Negative Affixation in Ìgbò Language

By

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Abstract

Negation brings about a grammatical change to structures, it has been claimed to be a functional element of a language. Kim (1998) quoting Dahl (1979) has identified three major ways of expressing negation in natural languages: as a morphological category on verbs, an auxiliary verb, and an adverb-like particle. The Ìgbò grammatical negative affixation has hitherto not been subjected to any in-depth morphological study. This paper shows that the Ìgbò grammatical negative morpheme consists of negative affixes. The negative morpheme is discontinuous in nature (a negative prefix and negative suffix), contrary to earlier views. In Standard Ìgbò, Á…ghÌ/Á…nÁ constitute the negative morpheme, whereas Á…ho/Á…nà/Á…na constitute the negative morpheme in Ògbahù dialect of Ìgbò language. The Ògbahù dialect exhibits a more highly productive morphological process of negative affixation in Ìgbò than the Standard Ìgbò or any other dialect of Ìgbò, hence, this work focuses on Ògbahù dialect. The Ìgbò language is one of the three major languages, spoken in Nigeria, West Africa. The other two languages are Hausa and Yorùbá.

Standard Ìgbò is an amalgam of the different dialects of the Ìgbò language. It is a neo-dialect with metalanguage. The Ìgbò language has eight phonemic vowels: /i, i, e, o, o, a, u, ù/. These vowels are neatly divided into two vowel harmony groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>ɪ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>ù</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>a</td>
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<td>o</td>
<td>ø</td>
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</table>

[ + ATR]       [- ATR]

Ìgbò is a terrace level tone language. It has a non-restricted, two-level tone system with two tones: high H, marked / / and low L, marked / / . In addition, Ìgbò has a downstep feature D or !H marked /- / or / / whose occurrence is restricted. In the tone-marking convention usually used, only the low and downstep tones are marked. But, for clearer illustrations, all tones are marked in this work. /A/ is an
archiphoneme set up for vowel phonemes /e, a/. The negative prefix vowel / e- / is used if the verb root vowel has the feature [+ATR], i.e. if the vowel is either /i, e, o, u/. But the negative prefix vowel /a-/ is used if the verb root vowel has the feature [-ATR], i.e. if the vowel is either /i, o, u/. /I/ is an archiphoneme set up for vowel phonemes /i, j/. The negative prefix vowel /i-/ is used if the verb root vowel has the feature [+ATR], i.e. if the vowel is either /i, e, o, u/. But the negative prefix vowel / i- / is used if the verb root vowel has the feature [-ATR], i.e. if the vowel is either /i, o, a, u/.

The negative morpheme (affixes) in Ògbahù dialect of Ìgbò consists of four allomorphic variants:

Á … hô (for indicative and infinitive negatives)
Á… na (for plural imperative negative)
Á… nà (for present perfective negative)
Í … na (for singular imperative negative)

Each of these variants consists of discontinuous morpheme – a negative prefix Á-/ Í- and a negative suffix -hô/ -na/-nà which together constitute the negative morpheme. In Ògbahù dialect and Standard Ìgbò, the structure of the negative morpheme is the same. In both Ògbahù and Standard Ìgbò, the negative morpheme is discontinuous in nature. Whereas Á-hô/ Á- na/Á-nà/Í - na constitute the negative morpheme in Ògbahù, Á-ghÍ/Á-nÁ constitute the negative morpheme in Standard Ìgbò. It will be observed that ‘Á-hô, Á-na, Á-nà, Í- na’, as well as ‘Á-ghÍ and Á-nÁ’ are allomorphic variants of the Ìgbò negative morpheme.

Indicative Negatives

The following indicative negative sentences exemplify the operation of the Á …. hô negative affixation. We use the verb roots, bí ‘live’, zà ‘sweep’, kò ‘plant’, dé ‘write’, and gwú ‘count’ as examples to discuss the indicative negatives.

1a. ébíhô m n’Àbá. (verb root -bí- ‘live’)
   neg pref.-live-neg suf 1 in Aba
   A – hô
   ‘I did not live in Aba’.

b. ágwúhô m . (verb root-gwú – ‘count’)
   neg pref. – count – neg suf 1
   A – hô
   ‘I did not count’.

c. ànyí ázàhô ãnò. (verb root – zà – ‘sweep’)  
   We neg pref -sweep-neg suf house
   A – hô
   ‘We did not sweep the house’.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>ìnwé égọ dị nkọ.</td>
<td>énwēhọ égọ dị nkọ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Inf.Pref-have money be bad</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>ébùhọ íbù dị mán.</td>
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<td>Òbí chọlị ádàhọ ógbènyè.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obi want-IV(pst) inf. pref.-fall poverty</td>
<td>Obi want-IV(pst) A-fall-họ poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Obi wanted to be poor’</td>
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In the above examples (1a) through (e), a number of morphological processes and/or categories are observed. We have the affixation of the A- and -họ negative prefix and suffix respectively. If the verb root vowel has the feature [+ATR], the negative prefix vowel will be ‘e-’, but if the verb root vowel has the feature [-ATR], then the negative prefix vowel will be ‘a-’. Vowel harmony is seen to be operating here. On the contrary, the ‘-họ’ negative suffix is constant. Its vowel does not undergo any assimilation (i.e. vowel harmony). Rather, vowel harmony is violated here. It is also observed in the negative word formation above, the operation of tonal assimilation, in which the low tone of the root vowel assimilates the tone of the negative suffix vowel, converting it into a low tone (e.g. c and e). But if the verb root vowel has a high tone, its tone will be reduced to a downstep tone. This in turn assimilates the tone of the suffix vowel, converting it to a downstep tone (e.g. a, b and d). The morphological process of affixation generates the phonological processes of vowel and tonal assimilation and tonal reduction.

**Infinitive negatives**

A...họ negative affix also marks the infinitive negatives in Ògbahù. Consider the following examples:

**Examples:**

affirmative

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d. ìzá áfà dì mìmá. ázähọ áfà dì mìmá.  
Inf.Pref-answer name be good A-answer-họ name be good  
‘To answer name is good’. ‘Not to answer name is good’.

The processes observed above are similar to those of the indicative negatives previously discussed. The morphological process of affixation precedes the phonological processes of vowel assimilation (vowel harmony), low tonal assimilation and tonal reduction in the formation of the infinite negatives.

**Plural Imperative Negatives**

Á… na negative morpheme marks the plural imperative negatives in Ògbahù. Below are some examples:

3a. únù égbūná évú à. (verb root-gbú – ‘kill’)  
You (pl) A-kill-na goat this  
‘You (pl.) do not kill this goat’.

b. únù átāná ánú à. (verb root –tá - ‘eat/chew’) 
You (pl.) A-eat-na meat this.  
‘You (pl.) do not eat this meat’.

c. Ébō nà Òbí, únù átāná ánú à. (verb root -tá– ‘eat/chew’) 
Ebo and Obi, you(pl.) A-eat -na meat this  
‘Ebo and Obi, do not eat this meat’.

d. nwá élīnā jí táàtà. (verb root-ľ- ‘eat’) 
they A-eat-na yam today  
‘Let them not eat yam today’.

e. nwá ákwūná ósè. (verb root – kwú - ‘plant’) 
they A-plant-na pepper  
‘Let them not plant pepper’.

f. únù ábūnà ábù. (verb root – bű – ‘sing’) 
You (pl.) A-sing-na song  
‘You (pl.) do not sing’.

Here again, in the derivation of the above plural imperative negatives, the morphology/phonology interface is glaringly evident. Like in the derivation of the indicative and infinitive negatives discussed earlier, the ‘Á-’ negative prefix is assimilated to the vowel of the verb root in terms of vowel harmony following the morphological process of affixation. The negative suffix vowel does not undergo assimilation in the negative derivation, but, the high tone of the root vowel is reduced to downstep tone in the process. This dowstep tone of the root vowel then assimilates the tone of the suffix vowel, converting it to downstep. On the other hand, the low tone
of the root vowel (if the root vowel has a low tone) assimilates the tone of the negative suffix vowel. Thus, both vowels are low in the derived plural imperative negative. The tone of the negative suffix vowel depends on the tone of the root vowel. In other words, the root vowel tone determines the suffix vowel tone in the derived negative word. The high tone of the negative prefix vowel is constant even after the affixation process. The morphological process of affixation precedes the phonological processes of vowel assimilation, tonal assimilation and tonal reduction. Notice that the suffixes -họ and -na bear identical tone with that of any preceding stem. This is evidence that they are toneless suffixes. It is postulated therefore, in this analysis, that the prefix is high-toned with a floating low-tone component which combine as prefix to the root. In other words:

**Present Perfective Negatives**

Á … nà negative morpheme marks the present perfective negatives in Ògbahù. Examples are given below:
4a.  éśíbènà m’úní. (verb – sì – ‘cook’)
   A-cook-perf-na I food
   ‘I have not cooked food’.

b.  ázábènà m’únò. (verb – zà – ‘sweep’)
   A-sweep-perf-na I house
   ‘I have not swept the house’.

c.  Èzè ézūbènà òhí. (verb – zú - ‘steal’)
   Eze A-steal-perf-na steal
   ‘Eze has never stolen’.

d.  ànyí ákübènà nígbḭjínígbá. (verb -kú - ‘ring’)
   we A-ring-perf-na bell
   ‘We have not rung the bell’.

e.  nwá ábübènà ábù. (verb – bù – ‘sing’)
   they A-sing-perf-na song
   ‘They have not sung’.

The affirmative perfective affix is Á- (V) ná, while the negative perfective affix is Á – bènà. The affix – bènà consists of the negative perfective marker – bè - and the negative suffix – nà, i.e. bè + nà. The negative prefix Á- and the perfective prefix Á-coalesce. In the derivation of the Ògbahù present perfective negatives, a number of morphological and phonological processes are observed. In the morphological process of affixation of Á – bènà to the verb root, certain phonological processes are triggered off. The negative prefix vowel is assimilated to the vowel of the verb root in terms of vowel harmony. The negative prefix vowel is á- or é- depending on the vowel harmony group of the root vowel. If the root vowel has the feature [+ATR], then, the negative prefix vowel is é-, but if the root vowel has the feature [-ATR], then the negative prefix vowel is á-. Furthermore, the tone of the verb root vowel undergoes either tonal raising or reduction. If the tone of the root vowel is high, it is reduced to downstep in the derived perfective negative word (e.g. 4a – d). However, if the tone of the root vowel is low, it is raised to downstep tone in the derived perfective negative word (e.g. 4e). The low tone of the negative suffix vowel is constant, not affected by the negative affixation process.

Singular Imperative Negatives
Í … na negative morpheme marks the singular imperative negatives in Ògbahù. The following are examples:

5a.  íṣúńā ákwà nwáà. (verb root – sú – ‘wash’)
   You (sg.)-wash-na cloth that
   ‘You (sg.), do not wash that cloth’.

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b. ìbùnà ìbú. (verb root –bú- ‘carry’)
   You(sg) carry-na load
   ‘You (sg.), do not carry load’.

c. ìzànà únọ. (verb root - zà - ‘sweep’)
   You (sg.)- sweep-na house
   ‘You (sg.), do not sweep the house’.

d. ìkònà ákpú. (verb root – kò- ‘plant’)
   You(sg.)-plant-na cassava
   ‘You (sg.), do not plant cassava’.

Like the plural imperative negatives discussed earlier in section 3, in the
derivation of the above singular imperative negatives, there is the operation of
morphology/phonology interface. Similar processes occur in the two and therefore need
not be repeated here. The only difference is in the negative prefixes. Whereas Á- is the
negative prefix of the former, č- is the negative prefix of the latter. The ĭ negative
prefix can be either í- or ì depending on the vowel harmony group of the vowel of the
verb root. In other words, the vowel of the verb root assimilates the negative prefix
vowel in terms of vowel harmony. There is partial vowel assimilation of the negative
prefix vowel to the verb root vowel. In the derivation of the singular imperative
negatives, following the morphological process of affixation, the phonological process
of vowel assimilation appears to be in operation. If the verb root vowel has the feature
[+]ATR], the singular imperative negative prefix vowel will be í, but if the verb root
vowel has the feature [-ATR], then the negative prefix vowel will be ţ. The tonal
assimilation and tonal reduction are exactly the same as in the derivation of the plural
imperative negatives previously discussed. The morphological process of affixation has
generated the phonological processes of vowel assimilation, tonal assimilation and
tonal reduction.

Conclusion
In this paper, it is established that the negative grammatical morpheme in Ìgbò
is discontinuous in nature, consisting of a negative prefix and a negative suffix.
Whereas Á…ho/Á…na/Á…nà/Á…na constitute the negative morpheme in Ògbahù
dialect of Ìgbò, Á…ghl/Á…nÁ constitute the negative morpheme in Standard Ìgbò.
When the negative morpheme is affixed to an affirmative verb, negation is normally
expressed grammatically in Ìgbò. Furthermore, interface of morphology/phonology/
syntax/semantics is revealed in this Ìgbò negative affixation derivation exercise. The
negative suffixes -ho and -na bear identical tone with that of any preceding stem. This
is evidence that they are toneless suffixes. It is postulated therefore, in this analysis,
that the prefix is high-toned with a floating low-tone component which combine as
prefix to the root.
References


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