowledge related to a proposition. It serves to comment on and evaluate interpretations of reality, particularly when performing speech functions such as asking questions, whereas deontic modality deals with expressions related to obligations, advisability, or permission. It indicates whether a proposition conveyed by a command aligns with certain normative standards, such as moral or conventional guidelines (Suhali Jumino, 2011).

As previously mentioned in this study, the interpersonal metafunction interprets speech as a representation of mood and residue. In this context, *ngbó* as a grammatical category can be construed as an epistemic modal adjunct

(modifier) because it is employed to thematically modify an entire clause. With this structural function of it, *ngbó* is discourse marker- any linguistic item that can serve as a connective in a discourse (link segments of discourse) and that can also specifies speaker's attitude to what is said (Patridge Brian, 2006).

6. Textual Analysis

Identifying *ngbó* as epistemic modality adjudged it as discourse marker that functions purposively to connect or link segments in discourse as illustrated in the excerpt below from *Réré Rún*, a published dramatic text written by Oládejo Òkèdìjì in 1973 (Òkèdìjì Oladejo, 1973).

Example 8

Speaker A: *Mo ní Ẹ irú èyí dára?*

Speaker B: *Símẹ́ntì àbí yànrìn?*

Speaker C: *Ngbó, ká le bu èyí tí ò bá dára níbẹ̀ kúrò.*

Speaker A: *Òpònú ara yín, ẹ̀ tí parí iṣẹ̀ nì, tí ẹ̀ n sítwọ̀.*

Speaker A: I said, is this good?

Speaker B: Cement or sand?

Speaker C: Answer, so we can remove the bad one?

Speaker A: Idiot, have you finished the work that you stopped?

(Extracted from Òkèdìjì 1973:03)

In light of example (8), *ngbó* is used to confirm a part of the background knowledge (source of information) underlying its clause content. Speaker C's use of *ngbó* resonates with Speaker B's statement, *Símẹ́ntì àbí yànrìn*, meaning 'cement or sand'. The choice of *ngbó* reflects Speaker C's commitment to the proposition made by Speaker B. This commitment signifies agreement with Speaker B's response to Speaker

A's earlier question, *Mo ní Ẹ irú èyí dára?* 'I asked, is this good?' As a comment adjunct, *ngbó* modifies the entire clause spoken by Speaker C, thereby enhancing its meaning. Additionally, the pragmatic implication of *ngbó* returns to the source of the information in Speaker B's clause. Therefore, its proposition does not seek new information, unlike question markers (QMs) in discourse. Ultimately, Speaker C uses *ngbó* to express his degree of commitment to the knowledge upon which Speaker B's proposition is based. In this context, *ngbó* does not pertain to the truth condition of Speaker B's clause and clearly differs from the clause-mood marker *ki*. This distinction is consistent with the previous data.

Example 9

Speaker A: *Wọ̀n fẹ́ nì 'a-só-jú'*

Speaker B: *Ẹ́n, Nínú ìgbìmọ̀ ilù, láàrìn àwa ìjòyè!*

Speaker C: *Babaílá wọ̀n Ẹ̀lú rí? Àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ tálákà. Ngbó, ẹ̀ dá mi lóhùn;*

Speaker A: They want to have a representative.

Speaker B: Yes, in the state cabinet among the executives!

Speaker C: Did their forefathers ever rule? The indigent ones, is it true? Answer me;

(Extracted from Òkèdìjì 1973:05)

Speaker C seeks validation of the information asserted by Speaker A, who stated, they wish to have a representative. This request directly relates to the truth value of Speaker A's clause content. Additionally, it highlights the source of the information that informs its syntactic representation in the discourse, as illustrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3. *Ngbó* in imperative clause

Comment adjunct	subject	Finite element	Operator	Complement	Adjunct
<i>Ngbó</i>	<i>Ẹ</i>	<i>Non-tns</i>	<i>Dá</i>	<i>mi lóhùn</i>	
	Mood element		Residue		

When reviewing the content of the carrier clause *ẹ̀ dá mi lóhùn* 'answer me,' it becomes clear that *ngbó* is not part of the clause proposition defined

by the mood + residue structure. Instead, it suggests an external relationship that comments on the speech function (request) of the

proposition. It serves as an evidential marker indicating the source of the speaker's utterance, which is *Wọ́n fẹ́ ní 'a-só-jú* 'They wish to have a representative.' In this context, Speaker C demands that the listener affirm or deny the proposition regarding their wish to be part of the executives in the palace. Here, the use of *ngbó* performs an illocutionary act in which the speaker intends for the hearer to confirm or deny the allegation made in the locutionary act, *fẹ́ ní asojú* 'to have a representative.' As deduced from excerpts (8) and (9) above, *ngbó* can be used to pose any sentence form. The two scenarios involve requests as a form of imperative sentence. In the cited texts, despite the speaker's angry and obsessive requests for information from the listeners, rather than confirming or rejecting his assertion, the listeners ignore him by offering no response.

Considering the plight of the speaker in excerpt 9, who is inquiring about information that is unclear to him, *ngbó* can also be characterized as evidential. What does the evidential element do? An evidential is a linguistic device for coding the source of information (Anna, 2007). It literally evokes the notion of evidence: the source from which a speaker comes to know something they wish to express in language. Moreover, it broadly involves the speaker's assessment of the propositional content of the utterance in terms of its information source and/or the degree of the speaker's attitude towards that knowledge (Kareem, 2008: 86-7 & Lazad 2001:360).

An evidential is a form, such as a verbal affix, that serves as a grammatical expression of evidentiality. It may or may not relate to the truth condition of the clause content. This means that evidential sentences often have multifaceted meanings that are usually context-bound. They are devices for expressing the source of evidence on which a proposition is based, revealing the source of information asserted in the clause proposition, with or without the speaker's commitment to the truth condition of the clause. They may be derived from presupposition, accommodation, conversational implicature, and illocutionary force (Kareem Sattar, 2008).

Example 10

Lóru ojọ kan Kólá kò rí oorun sùn. Yíyí ní ó bẹrẹ sí yí ká lóri ibùsùn

nínú yàrá tí òun nìkan dá wà. Ìgbà tí wàhàlà ijà láàárín òun àti Tinú tí pòjù lóri itòjù yàrá ní ó tí fì

Tinú àti omọ wọn Démiládé sínú yàrá tí wọn jọ n ló tí ó sì kó sí yàrá m̀̀ràn ní tirẹ́. 'Ngbó, èwo ní kò tó ní rírò nínú ọ̀rọ̀ ayé rẹ́, tí iṣẹ́ tí kò rí láti iḡbà tí ó tí sin iḡba tán ní, àbí òní ejọ́, ọ̀lẹ́ iḡà tí òun àti iḡawó rẹ́ fì n ọ̀jọ̀jùmọ́ ẹ́?

One day, Kólá could not sleep. He rolled from one side of the bed to the other in his room. It was when the conflict between him and Tinú over cleaning the room became unbearable that he left Tinú and their child, Demilade, in the room they had been using and moved to another room alone. **If I may say**, which of the problems in his life does not warrant reflection, is it being unemployed after his youth service or the incessant quarrels between him and his wife?

(Extracted from: Adekeye Foluke 2012:45)

In the example (10) above, the narrator employs *ngbó* to draw the reader's attention back to the source of information that led to Kólá's predicament. In other words, *ngbó* acknowledged the source of information regarding the events that prevent Kólá from sleeping. *Ngbó* expresses the writer's epistemic attitude, revealing her disposition concerning the marital and unemployment problems that have given Kólá a sleepless night. Additionally, *ngbó* serves as an evidential marker in this excerpt. In this context, it validates the writer's responsibility for using flashback as a feature of dialogue. The semantic extension of this evidential marker is activated through inference, suggesting that the writer is indeed certain about the events stated. Hence, *ngbó* is used to emphasize the predicament confronting the character, leading to his inability to sleep due to over thinking.

It is interesting to note that the embolden statements above in example 10 are not part of the story; rather, they represent the narrator's commentary on the challenges stemming from Kólá's joblessness. Thus, the use of *ngbó* in this context reinforces the assumed cooperative conversation between the narrator and the reader. The application of *ngbó* enhances transformation of both the content question *èwo* 'which one' and the alternative question *àbí* 'or' into rhetorical questions that could have otherwise been answered with statements. In doing so, the narrator assumes silence, indicating that her readers are not at a loss, given the presumed cooperation between them. This approach maintains the maxim of relevance, which requires the speaker to express

only what is pertinent to the context of the exchange in order to preserve usefulness (Grice, 1975). The effectiveness of the rhetorical questions raised amidst the narration affirms the sequence of cooperation. To this end, the conversational cooperative principle of relevance is activated through the use of *ngbó*. Considering the pragmatic implications of *ngbó* in the conversations in example (10), significant cooperation is evident between the speaker and the hearer regarding the contextual argument, particularly in the flow of the conversation. Every conversation is guided by unwritten rules that influence the form or flow of conversational exchange; these principles are referred to as conversational maxims (Grice Herbert, 1975). When these rules are followed by participants in communication, we can assert that there is cooperation between the speaker and the hearer regarding the clause proposition. The question to be asked is whether there is some form of cooperation among the users of *ngbó*. Consider the excerpt (11) below:

Example 11

*Kòlà kò lè fí gbogbo ẹnu rẹrìn- in padà nitóri pé ànà ní ó yẹ kí ó ti wá síbẹ. Kò sì dá a lójú ohun tí ò lè ti şẹlẹ. Wọn kúkú bí í lèrè lójó tí ó şe ifòrò-wá-ni-lẹnu- wò pé ìgbà wó ní ó máa rí ààyè bẹrẹ bí wọn bá gbà à şişẹ. Ó sì dáhùn pé bí wọn bá ní kí òun bẹrẹ lójó nàà, ó ti yá òun. **Ngbó, Kín ni egbò rẹ ní şe tí ó ní òun ò ráyè wami?***

Kòlà cannot laugh genuinely because he was supposed to have come yesterday. He is uncertain about what he can do. During the interview, they had asked him, “When will you be ready to start work if you get the job?” He replied that he would be ready to start immediately if asked. (Is it true?) What can we say that stops his sore from shedding water?

(Adekeyè Foluke 2012: 67-8)

In the bolded sentence, *ngbó, kìn ni egbò rẹ ní şe tí ó ní òun ò ráyè wami?*, the writer does not expect a verbal response from the reader; instead, she uses it to maintain the flow (manage the narration) of the storyline. The presence of *ngbó* in this interrogative utterance does not limit the search for the specific information that the speaker is interested in. Rather, it reveals the nature of the evidence concerning the truth of the philosophical saying, *kìn ni egbò n şe to maa lóun ò ráyè wami?*, which translates to “What stops his sore from shedding water?” From this context, we can say that the reliability of *ngbó* in

the clause is based on cultural beliefs. This assertion aligns with Mushin’s (2001:5) view on the pragmatic function of evidentiality, as it reflects the speaker’s relationship to knowledge (Mushin Ilana, 2001). Through the use of *ngbó*, the writer can make inferences based on the evidence of what has happened to *kòlà* in the past. Thus, the evidential nature is direct, as the speaker possesses sensory evidence for the actions described. In another instance, the lexeme *ngbó* functions as a vocative marker (Halliday Michael & Matthiessen Christian, 2014) that calls for the addressee’s attention, as shown in example (12) below:

Example 12

Speaker A: Ó wàà fẹ́é rí yín fún aájò díé bí işé nàà ó ti máa lọ déédéé, a mò pé ohun gbogbo ní sişẹ pò fún rere. Olúwa to déwé, ọba òkè tó dégbò, òun nàà ló dómi adurà.

Speaker B: Bẹ́é ni Ọlórún kan nàà là ní sìn. Èdúmarè kan nàà là ní ké sí. **Ngbó, Ọrẹ wa, irú èwo le ní fẹ́?**

Speaker A: He came to consult on how to improve the business; we know that everything works together for good. The God who created the leaves, the heavenly God who created the herbs, is also the one who created water for healing.

Speaker B: Yes, we worship one God. We pray to the same God. Hey, my friend? Which one do you want?

(Akinwumi Isola 1997: 39)

In the above clause, *ngbó* serves as a vocative to seek the addressee’s attention to what the speaker is about to say in the conversation, the lexeme contextually identifies the person being addressed and encouraged for her participation in the conversation. It does not pose a question; instead, it functions as a request for the addressee’s opinion regarding the truth of the information presented in speaker A’s propositions. For instance, *Ó wàà fẹ́é rí yín fún aájò díé bí işé nàà ó ti máa lọ déédéé* translates to “He came for consultation on how the business will be improved.” As part of the interpersonal theme, separate from the mood-residue structure, *ngbó* as a comment adjunct modifies another nominal vocative *Ọrẹ wa* (our friend!) in a bid to seek for addressee’s attention and participation in the conversation. A compulsory response expected from the addressee to the interrogative clause *irú èwo le ní fẹ́* ‘which one do

you want' confirms the vocative role of *ngbó* in such a context. We could also see that, the reliability of *ngbó* clause is evaluated based on essential firsthand information gained through auditory perception versus hearsay. Thus, the speaker seeks to confirm what speaker A has reported.

7. Discussion of Findings

Insights from the textual analysis reveal that *ngbó* performs various pragmatic functions. The discussion of these findings will focus on the pragmatic roles of *ngbó* as identified in the analysis. *Ngbó* serves as a means of social interaction by conveying the nature or type of interaction between the speaker and the listener, which may include giving, requesting, demanding, ordering, or negotiating information. For instance, in the sentence *Ngbó, ká le bu èyí tí ò bá dára nìbè kúrò*, the use of *ngbó* indicates that the speaker is demanding information from the listener. The lexico-semantic relationship between *ngbó* and the adverbial clause *kí a lè bu èyí tí kò dára nìbè. kúrò* suggests that the feedback received from the listener will contextually influence the speaker's subsequent actions.

Additionally, *ngbó* initiates politeness by demonstrating the speaker's sensitivity and respect for the listener's perception or view on the topic of discussion. This function can be deduced from the conversation between the *babalawo* 'diviner' and his customer in example (10):

Béé ni Olórún kan náà là ní sìn. Èdúmarè kan náà là ní ké sí.

Ngbó, Ọrẹ wa, irú èwo le ní fẹ? [Really, my friend, which one do you want?]

One can assert that the speaker's use of *ngbó* at the beginning of the expression signals the addressee, 'the vocative- *ọrẹ wa*' and encodes a polite way of demanding information *irú èwo le ní fẹ* "which one do you want?". This usage softens the tone of the inquiry. After the diviner becomes convinced that the addressee needs help based on the reported information from the addressee's friend, the speaker of *ngbó* used it to demonstrate respect for the addressee's situation.

In Yoruba expressions, *ngbó* often indicates the source of information, specifying where or how the speaker obtained that information. By revealing the source, it helps to sustain the

credibility of the information being conveyed. In excerpt (8), for example, the narrator refers to personal experience with the statement, *babanlá wọn Ẹlú rí? Àwọn ọmọ tálákà. Ngbó, ẹ dá mi lóhùn* "Did their forefathers ever rule? The indigent ones, is it true? Answer me". In this context, the choice of *ngbó* empowers the speaker to rely on historical context, drawing from personal experience regarding the community's past kings and the belief that "no member from a poor family has ever been crowned king in their community." It is essential for statements to specify the type of source on which they are based, whether derived from direct observation, inference from indirect evidence, or information obtained from others. Evidentiality indicates the speaker's level of commitment to the factual status of the information presented and most importantly, they can have different lexico-grammatical realizations, either grammatical or lexical. Their multiple functions span syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. They can effectively enhance a speaker's ability to construct and achieve persuasion (Yang, 2014; Yating, 2021). Evidentiality import is also attained in a proposition that conveys traditional wisdoms, when we consider how they are expressed with varying degrees of certainty and sources of information. This instance could be exemplified with excerpt (11), where the speaker says:

Ngbó, Kín ni egbò rẹ ní ẹ tí ó ní òdún ò ráyè wami?

[What is that stops his sore from shedding water]

The speaker uses *ngbó* to express the truth condition of the semantic proposition encapsulated in the common knowledge statement *ki ni egbò ní ẹ tí kò ní ráyè wami* "What disturbs a wound from shedding water?", suggesting that one cannot claim to be too busy to address a life-changing solution to a perceived problem. In this context, *ngbó* is employed to seek the listeners' views on *Jide's* acceptance of the job offer and to support his enthusiasm for starting the office work without delay. Additionally, *ngbó* can be used to manage the narrative within the discourse. Consider this expression from the earlier excerpt:

Ngbó, èwo ni kò tó ní rí rí nínú ọrọ ayé rẹ,

tí iṣẹ tí kò rí láti ìgbà tí ó tí sìn ìjọba tán ni,

àbí òní ẹjọ, ọlẹ ijà tí òdún àti ìyàwó rẹ fí ní ojoojúmọ ẹ?

[My people, which of the problems in his life does not warrant reflection is it being unemployed after his youth service or the incessant quarrels between him and his wife?]

By choosing *ngbó*, the narrator emphasizes and delineates the specific problems that have been troubling Jide's life. This choice also helps contextualize her appeal for the listeners' perspectives on the issues causing Jide sleepless nights. Additionally, the use of *ngbó* can underscore authority, as the content proposition of this expression suggests:

Ngbó, wa níbí o. [Hey, come here]

The above sentence can only occur in a top-down interpersonal relationship based on cultural norms. Young people are forbidden from disrespecting or speaking rudely to their elders in their choice of language. Thus, one can say that *ngbó* emphasizes the position of authority that the speaker occupies in relation to the addressee.

In summary, every instance of *ngbó* in Yoruba expressions expresses appraisal meaning of speaker's attitude towards what is to be said, engage listener and evaluate the what had been said prior to the conversation. As a conveyance of attitudinal meaning, *ngbó* helps the speakers to reveal his subjectivity perspective as a way of evaluating the proposition. It also helps to achieve contextual influence in such that it reveals the importance of the proposition.

8. Conclusion

The study has sought to ascertain the linguistic status of *ngbó* in the Yoruba language, following the interpersonal metafunction outlined in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. It also presents a morphological description of the lexeme. The study posits that *ngbó* is not a question marker (QM) because its structural function is syntactically and semantically distinct from that of other question markers. Instead, it serves as a sentence modifier, appearing at the beginning of a sentence. It does not translate to 'is it true' in all contexts. In essence, addressees must understand the content implications of *ngbó* to match it with the asserted clause proposition. This indicates that questioning with *ngbó* may differ from the speaker's intended speech act, which can sometimes be pragmatically inclined. Consequently, the functional roles of *ngbó* are context-driven and negotiable. Its interpersonal role confers various types of modal evidential

assessments on the clause's proposition. Furthermore, it is realized outside the mood-residue scope, meaning it is not part of the proposition expressed by the mood plus residue structure. The application of *ngbó* encompasses aspects of language use that prioritize confirmation rather than complementation. In many instances, the semantic meaning of the sentence is already complete without its presence. It is evaluated as a grammatical evidential, indicating the source of the information asserted in the clause. Moreover, it may or may not have epistemic extensions; that is, it may not comment on or indicate the speaker's commitment to the truth of the clause proposition. Thus, its meanings are inherently dependent on context so, the appraisal meaning of all the instance of *ngbó* is contextualized relaying on the relationship between the speaker and audience. In a bid to encourage and engage the addressee in conversation, it emphasizes the speaker's contribution to the discourse by clarifying the source of information and his opinion about the theme of discussion.

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