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

Date of Submission: 17-08-2017
Date of acceptance: 18-10-2017

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 md: 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, multoverbal 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 bà. 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, bà.

1a) ịnání lì inwìndà
    PN COP beautiful
    ‘Inyani is beautiful’

1b) ịnání lì inwìndà bà
    PN COP beautiful NEG
    ‘Inyani is not beautiful’

2a) o kà jà ijà
    3SG FUT laugh laugh (N)
    ‘He/She will laugh’

2b) o kà jà ijà bà
    3SG FUT laugh laugh (N) NEG
    ‘He/She will not laugh’

3a) ịmgbē lé ólè wà
    children play play(N) PERF
    ‘The children have played’

3b) ịmgbē lé ólè wà bà
    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) ịsèsè kà kíé ènì fúé èsè
    PN FUT take water sprinkle floor
    ‘Isèsè will sprinkle water on the floor’

4b) ịsèsè kà kíé ènì fúé èsè bà
    PN FUT take water sprinkle floor NEG
    ‘Isèsè 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 kà and the postverbal negative particle bà. In the negation of the plural imperative, the negative marker bà is followed by the plural imperative marker nàà (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 ụngwà
    pound millet
    ‘Pound millet’

5b) kà sò ụngwà bà
    PTCL pound millet NEG
    ‘Don’t pound millet’

6a) sò ụngwà nàà
    pound millet PL.
    ‘Pound millet’

6b) kà sò ụngwà bà nàà
    PTCL pound millet NEG PL.
    ‘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 ụngwà ‘yam’ becomes ụngwà̀ 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 lò which presumably bears an inherent high tone. The vowel of the negative particle is however lengthened resulting in the form lòò. ¹ Observe the difference between the negation of polar questions and their

¹ The analysis of the negative particle lòò 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.

DOI: 10.9790/0837-2210071114   www.iosrjournals.org 12 | Page
variants. In the (a) examples as shown in (7) - (9), the polar question is marked by vowel lengthening in the words àtsúbōò ‘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  gioc  àngwɔ̀  àngwɔ̀  PN  eat  yam Q
‘Did Adi eat yam?’
7b) àdì  gioc  àngwɔ̀  lóò  PN  eat  yam  NEG-Q
‘Didn’t Adi eat yam?’

8a) àdì  gioc  wàà  àdì  gioc  3SG:SUBJ  go  PERF.Q
‘Has he gone?’
8b) àdì  gioc  wàà  àdì  gioc  3SG:SUBJ  go  PERF  NEG.Q
‘Hasn’t he gone?’

9a) ingú  kà  jàgbá  ná  únáà  PN  FUT  be  able  sleep  sleep(N)-Q
‘Can ingyu sleep?’
9b) ingú  kà  jàgbá  ná  úná  lóò  PN  FUT  be  able  sleep  sleep(N)  NEG-Q
‘Can’t ingyu sleep?’

2.3 Negation of complex clauses

In complex clauses such as focus constructions, negation is marked by the negative particle bà. 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) li  ánì  nwì  àdì  tá  ánì  âfɛ̀  bá
   COP  1SG  REL  PN  hit  1SG  slap  NEG
   ‘It is not me that Adi slapped’
11) li  ánì  nwì  àdì  tá  ánì  âfɛ̀  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 bà and the preverbal negative morpheme jàmá. The latter directly precedes the verb of the first clause. In addition, the negative marker bà is marked twice. This is however optional.

12) àdì  jé  gbɛ̀  tà  jé  gbɛ̀  àdì  ná  úná  bá
   PN  know  COMP  PN  sleep  sleep  NEG
   ‘Adi did not know that Inyani slept’
13) éjî  jàmá  jé  gbɛ̀  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 ñkábá ‘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, jàmá may also indicate negative emphasis as in the following construction:

i) àdì  kà  jàmá  ná  úná  bá
   PN  FUT  NEG  sleep  sleep  NEG
   ‘Adi will never sleep’
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morphemes. Ńkábá is derived from the noun Ńká and the negative particle bá while wùbá is derived from the morpheme wù (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:

14a) lì Ńkábá COP nothing
   ‘It is nothing’

14b) ābù  lè kí Ńkábá 2SG:SUBJ PROG go nowhere
   ‘You are going nowhere’

15a) ò lè fè ánì wùbá 3SG:SUBJ PROG wait 1SG no more
   ‘He is no more waiting for me’

15b) ādì ká jà Ĭfà wùbá PN FUT laugh laugh never
   ‘Adì will never laugh’

16a) ābù  kì ìwùwòjè 2SG:SUBJ cook food
   ‘You cooked food’

16b) ē ē ābù  kì ìwùwòjè 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 (bá) and non-standard (lóò) 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.

REFERENCES


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 ò kì ìsinì ‘How are you doing’ would be nkábá which literally means nothing.