



# Homographic, Heterophonic and Heteronymic Evidence that Yoruba is a Language Isolate

Seun Ayoade\*

Department of Physiology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

\*Corresponding author: Seun Ayoade, BSc (Hons) University of Ibadan, Independent Researcher, P.O. Box 22325, Nigeria

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## Introduction

In linguistics, words that have the same spelling but have different meanings when pronounced differently are called homographs, heterophones or heteronyms [1,2]. Apart from English, Dutch and a few other Indo-European languages, few other languages on earth apart from Yoruba have so many heteronyms. And given that many of the English heteronyms are merely verb and noun heteronyms (e.g. the noun 'house' means an actual structure for domicile while as a verb to 'house' means to provide said domicile and/or place person(s) therein) the number of spot-on English heteronyms falls significantly. Also, many English and Indo-European language heteronyms come in pairs e.g. 'confine' as a noun means a boundary or limit while 'confine' as verb means

to restrict. On the other hand, many Yoruba heteronyms came in trios, quartets, quintets and in rare cases septets such as the word 'OKO' which, depending on the pronunciation means spear, penis, farm, vehicle, husband, stone and hoe! [3] This is seven meanings for just one word merely by varying the pitch! It's time for linguists worldwide to stop burying their heads in the sand and to do the honorable thing-officially reclassify Yoruba as a language isolate.

More examples of Yoruba homographs and 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). This list of Yoruba heterophones is by no means exhaustive. But these are enough for any fair-minded and reasonable observer to strongly suspect, if not conclude that Yoruba is a language isolate [3].

Table 1:

Yoruba Word	Pronunciation	Meaning
Awo	D,r	Plate
	R,r	Fetish, cult
Oro	R d	Masquerade
	D d	Speech, words
	R m	woe
Eye	R r	Bird
	D r	Praise, accolade
ara	R r	Body
	D m	Lightning
Iya	D d	Suffering
	dm	Mother
dodo	Dd	Fried plantain
	rr	navel
ogun	Dd	Medicine
	Dm	Yoruba God of Iron
	Rm	Property
	Rr	War

Aja	Rm rd	Dog Recess in wall
ese	Rd dd	Feet sin
epo	Rr dm	Palm oil weeds
eyin	Rr Rm rd	Egg Teeth Back/rear
oke	Dd dm	Up/top The numeral 20,000
ode	Rd dr	Dunce Outing
oya	Mm rr	It's time! A Yoruba Goddess
orun	Rd dr	Neck Heaven/the skies
okun	Dr rd	The sea Rope
ifa	Rm rd	Yoruba oracle Free thing/freebie
ewe	Rm dr	Leaf Toddler/child
igbe	Mm dm	A shout Faeces, forest
ike	Rr dm	Hump/hunchback, plastic Care/favor
ika	Rd dr	Sadist finger
ole	Dr rd	Lazy person thief
obe	Rd dr	Stew knife
iro	Rm dm	Falsehood/lie/fib wrapper
ile	Rd rm	Ground/land house
ekun	Rm rd	Tears leopard
igba	Rr dd	Garden egg/the numeral 200 Time/period/season
ebi	Rr rm	Hunger Blood relation/extended family
Opolo	Ddm rrr	Frog brain
Ejo	Rd rm	Snake Conversation/talk

Owo	Rm Rm (accent on both vowels) rd	Money Hand Trade/merchandise
iye	Rd dm	Life feather
ida	Rd dm	Sword portion
iru	Rd rm	Tail Locust beans
eru	Rm rd	Slave luggage
emi	dr dm rm	Me/myself/I Spirit, demon, sprite Breath, inhalation
ota	Dm rr	Enemy stone
irin	Rr rd	Iron A walk/perambulation
ise	Rm dm	Work poverty
ipa	Rr dm	Force Scrotal deformity/venereal disease
iho	Rd rr	Hole horn
ilu	Rd dm	Drum town
iso	Dm Rm rd	Nail Fart shop
ewa	Rd rm	Beauty, beans Come!
opo	Dm rm	Pole/pillar widow
eko	Dr dm	Corn based jelly/porridge Education, learning
ere	Rm rd	Games, play, sports/physical activity Gain/profit (especially financial)
ewu	Rr rd	Danger Sleeveless vest
oru	Rr dr	Heat Night

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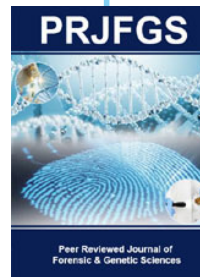
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2. *Ibid*, pp. 202.
3. Seun Ayoade (2018) *Argument for The Reclassification of Yoruba as A Language Isolate*. *Peer Re J Foren & Gen Sci* 2(4).



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