

THE LINGUISTICS OF VERBAL CLAUSE “Ẹ KÚ” IN YORÙBÁ VERSUS THE FRENCH MODIFIER “BON”: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Ezekiel O. Tanitolorun¹, and Ayobami M. Tabi-Agoro²

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Nigeria.

¹Department of French Studies, College of Humanities

²Department of Yoruba Studies

Corresponding Author: tanitoloruneo@tasued.edu.ng

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.69713/uoaaj2026v04i01.08>

Abstract

Ẹ kú, O kú, or A kú of the Yorùbá Language parlance has a great linguistic value as it is being used in a myriad of morphosemantic structures. The adjectival modifier bon of the French Language is equally well noted in its morphosyntactic and semantic usage structures. The major challenges encountered by learners are the usage of these idiomatic expressions, especially those characterized by polysemic adjectives such as “bon” in the studies of French Language and Ẹ kú of Yorùbá. These expressions, splendid in cultural meaning and often far from their literal meaning, pose interpretation problems and incorrect usage among learners. This study identifies these difficulties and proposes solutions to them. A contrastive language elements usage of Ẹ kú in Yorùbá and that of bon in French demands an in-depth study of their relativity in considering the morphosemantic structures of the two elements: Ẹ kú of Yorùbá and bon of French. Having explored the theoretical framework on the intersection of cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and didactics of language, as well as the descriptive qualitative approach, we found that French and Yorùbá have some common grounds in their morphosyntactic varieties of words used in greetings, compliments, socio-cultural situations, and acknowledgements. We therefore recommend that learners or linguistic researchers be more prominent in finding out the relativities of the spoken and written forms of the languages of their research in order to enhance their linguistic capacities.

Key-words: Ẹ kú, bon, Yorùbá, French, Semantics, Morphosyntactic Structures

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most paramount element of culture with which people express their thoughts. A mere greeting may introduce one as a member of a certain cultural heritage even outside his/her country or domain, most especially in Yorùbá where *a/ẹ+kú*, an expression without a corresponding meaning in other languages, is distinctive to Yorùbá people. The popularity of the expression is so glaring and prevalent to the extent that people

tend to refer to any Yorùbá as *akú*, a derivation from the combination of *ẹ/a kú*. This indicates that language and cultural identity are two complements that are difficult to separate. According to Obinaju et al (2023:17), there is cultural representation in our daily expressions.

This study investigates the multifarious semantics of *ẹ/a kú* (Yorùbá) and the modifier **bon** (French) in various concepts with examples. The study aims to juxtapose the two grammatical elements from their different

contexts of usage. *E/a kú* has been translated to be compliments, enjoyment, pleasantries, or non-pleasantries among others (Olágúnjú, 2021).

Olágúnjú (2021:1) expressively posits that: *E kú...*” whose nearest meaning in English is “Compliment of...” for a pleasant situation and just “Greetings for...” for an unpleasant situation. Not every language of the globe has such a greeting culture. It will be an understatement to say that the Yoruba cherished greetings so much. We can equally say that greetings are inseparable from the Yorùbá because this is the first thing a stranger will notice when he meets the Yorùbá people.

There are two subtle translations of *e/a kú* in Yorùbá according to the foregoing. It is either an expression of pleasantries or an unpleasant situation. But whether the situation or circumstance is good or not, *e/a kú* is used by Yorùbá. This begs for an answer as to why a single expression connotes direct anonymous situations. One important thing to note, as mentioned earlier, is that greeting distinguishes Yorùbá people from other tribes; greeting is usually marked by *e/a kú* and greeting is part and parcel of Yorùbá culture. Anyone who does not imbibe the habit of greeting will be attributed to arrogance, pomposity, and ill-mannered.

This study undertakes a multi-layered analysis of *e/a kú* and equally **bon** in line with their corresponding appendages that sheds more light on the vague expression semantically, syntactically, and pragmatically to see if there would be middle term that captures both pleasant and unpleasant connotations of it by extant scholars.

Learning a foreign language like French implies not only the mastery of grammatical rules but also the comprehension of idiomatic

expressions. In French, the adjective "bon" is always used in several idiomatic expressions such as "bon appétit, bon voyage, bon courage" etc., which simply means; "have a nice meal, safe journey, well done". Although these expressions seem simple and positive, they may not always correspond with the popular use of **E kú** in Yorùbá, which can pose some challenges to Yorubaphone learners of French. **Bon** is an adjective, and an adjective is a word that qualifies a noun or a pronoun. In general, the purpose of an adjective is to describe a noun or pronoun and provide more information about it. Adjectives provide answers to questions such as “What kind?” “Which one?” and “Whose is it?” etc., The modifier **bon** is therefore different from the grammatical properties of **E kú** in the Yorùbá Language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded in the intersection of cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and the didactics of language. Understanding the idiomatic expressions, especially those containing the adjective **bon**, requires more than a simple lexical understanding; this implies the mastery of cultural, contextual, and figurative meaning. Equally, from the point of view of Adegboku Dele (2023:268), the environmental concept of learning a language must be determined. Several theories support this approach:

Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987)

Langacker opines that language is the reflection of human understanding and not only a body of rules. The multiple meanings of "bon" in the idiomatic expressions (for example, bon courage, bon marché) show that the learner must surpass the literal meaning of "bon" to move to meanings culturally anchored.

Pragmatic Competence (Bachman, 1990)

According to Bachman, Pragmatic competence can be defined as the capacity to use language

in the appropriate manner according to context. The idiomatic expression with “bon” E ku often relies on implicit cultural norms. For example, bon appétit is often tied to a social ritual and not just a simple sentence tied to food, while **Ẹ kú** iroju reflects an unpleasant situation in Yorùbá.

Didactics of Fle (Puren, 2004)

Puren emphasizes the importance of integrating the cultural context in the teaching of languages. The teaching of idiomatic expressions like **bon** must include an explanation of their pragmatic usage and of their emotional function, and not only the lexical translations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies in the teaching of French as a foreign language and Yorùbá as an African language are interested in the learning of figurative expressions, also known as idiomatic expressions. This expression often poses challenges to learners in reason of their non literal meaning. (Vincent, 2010). According to Meunier (2012), the understanding of idiomatic expressions needs pragmatic competence that surpasses the simple knowledge of vocabulary. The adjective **bon**, although it seems simple, appears in several expressions that have specific cultural meanings. For example, in "bon courage" it's not a question of "good" in the sense of quality, but instead it's of a moral support expressed to someone faced with a challenge (Durand, 2016). This polysemy makes the learning of these expressions difficult for foreign learners, especially if their mother tongue doesn't use similar expressions. This phenomenon equally characterizes the use of **Ẹ kú** in several dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to do a discourse analysis

of the usage of E ku and the adjective "bon" in their common language use and laying emphasis on their understanding and usage by the learners. Data composed of 20 idiomatic expressions, including "bon" will be drawn out from manuals of FLE (for example, Alter Ego, Edito, Le nouvel espace), also from dictionaries (for example, Le Robert, Larousse), and lastly from online resources such as (www.expressions-francaises.fr). Examples of expressions include: bon appétit, bon marché, bon vivant, bon à rien, etc.. This research equally demonstrates several contextual uses of **Ẹ kú** in Yorùbá Language expressions.

PHONOLOGY ANALYSIS OF **Ẹ/A KÚ**

Phonologically, *ẹ/a kú* is not a so much contradictory or ambiguous expression, while the attached nominal expressions may need phonological analysis, one can easily say that /ẹ/ is a pronoun that denotes the second pronoun at the subject position. Ku on its own has no particular lexical semantics in Yorùbá. *Kú* is phonologically to /kú/ (die) in terms of syllable, pronunciation, and tonetically but not morphologically related to death. Therefore, the phonology of *ẹ/a kú* is relational.

THE DISCOURS ANALYSIS OF **Ẹ/A KÚ**

- *The semantics*

Semantics is the linguistic science of the meaning relation of a language. In semantics, the connotative and denotative meanings of an expression are analysed to reveal the surface and deeper interpretation of an expression. In this study, we examine the multifarious levels of meaning related to *ẹ/a kú*. *Semantically speaking, ẹ/a kú has no specific meaning. Its meaning depends on the meaning of the attached noun.* And how those meanings help in arriving at the actual connotation it has (pleasant, unpleasant, casual). Ajayi (2020) notes that **Ẹ kú** adapts to day parts: ààrò

(morning), òsán (afternoon), alẹ́ (evening).
Omitting timeframes risks impoliteness.

• *e/a kú in Neutral Situation*

S/N	Context	Ẹ kú- greeting Variants	Meaning	Linguistic Function
1	For a usual positive gesture	Ẹ kú gbogbo	Gratitude for every time	NEUTRAL Conative
2	For someone who keeps their promise	Ẹ kú àìgbàgbé	Gratitude for the fulfilment of a promise	NEUTRAL Conative
3	For someone who is a lone beneficiary	Ẹ kú àdájẹ	Compliment of lone enjoyment	NEUTRAL Conative
4	For an elderly person	E ku àgbà	Good wishes, yours, elder	NEUTRAL Conative
5	For someone travelling	Ẹ kú àlọ	Best wishes for your trip	NEUTRAL Conative
6	For someone returning from a trip	Ẹ kú àbọ	Welcome	NEUTRAL Conative
7	For someone who came to pay a visit.	Ẹ kú àgbòdide	Gratitude for coming to grace the event	NEUTRAL Conative
8	For someone who came to pay a visit.	Ẹ kú àbẹ̀wò	Gratitude for the visitation	NEUTRAL Conative
9	For someone being on something since	Ẹ kú àtàárò	Gratitude for staying since morning	NEUTRAL Conative
10	For arriving earlier	Ẹ kú iwájú	Compliment for arriving early	NEUTRAL Conative

• *e/a kú in Pleasant Situation*

S/N	Context	Ẹ kú - greeting Variants	Meaning	Linguistic Function
1.	Greetings in the evening 4:7pm	Ẹ kú iròlẹ́	Good evening	POS. Conative
2	Greeting when someone is enjoying something or the breeze	E kú ìgbádùn	Compliment of enjoyment	POS. Conative
3	Greeting in morning	Ẹ kú òwúrò	Good morning	POS. Conative
4	Greetings in the afternoon between 4 and 7 pm	Ẹ káàsán	Good afternoon	POS. Conative
5	Greetings in the mid-day, 11 am-12 pm	Ẹ kú iyálẹ̀ta	Compliment of mid-day	NEUTRAL Conative
6	Greetings in the evening (6 pm-7 pm)	E kú ojòrò/ajálẹ́	Compliment of evening	POS. Conative
7	Greetings during the heat	Ẹ kú oorú	Compliment of heat	NEG. Conative
8	Greeting when it is raining.	Ẹ kú òjò	Compliment of the pleasurable rain	POS Conative
9	Greeting when the speaker doesn't want to mention a specific time	Ẹ kú àsìkò yìí	Compliment of this period	POS. Conative

10	When the addressee is sitting down	Ẹ kú ìjókòó	Compliment of sitting	POS. Conative
11	For someone that achieve something	E kú oríre	Congratulation	POS. Conative
12	For people on a particular deliberation	Ẹ kú àpèrò	Compliments of deliberation	POS. Conative
13	For someone or people who just achieved a great effort	Ẹ kú àjàbó/àjàségun	Congratulations on your victory	POS. Conative
12	For someone generous	Ẹ kú àiníkèéta	Gratitude for generosity	POS. Conative
13	For someone who just finished an occasion or is generous to someone.	Ẹ kú ináwó	Gratitude for a well spent money.	POS. Conative

• *ẹ/a kú in Unpleasant Situation*

S/N	Context	Ẹ kú greeting Variants	Meaning	Linguistic Function
1.	For bereaved people, while mourning	Ẹ kú idárò/ Ẹ kú aráfèrakù/ Ẹ kú orò èniyàn	Sorry for the loss	NEG. Conative
2	For someone who exercises patience	Ẹ kú àibínú	Gratitude for your patience	POS conative
3	For people fasting	Ẹ kú òhùngbẹ	Compliments of the fasting.	NEG. Conative
4	For someone enduring an unpleasant situation	Ẹ kú àmúmọra	Gratitude for the endurance	NEG. Conative
5	For a patient	Ẹ kú sùùrù	Gratitude for the patience	POS. Conative
6	For the person taking care of the sick person	Ẹ kú itójú	Gratitude for the care	NEG. Conative
7	Greeting during or after the vigil.	E kú àisùn	Compliment of the vigil	NEG. Conative
8	Greeting during or after sleep.	E ku oorun	Happy sleeping	POS. Conative
9	During or after hunting	Ẹ kú ilàako	Well done on your hunting	NEG. Conative

• *ẹ/a kú Expression of Disapproval or Disgust*

S/N	Context	Ẹ kú- greeting Variants	Meaning	Linguistic Function
1.	When someone was just beaten or used and doesn't know how bad what he did was.	Ẹ kú iyà.	Revel in suffering	Conative Function
2	When someone is joyous over an unpleasant thing	E ku iranù.	Revel in rubbish	NEG. Conative function
3	Disdain or despair	Ẹ kú isonu.	Revel in hypocrisy	NEG. Referential function
4	Response to mockery	Ẹ kú oṣi.	Revel in nonsense	NEG. Conative

5	When someone revels in another's downfall.	Ẹ kú òfò.	Revel in your self-pity	NEG. Referential function
6	Expression of immaturity	E kú bó ẹ yé yín sí.	Revel in your ignorance	NEG. Referential
7	When someone misbehaves.	Ẹ kú àìlójúti	Revel in your shamelessness	NEG. Referential
8	After a stress	Ẹ kú ìdààmú	Revel in your trouble	NEG. Conative
9	While someone is troubled	E kú wàhàlà tiyín	Revel in your struggle	NEG. Conative
10	After a fight	E ku ijà	Compliment of fighting	NEG. Conative
11	For a daft person	Ẹ kú àìlòye	Revel in your daftness	NEG. Conative

Semantics of *ẹ kú* reveals that it can be used for pleasant, unpleasant, disapproval, expression of disgust, and neutral situations. Any attempt to equate the meaning of certain greetings or compliments in other languages to *o/a/ẹ kú* greetings in Yorùbá will bring about linguistic malady, vagueness, and ambiguity. The best way to address it is to use the situation or circumstance where the speech takes place to determine the meaning. The linguistic function of *ẹ kú* is either positive or negative, which might also be conative or referential, though the conative function of language takes dominance in the linguistic function of *ẹ kú*.

SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF Ẹ/A KÚ

O/a/e/ is a phrase that relies on the nominal expression. The monosyllabic first person, second person, or third person pronoun that precedes the expression of a verb that has no particular denotation occupies:

1a .	A/E/O/	kú	òwúrò	wish
	1st/2nd/ 3rd/ P		morning	
	Subject			
	PRED.			
	OBJECT			
1b.	A/E/O/	kú	iyà	wish
	1st/2nd/ 3rd/ P		suffering	

Subject
PRED. OBJECT

It is therefore noted here that after the expression of *ẹ kú*, which is a combination of subject and the predicator, a nominal expression must follow it, as can be seen in the examples above. Invariably, *ẹ kú* greeting expression is a simple sentence expressing a simple thought of either compliment, disgust, or neutrality.

Functionally, *ẹ kú* variant of the greeting is an imperative sentence. The reason is that it takes a form of command in Yorùbá in which the subject is optional depending on the referent. *O/a/e/* are the possible subject of this sentence, but when the speaker is older than the addressee(s), he can decide to omit the subject *a/o/ẹ* as can be seen below:

2a O		VERB	
	2ndP	isẹ	work
2b. A		VERB	
	1stP	ọdún	
		Festival	
3b. Ẹ		VERB	
	3rdP	ìgbádùn	
		VERB	
		enjoyment	
4e. ̸		kú	
		àìníşẹ	

Ø VERB
joblessness

The example above shows that 4e is subjectless because the subject is younger than the addresser, and he decides to omit the subject from it, just like the imperative sentence does. This means that the subject is not compulsory in *E kú* greeting expression, most especially when the speaker is older than the addressee(s). It is therefore safe to say that the expression, either directed to older or younger, expressing a pleasant or unpleasant situation, is an imperative sentence.

The Phonology Analysis of Bon

The word **bon** is a combination of two syllables and two phonetic sounds (b and on). The sound of (on) is an equivalent sound to the grapheme (on) as we have in Yorubá: *ibon, pón, e.t.c.*

THE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BON

According to the methodology adopted, here's a list of 20 idiomatic expressions including the adjective 'bon' drawn out from manuals of French (Alter Ego, Edito, Le nouvel espace), also from dictionaries (Le Robert, Larousse). These expressions are classified and analyzed according to their semantic field, in order to showcase their meaning and their cultural usage in French.

Thematic Classification	Idiomatic Expression	Meaning
Daily life Psychology	Bon appétit, bon marché Bon courage, bon coeur	Politeness, quality/price Moral support, generosity
Physical condition/health Time Social evaluation	Bon pied bon œil, bon pour le service Bon timing, bon moment, bon an, mal an Bon résultat, bon vivant	Good physical condition, aptitude Rhythm, regularity, opportuned moment Success, social comportement
Proverbs	À bon entendeur, salut ! bon gars mal gars, bon sang ne saurait mentir, bon débarras, bon vent, bon à savoir	Popular expression, warning
Quantity Result Competence	Bon nombre de... Bon déroulement Bon coup	Approximation Positive progress Efficiency

Equally, on greetings, we can also establish the following:

Greetings	Time	Meaning
Bonjour	Morning	Good Morning
Bon après- midi (mostly said in Africa)	Afternoon	Good Afternoon
Bonsoir	Evening	Good Evening
Bonne nuit	Night	Good Night
Bonne arrivée	Anytime	You are welcome
Bon voyage	Anytime	Safe journey
Bon Noël	Christmas time	Happy Christmas
Bonne année	New Year's time	Happy New Year
Bon appétit	Anytime	Have a good meal

Bon séjour	Anytime	Have a good stay
Bon marché	Anytime	Have a good sale
Bonne amitié	Anytime	Good friendship
Bon moment	Anytime	Have a good time

It could be noted in this regard that the adjective **bon** qualifies a masculine singular noun while **bonne** qualifies a feminine singular noun. French is therefore a gender sensitive language.

The Use Of Bon

Bon is always being used in pleasant situations. It is therefore for positive situations.

Syntactic Analysis of Bon

In any expression being used, the French qualifier **bon** always precedes a noun, as seen above. Other examples of wishing good days of the week, we have the following:

- Bon dimanche - Happy Sunday
- Bon lundi - Happy Monday
- Bon vendredi - Happy Friday
- Bon weekend - Happy weekend.
- Bonne journée - Have a good day, etc.

This classification permits breaking down or simplifying the recurrent themes in the usage of ‘bon’ showing that its function largely surpasses its literal meaning of ‘well or good’. The learners of French as a foreign language often face difficulties in interpreting these expressions correctly, especially when their meaning is confusing at first.

CONCLUSION

The finding of the study reveals that there is no definite translation of *o/a/é kú* greeting expressions in Yorùbá. The context determines its meaning, and the circumstance of its use may be pleasant, unpleasant, an expression of disgust/disapproval, or neutral. It may be a greeting for something, an expression of compliment, wishes, gratitude, or empathy. Similarly, all *o/a/é kú* greeting expressions are followed immediately by a nominal phrase or expression, except for one type of noun

derivation through the *oni-* prefix. It is only the *oní-*prefix in Yorùbá that doesn’t go with this expression. Syntactically, the structure of all *é/a/o kú* greeting are basic simple sentence, and functionally, they are usually imperative sentences where *o/a/e* that are subjects are optional, most especially when the referent is one, and he/she is younger than the addresser.

This research equally permits the in-depth examination of the adjective **bon** in the idiomatic expressions of French as a foreign language. Through the analysis of 20 expressions drawn out from French manuals, dictionaries, and other sources, it has been brought to light that ‘bon’ largely surpasses its literal meaning; it has been shown that **bon** can be used to transmit cultural, emotional, and contextual notions, just like *E ku*. These notions reflect the essential aspects of daily life, morality, health, and social communication in language. It is therefore recommended that language teachers should progressively integrate idiomatic expressions in their lessons. It is also recommended that language teachers should make use of films, songs, and press articles from where these expressions are naturally used in order to reinforce the exposure of learners to real language situations, which will enhance their speaking skills to be fast evolving. And lastly, comparison between foreign language idiomatic expressions and those of their mother tongue should be encouraged in order to facilitate a better understanding of their language of study.

REFERENCES

- Adétugbò, A. (1973). "The Yorùbá Language in Yorùbá History" In sources of Yorùbá History, P.177-204.

- Adegboku Dele (2023); Foreign Language Teaching: Current Challenges facing Teachers in a Globalised world and ways out, in Ayeleru et al edited: *Readings in Languages & Literatures*, an Essay in honour of Professor Raufu Adebisi, Ibadan Zenith Book House Ltd.
- Ajayi, J.O. (2020). *Language Practices and Social Integration among Multi-Ethnic Youth: A Yoruba Perspective. Cultural Exchange, Yoruba Social Integration and Language*.
<https://doi.org/10.32473/ysr.10.1.139157>.
- Bachman, L.F. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goosse, A., & Grevisse, M. (2016). *Le Bon Usage (16th ed)*. Bruxelles : De Boeck Supérieur.
- Guillbert, L. (1975). *La créativité lexicale. Paris: Larousse*.
- Kouraogo, P. (1990). *L'enseignement du lexique en FLE : état des lieux et perspectives. Etudes de linguistique appliquée*, 77, 53-65.
- Langacker, R. W. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, Volume I: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford University Press.
- Meunier, F., & Granger, S. (2008). *Phraseology in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Obinaju et al (2023); *Emerging trends in French Language Studies, Benin*, RANEUF
- Olágúnjú, S. T. (2021). *Towards the Translation of Selected "E Ku" Greeting Situations in Yorùbá language*.
- Puren, C. (2004). *La perspective actionnelle : vers une nouvelle cohérence didactique*. Paris : Hachette FLE.
- Rey, A. (2011). *Dictionnaire des expressions et locutions (6^e éd.)*. Paris: Le Robert.
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Harcourt Brace, www.expressions-francaises.fr, consulté le 15 septembre 2025.
- Ugorji, C.U.C. (2003). "Dialect Communities and Languages Vitality". In Ndibele, O. (ed) 'In the Linguistics Paradise: Festschrift for Emenanjo E. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt www.expressions-francaises.fr, accessed on September 15, 2025.
- William, S. and Hammarberg, B. (1997). "Language Switches in L3 Production: Implications for a Polyglot Speaking Model" e-book available on ResearchGate, accessed on 25, August, 2025