

SYNTAX OF NEGATIVE MARKERS IN IGBO AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This paper examines negation in Igbo and English languages. It discusses how negative markers are formed and investigates the nature of negative markers in the languages. To achieve its aim, previous literatures related to the study were reviewed. The paper adopts the Transformational Generative Grammar as its framework. The data gathered were analysed using descriptive approach. The study reveals that negation exists in both Igbo and English and that negation is a formation that opposes the semantic representation of a constituent. The morphemic constituents for forming negative markers in Igbo are **-ghi, beghi**, and English has **not, non-**, and **un-** or **no –sentence**. Negative markers are discontinuous in nature. The study concludes that the morphemic environment a verb finds itself determines the morpheme it loses to be aligned with its negator in Igbo.

Keywords: Igbo, Transformational Generative Grammar, Negative markers

Introduction

Language is the most important means of communication used by human beings. People make use of language to express ideas, emotions, behaviour, feelings and thoughts. A language is uttered with the use of words which are put together in form of sentences or phrases. There are different types of sentences such as declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives, and so on. According to Li and Cheng (20), interrogative sentences are used for asking questions, these sentences raise doubts, queries and in return expect answers. Sentences can also be used to inquire about situations either to

confirm or to deny it. Some of the sentences are affirmative and while others are negatives. In order to determine the existence of negation and the formation processes in Igbo and English, the paper compares negation in Igbo and English languages.

Igbo and English belong to different language families. Igbo is one of the three major indigenous languages of Nigeria. It is classified as a Niger-Congo language which belongs to the new West Benue-Congo sub-branch of languages (Bendor-Samuel 1989) or the West Benue-Congo (Williamson & Blench 2000). The native speakers are found in the five south-east states of Nigeria namely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Other speakers are also found in the neighbouring states of Delta, Benue, Rivers and Akwa Ibom. There are many dialects of the Igbo language such as the Ika, the Owerre (Owerri), the Onicha (Onitsha), the Olu (Orlu), the Omaahia (Umahia), the Ikwere (Ikwere), Nsuka (Nsukka), and so on but this paper is based on the standard variety which is the Standard Igbo.

Syntactically, the Igbo language exhibits the SVO characteristics. Morphologically, it is an agglutinating language, which is rich in derivational and extensional morphology, (makes extensive use of affixes: prefix, superfix, interfix, infix, and suffix) and makes use of verb serialization. The Igbo language has both bound morphemes as well as free morphemes. Orthographically, the Igbo language makes use of the Onwu orthography in written Standard Igbo variety; it comprises 28 consonants and 8 vowels. Phonologically, the Igbo language is a tone language with three distinct tones.

Literature Review

Scholars and grammarians view negation differently. For Crystal (323), negation is “a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence’s marching”. In the English grammar, it is

expressed by the presence of the negative particles (NEG) not or n't (the contracted negative). In lexis, there are several possible means for instance, prefixes such as un, non, or words such as deny. Some languages use more than one particle in a single clause to express negation. Lyons (1969) opines that there is also a clear difference of meaning in utterance which results from the negation of a performative verb and the negative of its complement. The above claim is elucidated in these examples:

(a) I don't promise to assassinate the prime minister.

(b) I promise not to assassinate the prime minister.

To Chinedum *et al* (181-204), philosophers and logicians who accept the notion of logical form based on the distinction between the logical and extra logical (or descriptive) vocabularies treat negation as a feature of the logical vocabulary somehow apart from negative elements in the meaning of extra – logical terms and accept the doctrine that validity is a function of logical form in the narrow sense in which it is determined by logical particles. Examples:

(a) Christ lives forever

(b) Christ does not live forever

(c) Christ is mortal

Lobner (193), states that the negation is best captured with the term polarization, which means a partition of everything into two opposed alternatives, yes or no, true or false. Polarisation is not restricted to declarative sentences. It applies as well to all other types such as interrogative or imperative sentences. Consider the following examples:

(a) Why is there beer in the fridge? Versus why is there no beer in the fridge?

(b) Please, put beer into the fridge versus please, don't put beer into the fridge.

Quirk and Greenbaun (24) opine that negative sentences involve the operator requiring the insertion of not (or the affixal contraction – n't) between the operator and the predication. The assertion is exemplified thus:

(a) The man isn't a doctor

Kempson (118) notes that, in particular, there is the problem of interpreting negative sentences. How can we reconcile the claim that to give the meaning of a lexical item is to state the condition which contributes to the set of truth condition of all sentences such as a – d, below, none of which has a necessary condition for the contribution made by lexical item.

(a) John didn't kill Mar

Finnegan (332) opines that four out of five negative morphemes occur as the negative adverb not (attached to the verb as a contraction). One characteristic difference between speech and writing is the much higher frequency of negation in spoken registers, where the vast majority of negative elements are separated which is often realised as – n't rather than incorporated into words like invalid.

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (161) hold that the contracted negative form n't can be attached to auxiliary verbs. See the following examples:

(a) John is running John isn't running

(b) They have left They haven't left

When a sentence continues only a main verb and no auxiliary verb, the auxiliary verb do is used in forming the negative version as demonstrated below:

(a) You know those women You don't know those women

(b) Mary left early Mary didn't leave early

(c) They went to Berkeley They didn't go to Berkeley

Ndimele (939) says that it is often claimed that negation is a distinct speech act from the affirmative, and that negative affirmative pairing

is not always a straight forward one. Schaefer and Masagbor (28) and Chinedum *et al* quote Dahl (1979) as defining "...negation in terms of the truth value of two sentences. That is, a negation marker is such that in converting one sentence (S-1) into another (S-2), it brings about a state where S-1 is true if S-2 is false, or S-2 is true if S-1 is false."

In logic, negation the logical complement is an operation that essentially takes a proposition P to another proposition P n written P, which is interpreted intuitively as being true when P is false and false when P is true. Negation is thus a unary (single argument) logical connective it may be applied as an operation on propositions, truth values, or semantic values more generally. In classical logic negation is normally identified with the truth function that takes truth to falsity and vice versa. In intuitionist logic, according to the Brouwer Heyting-Kolnogerou interpretation the negation of a proposition P is the proposition whose proof are relations of P. (Hazelwinkle, 21)

Data Presentation and Analysis

Affirmative

Affirmative

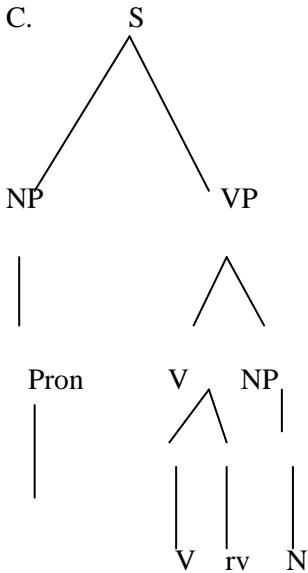
1a. ò jéré áhia?
3(s) go-rv market
Did s/he go to the market?
market?

Negative

Negative

B O jēghi a hai?
3(s) go-Neg market
Didn't s/he go to the

C.

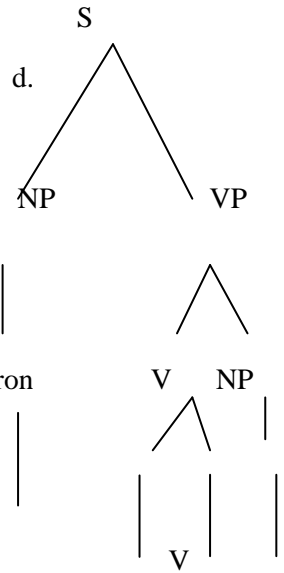


Neg N

3(s) (l)

Ò jé ré ahĩa

d.



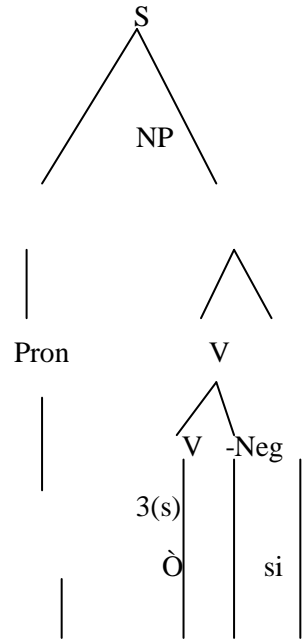
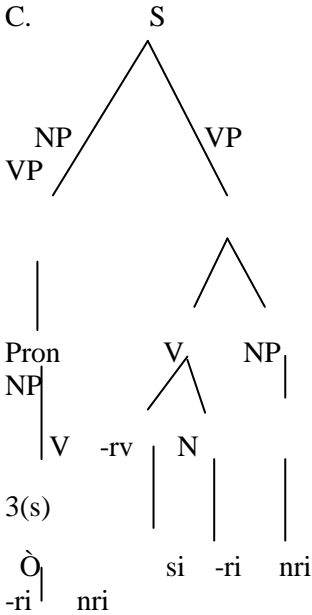
3(s) (H)

Ò si -ghi ahĩa

The above example demonstrates negation in Igbo language. The negative marker is affixed to the verb and the tense marker in the affirmative sentence is deleted to give way for the negative maker. The example in view agrees with negation marker position in English. While English uses 'not' after a given verb to show negation, Igbo language uses 'ghi' to show negation in Igbo language.

2a. Ò siri nri?
 3(s) Cook-rv food
 Did s/he the cook food?

b. O sighi nri?
 3(s) cook-Neg food
 Didn't s/he cook food?

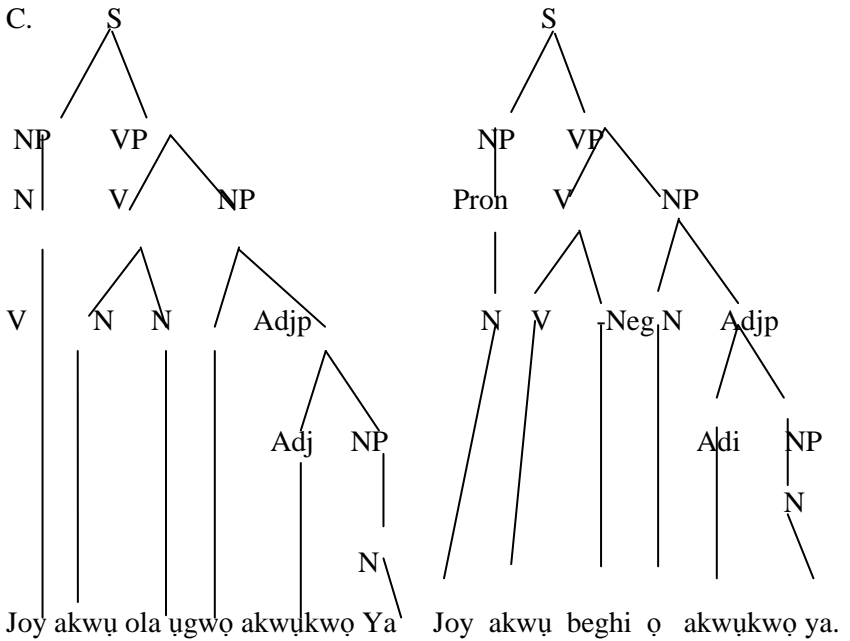


3a. Joy akwụọla Ùgwọ akwụkwọ ya.

Name paid debt school her.

Joy has paid her school fees.

b. Joy akwụ begħi ùgwọ akwụkwọ ya.



(4) Ali zutara ụgbọala ọ hụ

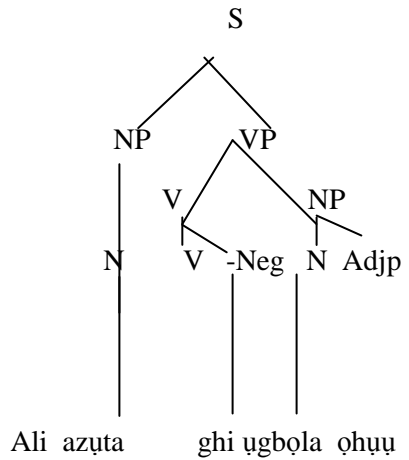
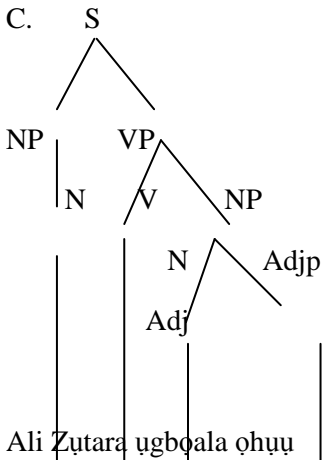
Ali buy car new

Ali bought a new car

b. Ali azutaghi ụgbọala ọhụ

Ali did not buy car new

Ali did not buy a new car



5a. Mmeso guru akwukwo odide ya unyaahu.

Mmeso read book written her yesterday.

Mmeso read her note book yesterday.

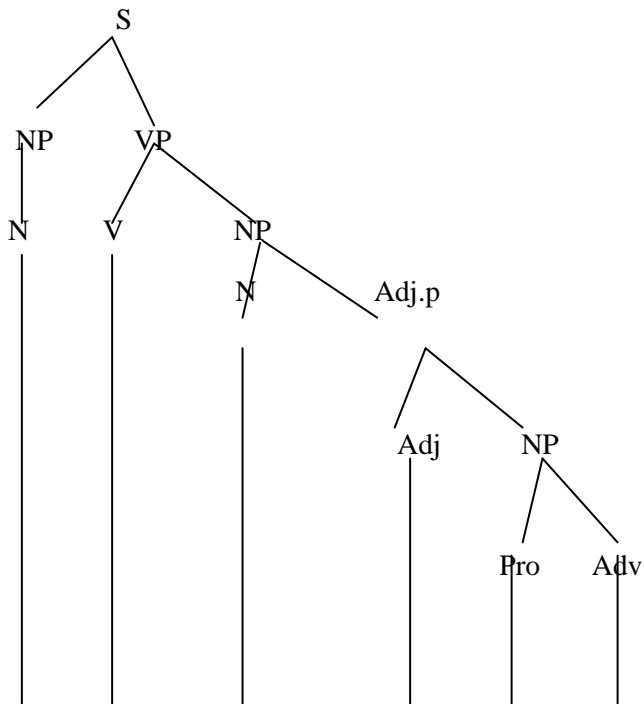
b. Mmeso agughı akwukwo odide ya unyaahu.

Mmeso did not read book written her yesterday.

Mmeso did not read her note book yesterday.

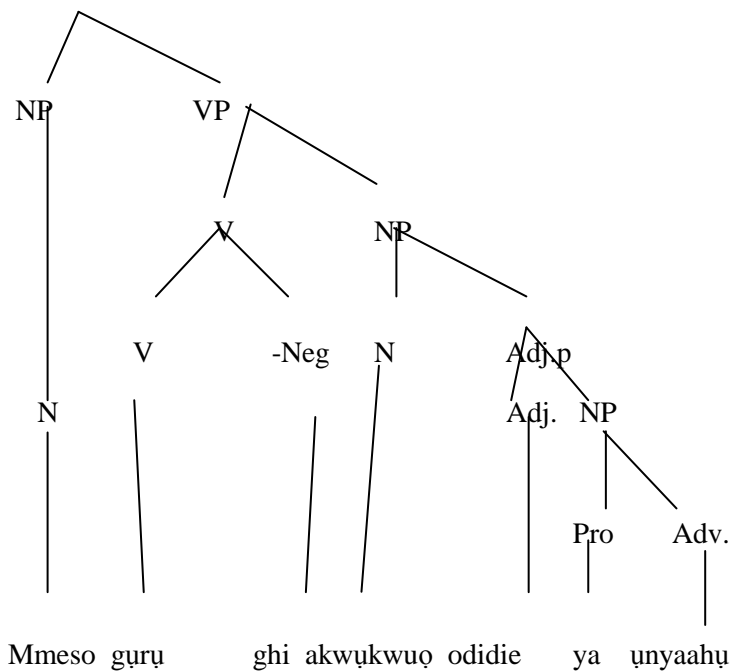
(Affirmative)

C.



Mmeso guru akwukwo odide ya unyaahu

S (Negative)



Conclusion

So far, we have established that Igbo as well as English language allows negation of verbs. The negative morphemes in the languages are; **ghi**, **beghi**, and **la** (Igbo) and **not**, **un-**, and **no sentences** (English). The study also reveals that verbs in Igbo go through some morphological processes like deletion and insertion of some morphemes to be aligned with the negator. The insertion or deletion could be at the initial or terminal position in verbs.

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