

## Negation marking strategies in Etulo

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**Abstract:** This study gives a descriptive account of negation in the Etulo language. It seeks to identify the negative marking strategy employed in Etulo. Using a structured questionnaire on negation, relevant data have been sourced from Etulo informants. The questionnaire reflects the negation of different construction types. The result of the analyzed data reveals that the Etulo language expresses negation by the use of negative particles. These particles are identified as *bá* and *lóò*. Their position of occurrence is mostly sentence final. The negator *bá* bears an inherent high tone but may assume a step tone in very few cases when the preceding tone is a step tone. On the other hand, the negative particle *lóò* is characterized by vowel lengthening and a syllable final low tone. The negative particle *bá* is analyzed as a standard negative marker associated with the imperative, simple declaratives, anticipative and perfective construction while the negative particle *lóò* is used in the negation of polar questions.

**Keywords:** Etulo, negation, particles, tone

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Date of Submission: 17-08-2017

Date of acceptance: 18-10-2017

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Negation is a language universal category. According to Crystal (2003:310) negation is a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence meaning. In a cross-linguistic study of negation, Dahl (1979) observes that most languages of the world exhibit either morphological or syntactic negation. Syntactic negation involves the use of particles and auxiliaries while morphological negation involves the use of affixes. Distinction is often made between standard negation (negation of main clause) and other forms of negation (cf: Payne 1985). In line with this view, Miestamo (2005) defines standard negation as the basic way (or ways) a language has for negating declarative verbal main clauses. Thus, while the standard negative marker is associated with most minimal and basic sentences, 'non-standard negative markers are associated with the prohibitive/imperative, non-verbal constructions, polar questions etc (cf: Miestamo 2005, Kahrel 1996). In Igbo and Yoruba for instance, different negative markers are used in the negation of declarative and imperative/prohibitive constructions. For Igbo, the negative prefix *-ghi* applies to simple declarative constructions while the negative prefix *-la* applies to imperative constructions. Hewson (2006: 10) identifies two negative particles in Yoruba as *kò* and *má*: the former appears in main clauses while the latter appears in prohibitions or subordinate clauses. This paper focuses on the structure of negative constructions in Etulo. The structural and functional domain of identified negative markers is examined. Emphasis is made on the phonological properties (tone and vowel lengthening) of the negative markers. The following constructions are explored: the simple declarative, imperative, anticipative or future, perfectal constructions and interrogatives (polar questions). Also included is the negation of monoverbal, multiverbal and complex clauses. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: §1.1 gives ethnolinguistic information on Etulo as well as some basic grammatical features, §2.0 discuss the negation of basic constructions. In §2.1 and 2.2, the negation of imperative construction and interrogatives are discussed respectively. §2.3 examine the peculiarity of the negation of complex clauses. In §3.0, the use of negative words in Etulo is highlighted. This is followed by the conclusion in §4.

#### 1.1 Background information

Etulo is classified as an Idomoid language of the Benue Congo subgroup of the Niger Congo language family (Armstrong 1989). It is a minority language spoken in some parts of Benue and Taraba states in Nigeria. This study focuses on the variety spoken in the Etulo speech community of Katsina-ala LGA of Benue state. It is relatively an endangered and under-described language.

Etulo is a tone language with three distinctive level tonemes (high, low and mid/step) and two contour tones (the rising and falling tones). Tone plays both lexical and grammatical function in this language. It has



variants. In the (a) examples as shown in (7) - (9), the polar question is marked by vowel lengthening in the words *àtsùbòò* ‘pepper’, *wàà* ‘perfective marker’ and *únáà* ‘sleep’ which occur in sentence final position. In the negated variant however, this vowel lengthening is shifted to the negative particle (7b, 8b and 9b). Despite its specific shape, all negative morphemes have two things in common: their structural domain and their nature as particles. Examples:

7a) àdì gíé ángwóò  
PN eat yam Q  
‘Did Adi eat yam?’

7b) àdì gíé ángwó lóò  
PN eat yam NEG-Q  
‘Didn’t Adi eat yam?’

8a) ò lú wàà  
3SG:SUBJ go PERF.Q  
‘Has he gone?’

8b) ò lú wà lóò  
3SG:SUBJ go PERF NEG.Q  
‘Hasn’t he gone?’

9a) íngíú kà jágbá ná únáà?  
PN FUT be able sleep sleep(N)-Q  
‘Can ingyú sleep?’

9b) íngíú kà jágbá ná úná lóò  
PN FUT be able sleep sleep(N) NEG-Q  
‘Can’t ingyú sleep?’

### 2.3 Negation of complex clauses

In complex clauses such as focus constructions, negation is marked by the negative particle *bá*. At the surface level, the scope of the negative marker in focus constructions seems ambiguous. The negation of the focused constituent and the main predicate is similarly marked by the post sentential negative particle. Etulo makes no structural distinction between the negation of a focused constituent (11) and of the predicate (12).

10) lí àní nwí àdì tá àní àfè bá  
COP 1SG REL PN hit 1SG slap NEG  
‘It is not me that Adi slapped’

11) lí àní nwí àdì tá àní àfè bá  
COP 1SG REL PN hit 1SG slap NEG  
‘It is me that Adi did not slap’

In a complex construction involving two clauses, the scope of negation may be partial or full. Negation is marked once when only one clause in a complex construction is negated, but is doubly marked when both clauses are negated. In example (12) for instance, negation is marked once and it has scope over the first clause. When both clauses are negated as in (13), Etulo adopts the use of multiple negation marking, which is indicated by the negator *bá* and the preverbal negative morpheme *jámá*<sup>2</sup>. The latter directly precedes the verb of the first clause. In addition, the negative marker *ba* is marked twice. This is however optional.

12) àdì jé gběē ìnàni ná úná bá  
PN know COMP PN sleep sleep NEG  
‘Adi did not know that Inyani slept’

13) éjì jámá jé gběē àdì ná úná (bá) bá  
1PL NEG know COMP PN sleep sleep NEG NEG  
‘We did not know that Adi did not sleep’

### III. NEGATIVE WORDS

In Etulo, negative words such as *ńkábá* ‘nothing’, *wùbá* ‘never/no more’ *Eeee* ‘no’ are attested. From a synchronic perspective, the first two negative words are considered lexicalized forms derived from two

<sup>2</sup> Besides the use of multiple negation in complex clauses, *jámá* may also indicate negative emphasis as in the following construction:

i) àdì ká jámá ná úná bá  
PN FUT NEG sleep sleep NEG  
‘Adi will never sleep’

morphemes. *Nkábá*<sup>3</sup> is derived from the noun *ńká* and the negative particle *bá* while *wùbá* is derived from the morpheme *wu* (which has no identifiable meaning in isolation) and the negator *bá*. In different contexts, *ńkábá* loosely translates into English as nowhere or nothing (see 14a and 14b). The negative word *ee* is basically used to answer yes/no questions. Its syntactic position is preclausal (see 16b). The following examples are illustrative:

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|--|--|
| <p>14a) li      ńkábá<br/>COP nothing<br/>'It is nothing'</p>  | <p>14b) ábù      lè      ké      ńkábá<br/>2SG:SUBJ PROG go nowhere<br/>'You are going nowhere'</p>            |
| <p>15a) ò              lè      fè      áńí      wùbá<br/>3SG:SUBJ PROG wait 1SG no more<br/>'He is no more waiting for me'</p> | <p>15b) àdì      kà      ǰá      ǰá      wùbá<br/>PN      FUT laugh laugh never<br/>'Adi will never laugh'</p> |
| <p>16a) ábù              kìdì      ùnwógīē<br/>2SG:SUBJ cook food<br/>'You cooked food'</p>                                    | <p>16b) èè      ábù      kìdì      ùnwógīē      bá<br/>no 2SG cook food NEG<br/>'No you did not cook food'</p> |

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Etulo falls among the languages that make use of particles for syntactic negation. It distinguishes between the use of the standard (*bá*) and non-standard (*lòò*) negative markers. The aforementioned negative markers are analysed as particles considering the following:

- They perform no other function or have no other meaning than the underlying meaning of negation or the function of negating an affirmative construction.
- They occur in sentence final position regardless of the preceding word; be it an adjective, noun, verb etc. They are therefore less likely to be affixes.

Further investigation is needed on the realization of multiple negators in Etulo, as well as on the ambiguity observed in the partial negation of complex clauses.

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Chikelu Ihunanya Ezenwafor. "Negation marking strategies in Etulo." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* , vol. 22, no. 10, 2017, pp. 11–14.

<sup>3</sup> In Etulo, the negative word *nkaba* is commonly used as a response to traditional greetings. In such contexts, it is roughly the equivalent of the English words 'fine/not bad'. For instance, the typical response to the Etulo greeting *ò kìdì sínèè* 'How are you doing' would be *ńkábá* which literally means nothing.