

Negation, Tense and Aspect in North-Western Edoid

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Abstract

Negation is a universal grammatical category, with no known language lacking a means to reverse the truth value of a sentence's propositional content. However, the morphosyntactic forms of negative markers, their interaction with other functional categories such as tense and aspect, and their positions within the clause exhibit significant cross-linguistic variation. This study investigates the interaction between negation and tense/aspect in two Northwestern Edoid language groups spoken in the Àkókó region of Òndó State, Nigeria: Àbèsàbèsì and Proto Òssé. The goal is to compare the syntactic and inflectional behaviour of negation in these languages in order to identify both shared and divergent patterns. Findings show that while habitual aspect in Proto Òssé, especially Ìṣùà, is inflected for negation, Àbèsàbèsì, employs a non-inflectional strategy. Moreover, whereas negative markers typically precede the verb phrase (VP) in other Northwestern Edoid languages, Àbèsàbèsì exhibits an unusual clause-final placement. To account for these patterns, the paper adopts the Minimalist Program, with insight from the Borer-Chomsky Hypothesis, and proposes that the negative head (Neg⁰) in Àbèsàbèsì bears an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature. This feature triggers VP movement to the Specifier of Negation Phrase (Spec-NegP), leaving the negative morpheme stranded in clause-final position.

Keywords: *Negation, Propositional content, Minimalist program, Borer-Chomsky Hypothesis And VP movement.*

1. Introduction

Negation is a fundamental aspect of linguistic systems which allows speakers to express denial, contradiction, or absence of a state or event. Tense encodes the temporal relation between the time of an event and the time of speaking, while aspect conveys the internal temporal structure of the event, distinguishing, for instance, between perfective and imperfective viewpoints. Although the overt expression of negation, tense, and aspect varies significantly across languages in terms of form, syntactic position, and inflectional properties, these categories are universally attested across the world's languages. In an attempt to demonstrate the universality of this functional category as well as its parameterized reality, many scholars have investigated negation, tense and aspect in different languages and dialects showing differences and similarities in their forms, their syntactic status, inflectional relationship and their positions within the clause. For instance, Olumuyiwa (2013) investigated the grammatical rules with reference to tense/aspect and negation in Mòbà dialect of Yorùbá. The study compares the occurrence and distribution of tense/aspect markers as well as negation system with those of Standard Yoruba. It reveals the differences and similarities between the forms and distribution of tense/aspect and negation markers in Mòbà and the standard Yoruba. Adeoye (2013) examined tense, aspect and negation in Ìgásí. The study showed the tense/aspect systems and their markers in the language. He further investigated the relationship between tense, aspect and negation in the language or speech form. Ogunmodimu (2013) investigated the forms of tense and aspect markers in Àhàn as well as their distribution in negative clauses. Olodude (2024) examined tense and aspectual system in Ìkálè dialect of Yorùbá. The paper reveals the similarities and differences in the tense and aspectual systems of Ìkálè and the standard Yoruba. Taiwo (2018) investigated the features of negation, pronoun, tense and aspect in Ào and other dialects spoken in South Eastern Yoruba. Also, Ajóńgólò (2005) employed minimalist theory to examine the inflectional relationship between negation and other functional elements in the Ào dialect of Yoruba, Olaogun (2011) investigated the inflectional relationship among pronouns, tense, aspect and negation in the Òwò dialect of Yorùbá. However, these extant studies focus on the description of the forms of tense/aspect and negative markers, the use of one theoretical approach or framework to analyze negation and tense and aspect phenomena and their distribution in different individual languages, and comparing at least the forms of negative and tense/aspect markers in Yoruba and its dialect. There is comparatively limited or no research documenting the syntax of negation and tense/aspect across language groups, adopting the minimalist program with insight from Borer-Chomsky hypothesis to attempt a unified systematic account of the intra-and/or inter-lingual negation variations. Therefore, this study compares Àbèsàbèsì (a subgroup of Edoid Language family spoken in both Àkókó North Eastern and Akoko Northwestern Local Government Areas of Ondo State, Nigeria) with Ìpè (Ùkùè) and Ìsùà (Ùhàmù) another subgroup of Edoid language family classified as Proto Òssé under Northwestern Edoid) with a view to proposing a unified systematic account for all of the distributional nuances of negation markers in these two subgroups. Findings reveal that in Proto Òssé, negative markers occur preverbally, consistent with the typical pattern found in many Edoid and Nigerian languages. In contrast, Àbèsàbèsì exhibits a typologically unusual pattern in which negative markers appear clause-finally, resulting in a verb–negation word order. This paper argues that such variation can be accounted for within a minimalist syntactic framework by positing that the negative head in Àbèsàbèsì bears an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature, which triggers VP-fronting to the specifier of Negation Phrase (Spec-NegP), leaving the negative morpheme stranded in clause-final position.

In sum, the Northwestern Edoid languages of the Àkókó region present a compelling empirical domain for examining how negation interacts with tense and aspect. The syntactic asymmetries observed, particularly the clause-final position of negation in Àbèsàbèsì, contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-linguistic variation and the parametric options available within Universal Grammar.

2. Research Methodology

This research is primarily field-based and adopts a qualitative research design for both data collection and analysis. Fieldtrips were conducted to various towns and villages where the selected language groups under investigation are spoken. Data were elicited from 15 language consultants (native speakers) who have resided in these communities for over 25 years, with age ranges between 40 and 65 years. The study focuses on two language groups that were selected through a combination of random and purposive sampling, in alignment with the objectives of the research.

3. Linguistic Background of Northwestern Edoid Languages

The Northwestern Edoid languages are a subgroup of the larger Edoid language family, which falls under the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo phylum. These languages are predominantly spoken in Edo State and its surrounding regions in Nigeria. Specifically, the Northwestern Edoid languages are spoken in the Akoko region of Ondo State, which shares a border with Edo State. Notable languages within this subgroup include Ìsùà, Èpìnmi, Ìpè, and Àbèsàbèsì. While these languages share several typological features, they also display distinct characteristics, particularly in terms of syntax and phonology.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995) with insights from the Borer-Chomsky Hypothesis (Borer, 2005) to account for intra- and inter-lingual negation variations. The Minimalist Program (MP) seeks to simplify linguistic theory by reducing it to its bare essentials. It proposes that language is an optimal system, striving for efficiency in computation and representation.

Key concepts in the MP include:

Features: Linguistic units are composed of features, which are the smallest elements of syntactic information.

Merge: A basic operation that combines two syntactic objects to create a larger one.

Move: An operation that displaces a syntactic object from one position to another.

Agree: An operation that establishes a relationship between two features, allowing them to share information.

The Borer-Chomsky Hypothesis (henceforth, BCH) posits that syntax is feature-driven and that syntactic structures are built by combining lexical items based on their inherent features. This means that the properties of words, such as their category (noun, verb, etc.) and their semantic content, determine how they combine to form phrases and sentences.

5. Interaction of Tense¹⁷, Aspect and Negation in North Western Edoid

5.1 Aspect in Negative Sentences in North Western Edoid

This section discusses aspectual markers in negative sentences in North Western Edoid, focusing on constructions where aspectual markers can occur.

5.1.1 Habitual Aspect in Negative Sentences

Only the habitual aspect marker in Ìṣùà inflects for negation. That is, the habitual aspect markers in other languages do not inflect for negation. Consider the Ìṣùà sentences in below.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1a. Ayò é di èrèsin
Ayò Hab. buy cap
'Ayò usually buys cap'</p> | <p>b. Ayò ṣó dí èrèsin
Ayò Hab Neg-buy cap
'Ayò does not usually buy cap'</p> |
| <p>2a. Àwà é gbi eṣèni
They Hab. Kill fish
'They usually kill fish'</p> | <p>b. Àwà ṣó gbí eṣèni
They Hab-Neg kill fish
'They do not usually kill fish'</p> |

The negative marker in Ìṣùà is a high tone [´]. In the data presented above, this high tone takes the vowel of the verb that follows as its tone-bearing unit, as illustrated in examples (1b) and (2b). The habitual aspect marker é appears to inflect for negation by changing its form to ṣó. In these constructions, the vowel of the verb carries the negative high tone marker [´].

In Ṣósan, the same high tone that marks the habitual aspect also functions as a marker of negation. However, the distinction lies in the tone-bearing unit: while the high tone indicating affirmative habitual aspect derives its tone-bearing unit by copying the vowel (i.e., the tone-bearing unit) of the preceding subject DP, the high tone used to negate the habitual aspect takes the vowel of the following verb as its tone-bearing unit, as demonstrated in the examples below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>3a. Òjò ó de bàtà
Òjò Hab. buy shoe
'Òjò usually buys a pair of shoes'</p> | <p>b. Òjò ó de bàtà
Òjò Hab. Neg-buy shoe
'Òjò does not usually buy a pair of shoes'</p> |
| <p>4a. Mànhìn ín di emà
We Hab. eat food
'We usually eat'</p> | <p>b. Mànhìn ín dí emà
We Hab. Neg-eat food.
'We do not usually eat'</p> |

Also in Èpìnmi, the high tone that negates habitual aspect takes the vowel of the following verb in the sentence as its tone bearing unit as exemplified by the Èpìnmi sentences below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>5a. Ṣọlá é di eṣínnẹ̀
Ṣọlá Hab. eat beans
'Ṣọlá usually eats beans'</p> | <p>b. Ṣọlá é dí eṣínnẹ̀
Ṣọlá Hab Neg-eat beans
'Ṣọlá does not usually eat beans'</p> |
| <p>6a. Mè é ze àhùn
I Hab. sell pounded yam</p> | <p>b. Mè é zé àhùn
I Hab. Neg-sell pounded yam</p> |

¹⁷ The paper exclusively considers the interaction of negation, aspect and future tense to the exclusion of non- future tense because the tense type has no concrete element that marks it. (See Olaogun and Oyelade (2022) for a detailed discussion on this)

‘I usually sell pounded yam’

‘I do not usually sell pounded yam’

In Ìpè, the high tone that negates habitual aspect takes the habitual aspect marker *e* as its tone bearing unit. Consider the sentences in Ìpè below:

7a. Dàda e di bàtà

Dàda Hab. buy shoe.

‘Dàda usually buys a pair of shoes’

b. Dàda é di bàtà

Dàda Hab-Neg buy shoe

‘Dàda does not usually buy a pair of shoes’

8a. Ò e ri àhùn

S/he Hab eat pounded yam

‘S/he usually eats pounded yam’

b. Ò é ri àhùn

S/he Hab-Neg eat pounded yam

‘S/he does not usually eat pounded yam’

Conversely, in Àbèsàbèsì the habitual aspect is not inflected for negation as demonstrated in the example sentences below.

9a. Ojo màá miş

Òjó Hab. Sleep

‘Òjò usually sleeps’

b. Òjó màá miş yè

Òjó Hab. sleep Neg.

‘Òjó does not usually sleep’

10a. Ò mèé di bàtà

S/he Hab. buy shoe

‘S/he usually buys a pair of shoes’

b. Ò mèé di bàtà yè

S/he Hab. buy shoe Neg.

‘S/he does not usually buy a pair of shoes’

11a. Àó mòó fù aye

We Hab. cook beans

‘We usually cook beans’

b. Àó mòó fù aye yè

We Hab. cook beans Neg.

‘We do not usually cook beans’

As observed in (9), (10) and (11), the habitual aspect markers *màá*, *mèé* and *mòó* do not change form to inflect for negation when they occur with the negative marker *yè*. However, the variation in the form of these habitual aspectual markers is as a result of the vowel harmony¹⁸. Therefore, it can be validly concluded that, with the exception of Ìşùà, all functors marking or denoting the habitual aspect in Northwestern Edoid do not inflect for negation when appearing in negative sentences.

5.1.2 Perfective Aspect in Negative Sentences

This is a construction whereby one negates a completed action or event. In North Western Edoid, there are different markers for denoting negative perfective aspect. In all the North-Western Edoid languages examined in this study, the perfective aspect markers inflect for negation when used in negative sentences, as illustrated below.

Şósan

12a. Ayò hinaà dè bàtà

Ayò Perf. Buy shoe

‘Ayò has bought a pair of shoes’

b. Ayò bèé dè bàtà

Ayò Perf Neg-buy shoe

‘Ayò has not bought a pair of shoes’

13a. Mì hinaà di emà

I Perf eat food

‘I have eaten’

b. Mì bèé dí emà

I Perf Neg-eat food

‘I have not eaten’

¹⁸ The details of how vowel harmony conditions the shape of the aspectual markers in Àbèsàbèsì is given in Olaogun and Oyelade (2022).

Àbèsàbèsì

- | | |
|--|--|
| 14a. Táyò ka miṣ
Táyò Perf sleep
'Táyò has slept' | b. Táyò kìnà miṣ yè
Táyò Perf sleep Neg.
'Táyò has not slept' |
| 15a. Àé ke ji aye
We Perf eat beans
'We have eaten beans' | b. Àé kìnè ji aye yè
We Perf eat beans Neg
'We have not eaten beans' |
| 16a. Bòó ko fù aye
They Perf cook beans
'They have cooked beans' | b. Bòó kìnò fù aye yè
They Perf cook beans Neg.
'They have not cooked beans' |

The data above show that the perfective aspect marker *hinaà* in *Şósan* inflects for negation, changing form to *bèè* in negative sentences. Similarly, in *Àbèsàbèsì*, the perfective aspect markers *ka*, *ke*, and *ko* inflect for negation by changing to *kìnà*, *kìnè*, and *kìnò*, respectively, in negative constructions. The variation in these forms in *Àbèsàbèsì* is attributable to vowel harmony.

In *Ìpè* and *Ìṣùà*, perfective aspect markers also inflect for negation. However, while the affirmative perfective markers (*dà* in *Ìpè* and *ò* in *Ìṣùà*) appear in clause-final position, their corresponding negative forms (*béè* and *véè*) occur in pre-verbal position. The following examples illustrate these patterns in *Ìpè* and *Ìṣùà*:

Ìpè

- | | |
|--|--|
| 17a. Bólá di bàtà dà
Bólá buy shoe Perf.
'Bólá has bought a pair of shoes' | b. Bólá béè dí bàtà
Bólá Perf Neg-buy shoe
'Bólá has not bought a pair of shoes' |
| 18a. Ìyà rí àhùn dà
They eat pounded yam perf.
'They have eaten pounded yam' | b. Ìyà béè rí àhùn
They Perf Neg-eat pounded yam
'They have not eaten pounded yam' |

Ìṣùà

- | | |
|--|--|
| 19a. Şayò dí è rèsìn ò
Şayò buy cap Perf
'Şayò has bought cap' | b. Şayò véè dí èrèsìn
Şayò Perf. Neg-buy cap
'Şayò has not bought a cap' |
| 20a. Ò gbí eṣèni ò
S/he kill fish Perf.
'S/he has killed fish' | b. Ò véè gbí eṣèni
S/he Perf. Neg-kill fish
'S/he has not killed fish' |

Similarly, the perfective aspect marker in *Èpìnmi* inflects for negation in negative sentences. As evidenced in the examples (21-22) below, the high tone on the perfective marker *ré* changes to a low-tone *rè* and a high-tone morpheme occurring before it in negative sentences.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 21a. Kúnlé ré di bàtà
Kúnlé Perf buy shoe
'Kúnlé has bought a pair of shoes' | b. Kúnlé í rè di bàtà
Kúnlé Neg. Perf.buy shoe
'Kúnlé has not buy a pair of shoes' |
| 22a. Ìyà ré wìrẹn | b. Ìyà í rè wìrẹn |

They Perf. Sleep
'They have slept'

They Neg Perf sleep
'They have not slept'

23a. Ọ ré gbi èṣẹ̀nṣi
S/he Perf kill fish
'S/he has killed fish'

b. Ọ í rẹ̀ gbi èṣẹ̀nṣi
S/he Neg Perf kill fish
'S/he has not killed fish'

As observed in (21), (22) and (23), the cause of the change of the high tone on the functor *ré* to a low tone is as a result of tone polarization. That is, the high tone on the functor *ré* tends to take the opposite of the high tone on the preceding functor *í* (negative marker) which causes it to change to *rẹ̀* in negative sentence, considering the fact that functors are usually toneless.

5.2 Future Continuous Tense in Negative Sentences

This is the construction where one negates future continuous tense. Ịṣùà and Ọ́sàns use the same progressive aspect marker *é* for indicating future continuous tense. The question then arises, how the speakers of these languages would distinguish clauses with progressive aspect from clauses with future continuous tense. The simple answer is that the context of utterance will resolve the ambiguity. Therefore, we shall examine only the negative future continuous tense in Ẹ̀pínmì, Ị̀pẹ̀ and Àbèsàbèsì.

Ẹ̀pínmì

24a. Fẹ̀mì àà é yọ aàhọ̀
Fẹ̀mì Fut. Cont. go tomorrow
'Fẹ̀mì will be going tomorrow'

b. Fẹ̀mì àà é yọ aàhọ̀
Fẹ̀mì Fut. Cont. Neg-go tomorrow
'Fẹ̀mì will not go tomorrow'

25a. Ị̀yà àà é di bàtà
They Fut. Cont. buy shoe
'They will be buying a pair of shoes'

b. Ị̀yà àà é dí bàtà
They Fut. Cont. Neg-buy shoe
'They will not be buying a pair of shoes'

Ị̀pẹ̀

26a. Adé à ré di àthà
Adé Fut. Cont. buy cloth
'Adé will be buying cloth'

b. Adé é ré dí àthà
Adé Fut. Cont. Neg-buy cloth
'Adé will not be buying cloth's'

27a. Mànhìn à ré di eṣìnnè
We Fut. Cont. eat beans
'We will be eating beans'

b. Mànhìn é ré dí eṣìnnè
We Fut. Cont. Neg-eat beans
'We will not be eating beans'

Àbèsàbèsì

28a. Bọ́lá bá á das
Bọ́lá Fut. Cont. go
'Bọ́lá will be going'

b. Bọ́lá bá á das yè
Bọ́lá Fut. Cont. go Neg.
'Bọ́lá will not be going'

29a. Àé bé é ji aye
We Fut. Cont. eat beans
'We will be eating beans'

b. Àé bé é ji aye yè
We Fut. Cont. eat beans Neg
'We will not be eating beans'

30a. N bó ó fù ida
I Fut. Cont cook fire
'I will be cooking'

b. N bó ó fù ida yè
I Fut. Cont.cook fire Neg.
'I will not be cooking'

As observed in (24–30), except in Àbèsàbèsì, the future tense is inflected for negation. In Ìpè, the future tense marker *à* inflects for negation by changing form to *é* while the negative morpheme high tone equally shows up on the vocalic element of the verb. In Èpìnmi, the future tense marker with high-low tones *áà* in affirmative clauses becomes Low-low *àà* in negative future clauses.

5.3 Future Perfect Tense in Negative Sentences

This is the clause that negates the action or event that will be completed sometime in the future as given below. In Èpìnmi, a form of tone copying and tone polarization is observed as exemplified below.

31a. Bólá àà ré ri àhùn
Bólá Fut. Perf.eat pounded yam
'Bólá will have eaten pounded yam'

b. Bólá àà rè rí àhùn
Bólá Fut. Perf. Neg-eat pounded yam
'Bólá will not have eaten pounded yam'

32.a. Ò àà ré di àrhà
S/he Fut. Perf.buy cloth
'S/he will have bought a cloth'

b. Ò àà rè dí àrhà
S/he Fut. Perf. Neg-buy cloth'
'S/he will not have bought a cloth'

In Èpìnmi, the future tense marker with high-low tones *áà* in affirmative clauses becomes low-low *àà*, the perfective marker with a high tone *ré* changes to low tone *rè* while the tone of the verb changes to high as usual in negative future clauses.

In Şósan and Àbèsàbèsì, the functors that indicate future perfect tense do inflect for negation in negative sentences. However, the functor *á* that indicates future tense in Şósan does not inflect. Consider the sentences in Şósan and Àbèsàbèsì below:

Şósan

33a. Olú á hinaà de bàtà
Olú Fut. Perf. buy shoe
'Olú will have bought a pair of shoes'

b. Olú şà á bè de bàtà
Olú Neg Fut Perf buy shoe
'Olú will not have bought a pair of shoes'

34a. Mè á hinaà di eşèlè
I Fut Perf eat fish
'I will have eaten fish'

b. Mè şà á bè di eşèlè
I Neg Fut. Perf eat fish
'I will not have eaten fish'

Àbèsàbèsì

35a. Kúnlé ka bá das
Kúnlé Perf. Fut.go
'Kúnlé will have gone'

b. Kúnlé kinà bàá das yè
Kúnlé Perf. Fut.go Neg
'Kúnlé will not have gone'

36a. Àé ke bé di bàtà
We Perf. Fut. buy shoe
'We will have bought a pair of shoes'

b. Àe kinè bèé di bàtà yè
We Perf. Fut. buy shoe Neg.
'We will not have bought a pair of shoes'

37a. N ko bó fù ida

b. N kinò bòó fù ida yè

I Perf. Fut. cook fire
'I will have cooked'

I Perf. Fut. cook fire Neg.
'I will not have cooked'

As observed in (33), only the affirmative perfective aspect marker *hinaà* inflects for negation by changing its form to *bé* in the negative sentence (33b), whereas the affirmative future tense marker *á* remains unchanged in the negative sentence. This aligns with the earlier observation that the future tense marker *á* does not inflect for negation in *Şósan*. In contrast, in *Àbèsàbèsì*, both functors inflect for negation. The affirmative perfective aspect and future tense markers *ka bá*, *ke bé*, and *ko bó* in (35a), (36a), and (37a) respectively, change to *kìnà bàà*, *kìnè bèè*, and *kìnò bòò* in the corresponding negative sentences (35b), (36b), and (37b). The variation in form of these perfective and tense markers, across affirmative and negative clauses, is attributed to vowel harmony affecting the tense and aspectual markers in *Àbèsàbèsì*.

The following sentences illustrate the structure of the negative future perfect tense in *Ìpè* and *Ìşùà*.

Ìpè

38a. Şayò à gbi eşènnì dà
Şayò Fut. kill fish Perf.
'Şayò will have killed a fish'

b. Şayò é bè gbí eşènnì
Şayò Fut. Perf. Neg-kill fish
'Şayò will not have killed fish'

39a. Me à di bàtà dà
I Fut. buy shoe Perf.
'I will have bought a pair of shoes'

b. Me é bè dí bàtà
I Fut. Perf. Neg-buy shoe
'I will not have bought a pair of shoes'

Ìşùà

40a. Olú ó di eṽenṽen ò
Olú Agr-Fut. buy cloth Perf.
'Olú will have bought cloth'

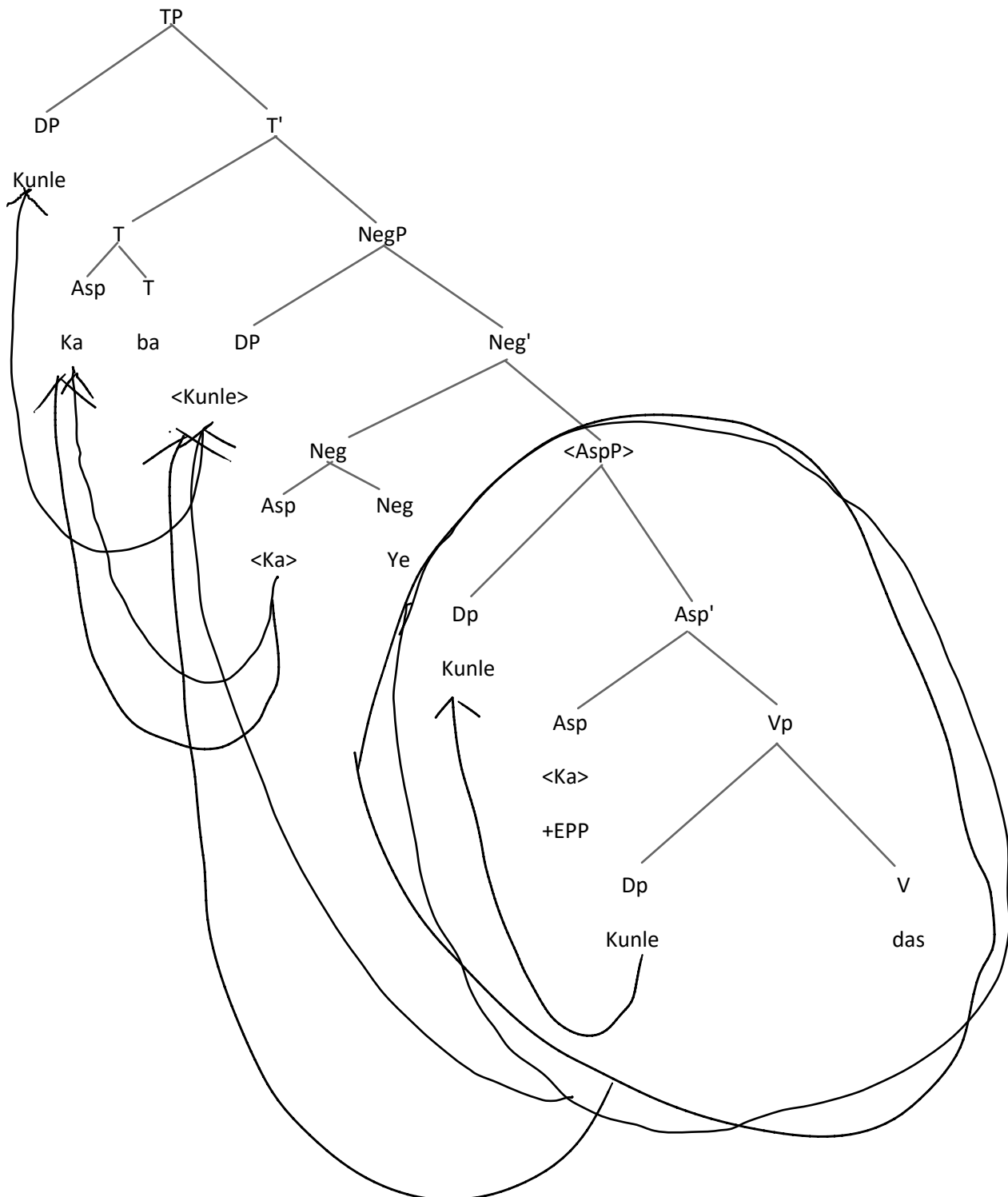
b. Olú še véè dí eṽen-èn
Olú Fut Perf. Neg-buy cloth
'Olú will not have bought cloth'

41a. Ó ri eşènnì ò
S/he-Fut eat fish Perf.
'S/he has eaten fish'

b. Ó še véè rí eşènnì
S/he. Fut Perf. Neg-eat fish
'S/he has not eaten fish'

As observed in (38–41), both affirmative future perfect tense markers *à...dà* in *Ìpè* and the high-tone marker [']...ò in *Ìşùà* change form to *é bè* and *še véè*, respectively, in negative sentences. This indicates that these functors inflect for negation to express the negative future perfect tense. Notably, while the perfective aspect markers *dà* in *Ìpè* and *ò* in *Ìşùà* occur clause-finally in affirmative clauses, their negative counterparts *bè* and *véè* appear in the pre-verbal position. The shift of the functors *dà* in (38a) and (39a) and *ò* in (40a) and (41a) to the pre-verbal position as *bè* in the corresponding negative sentences (38b) and (39b) and *véè* in (40b) and (41b) provides clear evidence that the original underlying position of these functors is pre-verbal. This suggests that movement occurs whereby the verb phrase raises from its base position to the INFL position, leaving the functors *dà* and *ò* stranded in their original, pre-verbal position.

6. Deriving Negative Clause containing Future perfective tense in Àbèsàbèsì



The negative clause containing the future perfective tense, *Kúnlé ka bá das yè*, is derived as follows: the subject DP *Kúnlé* is merged with the verb *das* in the Specifier of VP position, consistent with the VP-internal Subject Hypothesis, thereby satisfying the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) requirement of the head verb.

The derivation continues with the external merge of the Aspect (Asp) head, morphologically realized as *ka*, to the VP to satisfy its c-selection requirement, projecting an Asp-bar. The Asp head carries an

EPP (edge) feature, which triggers the projection of AspP by attracting the Spec-VP to its specifier position.

Next, the Negation (Neg) head, realized morphologically as *yè*, is externally merged to AspP to fulfill its c-selection requirement, projecting a Neg-bar. The Neg head also possesses an EPP feature, prompting the projection of NegP by pied-piping the entire AspP to the Specifier position of NegP. In other words, we argue that the negative head (Neg⁰) in Àbèsàbèsì has an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature satisfied through pied-piping the entire AspP to the Spec of NegP, leaving the negative morpheme stranded in clause-final position. Prior to this pied-piping, the DP *Kúnlé* raises to Spec-NegP, and the Asp head adjoins to the Neg head to form a complex head. This operation complies with Phase Impenetrability, which permits syntactic operations on the head and specifier of a phase even after the phase's completion.

Finally, the Tense (T) head, morphologically realized as *bá*, is drawn from the numeration and merged with NegP, projecting a T-bar to satisfy its c-selection requirement. The T head's EPP feature motivates the raising of Spec-NegP to Spec-TP, thereby satisfying the edge requirement. To achieve the correct surface word order, the Neg head adjoins to the T head, forming a complex head.

5.0 Conclusion

In this study, we have delved into the fascinating world of interaction between negation, tense and aspect within Northwestern Edoid languages, specifically focusing on Ìpè, Èpìnmi, Ìṣùà, Ṣósan and Àbèsàbèsì. Our findings reveal a rich tapestry of syntactic and phonological variations that characterize how these languages express negation.

One of the standout observations is the unique placement of negative markers in Àbèsàbèsì, where they appear at the end of clauses. This contrasts sharply with the more common pre-verbal positioning found in the other languages studied. Moreover, we noted the intricate relationship between negation and aspectual markers, particularly in Àbèsàbèsì and Ìṣùà. Here, the forms of perfective markers shift when negation is introduced, demonstrating that negation is not merely a syntactic operation but also involves phonological and morphological changes. This complexity adds depth to our understanding of how negation functions in these languages.

The role of tonal changes in negation was another significant finding. In Ìṣùà and Ṣósan, the high tone that marks habitual aspects also serves to indicate negation, albeit with different tonal behaviors. This interplay between tone and meaning emphasizes the importance of tonal systems in these languages and invites further exploration into how tone influences grammatical structures.

Employing the Minimalist Program and the Borer-Chomsky Hypothesis, we were able to provide a coherent framework for analyzing these phenomena. This theoretical approach not only clarified the syntactic structures involved but also offered insights into the broader implications of our findings for the study of negation, tense and aspect across languages. Conclusively, this research enhances our understanding of interaction between negation and tense and aspect in Northwestern Edoid languages while also prompting us to reconsider existing assumptions about negation in linguistic studies. The unique features observed in these languages show the need for continued exploration into the diverse ways in which grammatical categories such as negation, tense and aspect interact, paving the way for future research that could further illuminate this intriguing aspect of human language.

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