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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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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 lgbo 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

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roughly twenty seven consonants and eight vowels (speech sounds). Phonological processes like elision, labialization, nasalization etc are common. It is an isolating language with some agglutinative features and has a predominant SVO word order. The data used for this work are represented using phonetic symbols (IPA) since Etulo has yet no standardized or official orthography.

II. NEGATION OF BASIC CONSTRUCTIONS

The basic sentences in Etulo are here exemplified with the simple declarative, future and perfectal constructions. In these constructions, negation is expressed by the high tone negative particle $b\dot{a}$. The negative marker mainly occurs in sentence final position with a few exceptions (see 6b). These negated constructions contrast with their affirmative counterparts only in the presence of the negator, $b\dot{a}$.

1a) ìŋànì lì ìnwíndà PN COP beautiful 'Inyani is beautiful' 1b) ìnànì lì ìnwíndà bá
PN COP beautiful NEG
'Inyani is not beautiful'

2a) o kà ſá íʃá 3SG FUT laugh laugh (N) 'He/She will laugh' 2b) o kà ſá íſá bá 3SG FUT laugh laugh (N) NEG 'He/She will not laugh'

3a) èmgbé lé ólē wà children play play(N) PERF 'The children have played'

3b) èmgbé lé ólē wà bá children play play(N) PERF NEG 'The children have not played'

Just like mono-verbal clauses, negation is marked once in multi-verbal constructions. In serial verb constructions for instance, the post sentential negative marker has scope over all verbs.

4a) ìsèsé kà kíé ènì fúé èsé PN FUT take water sprinkle floor 'Isɛsɛ will sprinkle water on the floor'

4b) ìsèsé kà kíé ènì fúé èsé bá
PN FUT take water sprinkle floor NEG
'Isese will not sprinkle water on the floor'

2.1 Negation of imperative constructions

For the Etulo imperative negative, two morphemes are introduced: the high tone preverbal morpheme $k\acute{a}$ and the postverbal negative particle $b\acute{a}$. In the negation of the plural imperative, the negative marker $b\acute{a}$ is followed by the plural imperative marker $n\acute{a}\grave{a}$ (6b). The negative imperative constructions contrast with their affirmative counterparts on two counts: by the presence of a preverbal morpheme and a negative particle. Consider the following examples:

5a) sò àngià 6a) sò àngià náà pound millet pund millet PL 'Pound millet' 'Pound millet'

5b) ká sò àngìà bá 6b) ká sò àngìà bá náà
PTCL pound millet NEG
'Don't pound millet'

'Don't pound millet'

2.2 Negation of interrogatives (polar questions)

The polar question in Etulo is distinct from other constructions. It is characterized by vowel lengthening. The last vowel of the word in the final position of the sentence is lengthened. For instance, the noun $\acute{a}ngw\acute{o}$ 'yam' becomes $\acute{a}ngw\acute{o}$ when it occurs as the last word in a polar question. The extra vowel which is introduced as a result of vowel lengthening bears a low tone. Vowel lengthening and low tone therefore underly the formation of polar questions in Etulo. Negation of polar questions involves the use of the dedicated negative marker $l\acute{o}$ which presumably bears an inherent high tone. The vowel of the negative particle is however lengthened resulting in the form $l\acute{o}$.\(^1\) Observe the difference between the negation of polar questions and their

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¹ The analysis of the negative particle $l\acute{o}\acute{o}$ given here differs slightly from the analysis proposed in Ezenwafor C.I (2011), where the tone of the negative particle is strictly analyzed as a glide/falling tone.

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7a) àdì gié ángwóò
                                         7b) àdì
                                                   gíé
                                                        ángwó lóò
  PN eat yam Q
                                            PN
                                                   eat
                                                         yam NEG-Q
  'Did Adi eat yam?'
                                            'Didn't Adi eat yam?'
            lú wàà
                                      8b) ò
                                                   lú
                                                       wà
 3SG:SUBJ go PERF.Q
                                         3SG:SUBJ
                                                    go PERF NEG.Q
  'Has he gone?'
                                        'Hasn't he gone?'
9a) íngíú kà
              jágbá
                      ná únáà?
                                      9b) íngíú kà jágbá
                                                                   úná
                                                                          166
                                                             ná
   PN FUT be able sleep sleep(N)-Q
                                               FUT be able sleep sleep(N) NEG-Q
                                           PN
   'Can ingyu sleep?'
                                         'Can't ingyu sleep?'
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2.3 Negation of complex clauses

In complex clauses such as focus constructions, negation is marked by the negative particle $b\dot{a}$. 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).

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10) lì ánî nwí àdì tá ání àfè bá COP 1SG REL PN hit 1SG slap NEG 'It is not me that Adi slapped'
11) lì ánî nwí àdì tá ání àfè bá COP 1SG REL PN hit 1SG slap NEG 'It is me that Adi did not slap'
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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 $b\dot{a}$ and the preverbal negative morpheme $j\dot{a}m\dot{a}^2$. The latter directly precedes the verb of the first clause. In addition, the negative marker ba is marked twice. This is however optional.

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12) àdì jé gbšē ìnànì ná úná bá
PN know COMP PN sleep sleep NEG
'Adi did not know that Inyani slept'
13) éjî jàmá jé gbšē àdì ná úná (bá) bá
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15) eJi Jama Je gbεε adi na una (ba) ba

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

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² Besides the use of multiple negation in complex clauses, $j \grave{a} m \acute{a}$ may also indicate negative emphasis as in the following construction:

i) àdì ká jàmá ná úná bá
 PN FUT NEG sleep sleep NEG
 'Adi will never sleep'

morphemes. $\acute{N}k\acute{a}b\acute{a}^3$ is derived from the noun $\acute{n}k\acute{a}$ and the negative particle $b\acute{a}$ while $w\grave{u}b\acute{a}$ is derived from the morpheme wu (which has no identifiable meaning in isolation) and the negator $b\acute{a}$. In different contexts, $\acute{n}k\acute{a}b\acute{a}$ 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:

14a) lì ńkábá COP nothing 'It is nothing'

14b) ábû lè kέ ńkábá 2SG:SUBJ PROG go nowhere 'You are going nowhere'

15a) ò lè fế ánî wùbá 3SG:SUBJ PROG wait 1SG no more 'He is no more waiting for me'

15b) àdì kà ſá íſá wùbá

PN FUT laugh laugh never
'Adi will never laugh'

16a) ábû kìò ùnwógīē 2SG:SUBJ cook food 'You cooked food' 16b) éè ábû kiò ùnwógīē bá no 2SG cook food NEG 'No you did not cook food'

IV. CONCLUSION

Etulo falls among the languages that make use of particles for syntactic negation. It distinguishes between the use of the standard $(b\acute{a})$ and non-standard $(l\acute{o}\acute{o})$ 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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³ 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 $\partial ki\partial sin\dot{\epsilon}$ 'How are you doing' would be $\dot{n}k\dot{a}b\dot{a}$ which literally means nothing.