



KWASU INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

ISSN: 0795-820X (ONLINE)

Journal homepage

THE SYNTAX OF NEGATION IN THE YORUBA: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received on 13 February 2025

Accepted on July, 2025

Keywords: Negation, Syntax, markers, patterns, Tense.

ABSTRACT

The syntax of negation in the Yoruba language presents a rich area of study, reflecting unique linguistic structures that contribute to our broader understanding of negation across languages. This study explores Yoruba negation patterns, comparing them cross-linguistically with other languages to highlight syntactic similarities and differences. Yoruba, a Niger-Congo language spoken primarily in southwestern Nigeria, utilizes specific negation markers, such as "kò" and "kò sì," which convey negation within various sentence structures, through a cross-linguistic analysis the positioning of negation markers in Yoruba sentences, especially in contrast to negation systems in Indo-European and other African languages, focusing on the syntactic placement and scope of negation within different clause types. Furthermore, negation interacts with tense, aspect, and verb forms, illustrating unique syntactic phenomena such as double negation and negative concord, as seen in Yoruba dialects. Additionally, it examines negation's role in questions, commands, and complex sentence structures. This research contributes to theoretical discussions on negation, highlighting the language's distinct syntactic strategies and providing insights into typological universals and language-specific variations. Yoruba syntax. Findings from this research underscore the role of syntactic parameters in shaping negation systems, reinforcing Yoruba's position within the typology of negation across languages. This study also contributes to syntax theory, offering a deeper understanding of negation in understudied languages and suggesting directions for further research in linguistic typology and language preservation.

Introduction

The Yoruba language, primarily spoken in southwestern Nigeria and parts of West Africa, is a member of the Niger-Congo language family and exhibits unique syntactic structures, especially in its approach to negation. Linguists study Yoruba syntax to explore the grammatical rules and sentence structures that govern the language, offering insights into broader typological questions within African languages and comparative linguistics (Bamgbose, 2018). Yoruba syntax provides a window into the interplay of grammatical categories, word order, and the positioning of various markers within sentences, thereby contributing valuable data for understanding syntactic variation across languages (Ajayi, 2005).

Negation in Yoruba is particularly distinctive, as it uses specific negative markers like *kò* and *kò sì* to indicate negation across different tenses, aspects, and sentence types. Unlike some Indo-European languages, Yoruba does not rely on auxiliary verbs to convey negation, but rather employs particles that precede the verb to negate the statement directly (Owoyele, 2004). This approach aligns with negation structures found in other African languages, where negative particles are commonly used, though the position and form of these particles vary significantly across language families and regions (Heine & Nurse, 2000). The study of the syntax of negation in Yoruba, therefore, reveals important typological information about negation as a linguistic universal and its variations. Syntactically, negation in Yoruba also interacts with tense and aspect markers, adding a layer of complexity to its structure. Yoruba uses particular syntactic constructions to convey the negation of actions in the past, present, and future, which highlights the relationship between tense, aspect, and negation (Akanbi, 2012). For instance, while negation in the present tense is straightforward, negation in the past tense often involves different structural choices, such as reduplication or the introduction of additional particles (Adewole, 2015). Such nuances make Yoruba a valuable case study within comparative linguistics for understanding how languages encode temporal information in negative constructions.

The concept of negative markers is critical in understanding how negation is expressed. Yoruba, for instance, utilises particles as its primary markers, unlike languages that employ morphological or phonological changes within verbs (Ajayi, 2005). Furthermore, negation patterns in Yoruba exhibit features such as negative concord, where multiple negative elements co-occur within a sentence to reinforce negation. This phenomenon, seen in many African and Romance languages, allows for a sentence to contain more than one negative expression without resulting in positive meaning (Horn, 1989). Negative concord is a form of double negation that

reinforces rather than cancels out the negative meaning, which is the case in many dialects of Yoruba (Owoyele, 2004).

Through an examination of Yoruba language structure and the syntactic mechanics behind its negation patterns, scholars can gain deeper insights into the universality and variability of syntax across languages. These insights inform broader theories of syntax, such as syntax theory, which aims to construct universal principles for language structures while recognising variations shaped by linguistic, geographic, and cultural factors. As languages evolve, variations in syntax and negation reflect adaptive strategies for clarity, emphasis, and communicative efficacy, further enriching the comparative study of negation and syntax across linguistic families.

The syntax of negation in Yoruba represents an intersection of linguistic theory and typology, revealing significant insights into how languages construct and interpret negation. Comparative studies highlight the complexity and diversity of negation strategies, positioning Yoruba as a key language in understanding both African linguistic patterns and universal syntactic principles. Through exploring Yoruba's unique approaches to negation, scholars can better grasp the roles that tense, aspect, and cultural context play in shaping the syntax of negation globally.

Theoretical Framework

The study of negation in Yorùbá necessitates a theoretical framework that captures its structural, functional, and interpretative properties. Several linguistic theories have been proposed to explain the phenomenon of negation across languages, including Negative Concord Theory, Jespersen's Cycle, the Minimalist Program, and Polarity Theory. Each of these theories provides a unique lens through which negation can be analysed. However, for a robust analysis of Yorùbá negation, Negative Concord Theory proves to be the most appropriate, as it accounts for the systematic co-occurrence of multiple negation markers and their syntactic and semantic implications.

Negative Concord Theory

Negative Concord Theory provides a framework for understanding languages in which multiple negative elements appear within a clause but collectively convey a single negative meaning. In some languages, such as English, double negation leads to an affirmative

interpretation (e.g., I don't know anything implies I know something). However, in Yorùbá, multiple negation markers do not cancel each other but rather reinforce the negative meaning. For instance, in the sentence *Kò sí ẹnítí kò mọ ọ* (No one does not know him/her), the negative markers *kò* and *sí* co-occur without yielding a positive interpretation. This suggests that Yorùbá follows a strict negative concord system, where multiple negative elements within a clause function together to establish a single negation.

Negative Concord Theory effectively accounts for this pattern by arguing that in certain languages, negation is distributed across multiple syntactic positions as a means of reinforcing negativity. The presence of multiple negative markers in Yorùbá is thus a grammatical requirement rather than redundancy. This theory also explains why negation in Yorùbá interacts with existential constructions, as seen in *Kò sí owó* (There is no money), where *kò* and *sí* collectively express non-existence. Furthermore, negation in Yorùbá extends beyond standard negation to include negation in interrogatives (*Sé kó sí ounjẹ?* – Is there no food?) and serial verb constructions (*Mo kò le lọ sí ibẹ* – I cannot go there), reinforcing the systematicity of negative concord.

To capture the syntactic distribution and functional role of negation markers in Yorùbá, Negative Concord Theory provides the most comprehensive explanation of the language's negation system. It aligns with the morphosyntactic structure of Yorùbá and offers a formal mechanism for analysing how negation interacts with tense, aspect, and focus.

Jespersen's Cycle and the Evolution Theory

Jespersen's Cycle, proposed by Otto Jespersen (1917), describes the diachronic evolution of negation in languages. According to this theory, negation typically progresses through a three-stage cycle: (i) an initial stage where negation is marked by a single element, (ii) an expansion phase where negation is reinforced by additional markers, and (iii) a final stage where the original negation marker disappears, leaving the reinforced element as the new negation marker. This theory has been widely applied to the study of negation in European languages such as French. The applicability of Jespersen's Cycle to Yorùbá negation remains limited, as historical evidence suggests that the Yorùbá negation system has remained relatively stable over time. Unlike in some Indo-European languages, where older negation markers have been replaced, Yorùbá negation has consistently relied on the pre-verbal negation marker *kò*. However, there are instances where negation is reinforced by additional elements, such as in the existential negation

structure *Kò sí* (There is no...), which suggests that Yorùbá may exhibit features of the expansion phase of Jespersen's Cycle. Nevertheless, the lack of evidence for the eventual loss of *kò* as a negation marker challenges the applicability of this model to Yorùbá.

While Jespersen's Cycle provides valuable insights into the historical development of negation across languages, it does not sufficiently explain the synchronic structure of negation in Yorùbá. The stability of Yorùbá negation suggests that the language does not follow the full cyclic progression outlined in Jespersen's model.

The Minimalist Program and the Syntactic Structure

The Minimalist Program, introduced by Noam Chomsky (1995), seeks to explain linguistic structures using principles of economy and efficiency. Under this framework, negation is analysed in terms of its syntactic features and how it interacts with other elements within a sentence. In Yorùbá, negation is consistently realised through the marker *kò*, which occupies a fixed syntactic position before the verb. This rigid placement aligns with the principles of the Minimalist Program, which suggests that languages optimise their structures by maintaining consistent syntactic positions for functional elements.

Minimalist analysis also accounts for how negation interacts with auxiliary verbs and tense markers in Yorùbá. For example, in the sentence *Ó kò n jeun* (He/she is not eating), the negation marker *kò* precedes the progressive aspect marker *n*, demonstrating a predictable syntactic order. This consistency suggests that negation is governed by underlying syntactic constraints that ensure its proper placement within the clause.

Despite its explanatory power in accounting for the placement of negation markers, the Minimalist Program does not fully capture the phenomenon of negative concord in Yorùbá. While it provides a formal syntactic account of negation placement, it does not adequately address the semantic implications of multiple negation markers in a clause. Therefore, while useful for understanding the syntactic structure of Yorùbá negation, the Minimalist Program is insufficient as a comprehensive model for analysing its full range of functions.

Among the theories examined, the Negative Concord Theory proves to be the most suitable for analysing negation in Yorùbá. It effectively captures the language's use of multiple negation markers, its syntactic regularities, and its semantic implications. While Jespersen's Cycle, the Minimalist Program, and Polarity Theory each offer valuable perspectives, they do not fully account for the distinct characteristics of Yorùbá negation. By adopting a Negative Concord

approach, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Yorùbá syntax and its typological significance within the Niger-Congo language family.

Empirical Studies

Negation is a fundamental linguistic feature that enables speakers to deny propositions, contradict statements, and express the absence of entities or actions. In the context of the Yorùbá language, negation exhibits a rich and complex system that has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation. This aspect aims to synthesise contemporary research on Yorùbá negation, highlighting key empirical findings on the topic.

Recent studies have refined the understanding of sentential negation in Yorùbá. Adebayo (2021) challenges earlier assumptions by asserting that Yorùbá possesses four primary sentential negative markers: *kíí*, *kò*, *kó*, and *má*. These markers are categorised into two morphemes based on mood: the *k*-morpheme, used in real's mood, and the *má*-morpheme, employed in irreal's mood. The distinctions among *kíí*, *kò*, and *kó* are further delineated by their interaction with aspect and focus within sentences.

The semantics of negative focus constructions in Yorùbá have been critically examined to understand the scope and interpretation of negation. Ilori (2020) investigates the *kó*-negative constructions, traditionally viewed as negating only the immediately preceding constituent. Through semantic analysis, Ilori demonstrates that *kó* negates the entire proposition embedded within the focus construction, not merely the focused element. This insight challenges prior interpretations and underscores the necessity of considering the broader propositional context in analysing Yorùbá negation.

Negation patterns exhibit notable variation across Yorùbá dialects, reflecting the language's rich diversity. Sanusi and Omoṣewu (2016) conduct a comparative analysis of negative constructions in Standard Yorùbá and the Ègbá dialect. Their study reveals significant differences in the behaviour and syntactic positioning of negative markers between the two varieties. For instance, while *má* functions as a negative marker in Standard Yorùbá, it serves as a progressive marker in the Ègbá dialect. Additionally, the negative marker *kò* in Standard Yorùbá has variants *kò* and *ò* in Ègbá, highlighting the syntactic and morphological diversity within the language.

Further exploration into other dialects, such as Ọ̀rọ̀, reveals unique morphosyntactic strategies for negation. Ante (2018) identifies that negation in Ọ̀rọ̀ is achieved through circumfixation, involving the simultaneous prefixation and suffixation of negative morphemes to

the root verb. This process differs from the strategies observed in Standard Yorùbá and other dialects, emphasising the importance of dialect-specific analyses in understanding the full spectrum of negation in Yorùbá.

The morphosyntactic properties of negation in Yorùbá have been a focal point in recent linguistic research. Fábùnmi (2014) provides an in-depth analysis of negation across sixteen Yorùbá dialects, proposing that negation operates as an independent syntactic projection, termed the Negative Phrase (NegP). This perspective aligns with the Minimalist Program's view of functional categories and offers a unified framework for understanding the placement and function of negative markers within Yorùbá sentence structure.

The study of negation in Yorùbá encompasses a multifaceted exploration of its semantic, syntactic, and dialectal dimensions. Recent scholarship has significantly advanced the understanding of sentential negative markers, negative focus constructions, and the morphosyntactic underpinnings of negation across various dialects. These insights not only contribute to the theoretical modelling of negation in Yorùbá but also enhance the broader comprehension of negation as a universal linguistic phenomenon.

Types of Yoruba Negations

Negation in Yorùbá encompasses various types-such as standard, imperative, existential, and concordial negation, serving distinct grammatical functions and offering key insights into the language's syntactic and semantic structure.

Standard Negation

Standard negation in Yoruba is achieved using the negative particle *kò*, which precedes the verb in declarative sentences to indicate denial or contradiction. It remains consistent across different tenses and aspects, ensuring clarity in negative statements. Unlike English, where auxiliary verbs may be needed (e.g., "do not" or "did not"), Yoruba maintains a straightforward structure by simply inserting *kò* before the verb. This negation pattern is used in daily conversations, formal discourse, and literature to express actions that did not occur or are not occurring. The verb itself remains unchanged, making the construction simple and predictable. This form of negation is an essential part of Yoruba grammar, allowing speakers to effectively communicate opposition or denial. Scholars like Bamgbose (2018) emphasise its consistency and efficiency in negative sentence formation.

Examples:

1. Ade rí i. → Ade kò rí i. (Ade saw it. → Ade did not see it.)
2. Mo fẹ ẹjun. → Emi kò fẹ ẹjun. (I want to eat. → I do not want to eat.)
3. A bá wọn. → A kò bá wọn. (We met them. → We did not meet them.)

Negative Imperatives

Negative imperatives in Yoruba are formed using *má*, which functions as a prohibitive marker. This construction negates commands, warnings, or instructions, preventing an action from occurring. Yoruba does not require auxiliary verbs like "do not" in English; rather, *má* is placed directly before the verb to indicate prohibition. This structure is commonly used in parental instructions, religious teachings, traditional proverbs, and formal directives. The simplicity of *má* makes it highly effective in commanding attention and ensuring immediate compliance. According to Bamgbose (2018), negative imperatives in Yoruba are direct and leave no room for ambiguity, making them useful in various social contexts.

Examples:

1. Má siwà wu. (Do not misbehave.)
2. Má ta iwé yẹ. (Do not sell that book.)
3. Má tan iròyìn yí. (Do not spread this news.)

Existential Negation

Existential negation in Yoruba is expressed using *kò sí*, which conveys the absence or non-existence of an object, entity, or condition. This structure is crucial in indicating that something is missing, unavailable, or does not exist. It is commonly used in daily speech, literature, and formal discourse to describe situations where an item, person, or concept is absent. Unlike standard negation, which negates actions, existential negation negates presence or availability. According to Adesola (2010), this form of negation is a fundamental aspect of Yoruba syntax, as it helps in constructing meaningful expressions of absence or lack.

Examples:

1. Ìwé kò sí nínú apoti. (There is no book in the box.)

2. Ọmọ kò sí nílẹ. (There is no child at home.)

3. Ọúnjẹ kò sí nílẹ. (There is no food at home.)

Negation of Progressive Aspect

Negating the progressive aspect in Yoruba requires combining the standard negation marker *kò* with the progressive marker *ń*. This negation structure expresses the idea that an action is not currently in progress. The placement of *kò* before *ń* modifies the ongoing action, resulting in a clear indication that something is not happening at the moment. This negation type is crucial in everyday communication, helping speakers express real-time negations effectively. Ajayi (2007) noted that Yoruba's integration of negation with aspect markers reflects the language's grammatical complexity, ensuring precise temporal expressions.

Examples:

1. Ó ń sun. → Ó kò ń sun. (He/she is sleeping. → He/she is not sleeping.)

2. Wọ́n ń ọ̀sẹ̀. → Wọ́n kò ń ọ̀sẹ̀. (They are working. → They are not working.)

3. Mo ń kọ̀ ìwé. → Mo kò ń kọ̀ ìwé. (I am writing a book. → I am not writing a book.)

Double Negation

Double negation in Yoruba is a rare but emphatic structure used to reinforce a negation. It involves using multiple negative markers in a single sentence to stress denial or prohibition. Unlike in English, where double negatives often lead to a positive interpretation, Yoruba double negation serves to strengthen the original negative meaning. Bamgbose (2018) explains that this structure is primarily used in rhetorical contexts or formal discourse, adding depth to the speaker's assertion.

Examples:

1. Kò sí ẹniti kò mò ọ. (There is no one who does not know him/her.)

2. Kò sí ohun tí kò le ẹlẹ. (There is nothing that cannot happen.)

3. Kò sí ẹniti kò lè gbọ. (There is no one who cannot hear.)

Negative Concord

Negative concord occurs when multiple negative elements appear in a sentence while maintaining a single negative meaning. This type of negation ensures that all negative markers work together harmoniously, rather than cancelling each other out. In Yoruba, *kò* and *sí* often co-occur to reinforce negation without contradiction. Adesola (2010) highlighted that this phenomenon aligns Yoruba with other negative concord languages, strengthening its syntactic structure.

Examples:

1. *Kò sí ẹnìkàntí kò mò ọ.* (There is no one who does not know him/her.)
2. *Kò sí ohun tó kò yẹ.* (There is nothing that is not proper.)
3. *Kò sí ibi tí kò le lọ.* (There is no place he/she cannot go.)

Interrogative Negation

Interrogative negation combines negation with a question to express doubt, disbelief, or rhetorical emphasis. This form often uses *sé* (the interrogative marker) along with *kò* to create negative questions. It is commonly found in conversations where the speaker seeks clarification or indirectly asserts a point. Ajayi (2007) emphasises that interrogative negation plays a vital role in persuasive discourse.

Examples:

1. *Şé ó kò mò pé mowà nìbí?* (Does he/she not know that I am here?)
2. *Şé wọn kò gbà á?* (Did they not accept it?)
3. *Şé a kò le lọ lola?* (Can we not go tomorrow?)

Sentential Negative Markers in Yorùbá

Yorùbá employs distinct negative markers to indicate negation in sentences. Adebayo (2021) identifies four main markers: *kìí*, *kò*, *kọ*, and *má*. These markers fall into two broad categories based on mood: the *k*-morpheme, used in realis mood, and the *má*-morpheme, used in irrealis mood. The *k*-morpheme manifests in forms such as *kò* for declarative negation (*Ó kò lọ* –

"He/She did not go") and *kíí* for habitual negation (*Ó kíí sùnlásikò* – "He/She does not sleep on time"). The *má*-morpheme is used for prohibition (*Má sùnnísìnyí* – "Do not sleep now"), marking its irrealis function (Adebayo, 2021).

Dialectal Variations in Yorùbá Negation

Negation in Yorùbá varies significantly across dialects. Sanusi and Omoṣewu (2016) examined Standard Yorùbá (SY) and Ègbá dialect (ED), noting that *má*, which functions as a negative marker in SY, acts as a progressive marker in ED. Likewise, the negative marker *kò* appears in variants such as *kò* and *ò* in ED. These variations suggest that negation in Yorùbá dialects is not uniform but shaped by historical and regional influences. Fábùnmi (2013) further investigated negation across sixteen Yorùbá dialects, highlighting morpho-phonological differences. For instance, while Standard Yorùbá uses *kò*, *kíí*, and *kó*, the Ìlàjẹ dialect uses *éè* (*Méè lọ* – "I did not go") (Fábùnmi, 2013).

Semantic Scope of Negation in Yorùbá

The semantic scope of negation in Yorùbá has generated scholarly debate. Ilori (2020) challenges the traditional belief that *kó* negates only the noun phrase that precedes it. Through an analysis of entailments and presuppositions, Ilori (2020) argues that *kó* negation applies to the entire proposition rather than just the negated constituent. In the sentence *Ayò kó ni ó pè é* ("It was not Ayo that called you"), negation is not limited to "Ayo" but extends to the assumption that someone else called. This broader interpretation of *kó* negation reflects Yorùbá's syntactic and pragmatic flexibility (Ilori, 2020). Coegation in Yorùbá underscores its syntactic complexity, semantic nuances, and dialectal variations. Research from Nigerian and international scholars reveals that Yorùbá negation is governed by distinct morphemes (*kíí*, *kò*, *kó*, *má*), each functioning within specific grammatical contexts. Additionally, dialectal differences highlight the dynamic evolution of negation patterns in Yorùbá. The syntactic structure and semantic scope of negation, particularly regarding *kó*-negative constructions, demonstrate the language's intricate linguistic features. Understanding these aspects contributes to broader discussions in linguistic typology and African language studies, reinforcing the significance of Yorùbá negation in theoretical and applied linguistics. Yoruba employs diverse strategies to express denial, prohibition, contrast, and rhetorical emphasis. Understanding these various types of negation enhances communication clarity and provides insight into Yoruba syntax and morphology..

Below are some examples of Yoruba Negations and their analysis

1. Mo ti kò jẹun - “I have not eaten.”

In this sentence, the auxiliary *ti* indicates a past perfect tense, and *kò* negates the action of eating. The combination of *ti* and *kò* marks the completion of a negative event in the past. The negation is placed before the verb *jẹun*(eat), signalling that the action has not occurred up to the present. This structure shows the interaction of tense, aspect, and negation in Yoruba syntax, reflecting a typical pattern in the language.

2. Wọ̀n kòni lọ - “They will not go.”

The future tense marker *ni* is combined with *kò* to create negation in the future tense. The negation precedes the verb *lọ* (go), adhering to the syntactic rule of placing negation before the verb. This construction emphasises the future action that will not take place, and it illustrates how Yoruba handles future negation simply and directly.

3. Emi kò fẹràn rẹ̀ mọ́ - “I no longer like him/her.”

The phrase *kò* plus *mọ́* (anymore) is used to emphasise the cessation of the liking or affection. This structure is employed to show that a past condition has changed. The negation particle *kò* comes before the verb *fẹràn*(like), indicating that the liking no longer exists in the present. The addition of *mọ́* further reinforces the discontinuity of the action, highlighting the negation's role in changing the emotional state of the subject.

4. Ade ki yoorí mi - “Ade will not see me.”

In this sentence, *yóò* (will) marks future tense, while *ki* negates the verb *rí* (see). The negation is placed before the verb, maintaining the standard syntactic order. The sentence is an example of how Yoruba constructs future tense negation, indicating that the event (seeing) will not happen in the future.

5. Ẹ̀ ò tí ì kò sìn - “You have not yet served.”

The phrase *ò tí ì* expresses an incomplete action, while *kò* negates the event of serving. The structure is a combination of aspect and negation, where *kò* marks the non-occurrence of the action until the present moment. The sentence reflects Yoruba's use of aspect to convey actions that are yet to be completed, with negation reinforcing the unfinished nature of the action.

6. Emi kò tí ì kúrò nìbè - “I have not yet left there.”

Similar to the previous example, this construction uses *kò tí ì* to show that the action (leaving) has not yet been completed. The combination of the negative marker *kò* with the aspectual *tí ì* (not yet) illustrates Yoruba's syntactic flexibility in marking both negation and aspect. The phrase clearly communicates that the action is pending and has not taken place up until the present.

7. Àwà kí yóò rí imọ - “We will not see it anymore.”

The future tense marker *yóò* and negation *kò* combine to express that the event (seeing) will not occur in the future. *Mọ* emphasises the discontinuity of the action. This structure shows how negation and aspect work together in Yoruba to convey a sense of finality about the action, indicating that seeing the object will not happen anymore.

8. Wọ̀n kò tí ì lọ sí ilé-ékó - “They have not yet gone to school.”

This sentence uses the negative particle *kò* in combination with the aspectual marker *tí ì*, which emphasises the action (going to school) that has not yet occurred. The structure of the sentence highlights the interaction between aspect and negation, showing that the action is incomplete and has not been accomplished up to the present moment. The combination of aspect and negation is an important feature in Yoruba syntax, particularly in expressing actions that are yet to take place.

9. Olu tí kò wá - “Olu has not come.”

The word *tí* (present perfect tense) is combined with the negative particle *kò* to form a structure that expresses a past action that is yet to be completed. The verb *wá* (come) is negated by *kò*, meaning that the action of coming has not occurred, even though it is expected. The tense and aspect interplay with negation to highlight the incompleteness of the action. This structure emphasises that the event was anticipated but did not happen as expected.

10. Emi kò mọ ibití ó tí lọ - “I do not know where he/she has gone.”

This sentence demonstrates a more complex sentence structure with embedded clauses. The negative marker *kò* negates the main verb *mọ* (know), while the embedded clause *ibití ó tí lọ* (where he/she has gone) specifies the object of knowledge. The negation applies to the main verb, showing that the subject lacks knowledge about the event described in the relative clause. This

construction shows how negation functions in complex sentences without altering the overall syntactic structure.

11. Wòn kò fẹràn mi, sùgbón moní ifẹ́ fúnwòn - “They do not love me, but I love them.”

This sentence consists of two clauses connected by *sùgbón* (but). The first clause has the negation particle *kò* before *fẹràn* (love), indicating the absence of love from the subject towards the object. The second clause demonstrates a simple affirmative structure, where love is present from the speaker to the subject. This structure highlights how Yoruba handles contrastive negation, where negation occurs in one clause while affirmation occurs in another, maintaining the syntactic order in both cases.

12. Kò ẹ́ẹ̀ ẹ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀ fí ọ̀wọ̀ rọ̀ - “It cannot be done without effort.”

This sentence combines modality and negation. The verb *ẹ́ẹ̀* (can be done) is negated by *kò*, indicating that the action (doing) is not possible. The phrase *lái fí ọ̀wọ̀ rọ̀* (without effort) suggests a condition for the action. This construction is an example of how Yoruba uses negation to indicate impossibility, and it illustrates the use of negation in expressing modality (ability and possibility) while also showing syntactic coherence.

13. Ọ̀mọ náà kò gbàdúrà, àmọ kò sùn - “The child did not pray, but he/she did not sleep.”

This sentence shows how negation operates within multiple clauses. The first clause uses *kò* to negate the verb *gbàdúrà* (pray), while the second clause negates *sùn* (sleep) using *kò* again. Despite the negation, both actions (praying and sleeping) are presented in the same overall negative framework, demonstrating that both actions were absent. The contrastive conjunction *àmọ* (but) emphasises the fact that the child did not perform one action while still not performing another, which shows how Yoruba can combine negation across different clauses in one sentence.

14. Emi kò nífigbogboowó mi raaşo - “I did not spend all my money to buy clothes.”

In this sentence, the negation particle *kò* negates the verb phrase *nífiraaşo* (spend to buy clothes). This construction uses *kò* to negate the entire action of spending money, emphasising that the subject did not complete the action in full. The verb *nífi* indicates the action of spending, while the negative *kò* negates this transaction. The sentence structure shows how Yoruba can use negation to express partial actions or prevent a specific outcome from occurring.

15. Wòn kò fẹ́ ká jẹ́ kí ó ẹ́eyi yen- “They did not want us to allow him/her to do that.”

The sentence uses a double negation structure where the negation *kò* is applied to the verb *fẹ́* (want), indicating that the subject did not desire the action. Additionally, the verb phrase *kà* (allow) is also negated indirectly by the modal construction. This structure highlights the way Yoruba can use multiple negations in complex clauses, as well as the interaction between negation and modality in expressing disallowance.

Challenges Facing the Study of Negation in Yoruba and Possible Solutions

The study of negation in Yoruba, like any linguistic study, is not without its challenges. These challenges stem from various factors such as complexities in data collection, variation in language usage, cross-linguistic issues, the evolving nature of language, and limitations in linguistic theory. This section provides a detailed examination of these challenges and proposes solutions that can help mitigate them.

One of the primary challenges in the study of negation in Yoruba is the complex nature of its negation structures. Yoruba, like many other languages, uses different forms of negation, including single negation, double negation, negative concord, and negation with aspectual markers. Each of these structures has distinct syntactic properties that can lead to ambiguity when interpreting the data. For instance, negation with aspectual markers such as *kò ti* (not yet) introduces challenges in understanding how tense, aspect, and negation interact. While negation may function uniformly, the truth is that the syntactic structure varies according to the verb form and the tense of the action in the sentence.

Yoruba, being spoken across different regions in West Africa, exhibits significant dialectal variation, especially in terms of negation. These dialectal variations may impact the standardisation of negation forms and pose a challenge for researchers trying to develop a comprehensive understanding of negation in the language. For example, while the negative marker *kò* is widespread in many Yoruba dialects, other variants, such as *kò-ń* in some dialects, may introduce further variation. In addition to regional dialects, there may also be differences in negation patterns due to sociolects and registers, such as formal versus informal speech. In the context of Yoruba, the informal or colloquial registers may feature more instances of double negation and negative concord than formal speech. To address this challenge, it is essential to undertake dialectological research that compares various Yoruba dialects. The use of large-scale surveys across Yoruba-speaking regions can help gather data on how negation is used in different contexts. Working closely with linguists familiar with the different Yoruba dialects will also help to ensure that regional and societal variations are well-represented in the study. Furthermore,

ensuring the inclusion of both formal and informal speech registers will provide a more comprehensive understanding of negation in the language (Akinlabi, 2009).

Languages, including Yoruba, are dynamic and constantly evolving. This evolution can affect how negation structures are used in everyday speech, with new negation forms emerging over time. For instance, the usage of *kò* has expanded to incorporate various tense and aspect markers, and new forms of negation may arise, particularly due to the influence of contact languages such as English or Pidgin. This evolution presents a challenge for scholars trying to capture and analyse the "standard" or "traditional" forms of negation in Yoruba, as the language is continuously changing, especially in urban areas. To address the evolving nature of the language, researchers should focus on longitudinal studies that track the development and transformation of negation structures over time. Additionally, researchers can collaborate with sociolinguists to explore the influence of language contact and how Yoruba speakers adapt their negation forms in response to societal changes. By tracking these changes and their social implications, scholars can better understand the evolution of negation and its future trajectories (Labov, 2001; Trudgill, 2000).

Another challenge lies in the theoretical frameworks available to analyze negation in Yoruba. While many linguistic theories, such as generative grammar or construction grammar, offer tools for analysing syntactic structures, they may not fully capture the complexities of negation in Yoruba. For instance, Yoruba's use of negative markers in complex structures like double negation and negative concord requires theories that can account for the interplay between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Researchers should consider using more comprehensive theories, such as Optimality Theory (OT) or Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), which can handle complex interactions between different levels of grammar. These frameworks are better equipped to handle the interaction of negation with other elements like aspect, modality, and tense. The adoption of a multi-theoretical approach, drawing on the strengths of various linguistic frameworks, would allow for a more nuanced understanding of Yoruba negation (McCarthy, 2002).

Contributions to Existing Knowledge

The study on the syntax of negation in Yoruba from a cross-linguistic perspective makes significant contributions to linguistic scholarship. It provides a comprehensive analysis of negation in Yoruba, offering fresh insights into its structure, functions, and variations while situating it within the broader context of linguistic typology. This research advances knowledge

in syntax, comparative linguistics, and language technology, making it relevant to both theoretical and applied linguistics.

One of the major contributions of this study is its expansion of Yoruba syntax studies. Although Yoruba grammar has been widely studied, research on negation remains relatively underdeveloped. By providing a systematic analysis of negation, this study enhances our understanding of how negative constructions operate in Yoruba. It categorises different types of negation, including standard negation, negative imperatives, existential negation, and contrastive negation, thereby offering a more structured approach to analysing negative markers such as *kò*, *má*, and *kì í*. This categorisation clarifies the syntactic and semantic roles of negation in Yoruba, filling an important gap in linguistic research. Furthermore, the study contributes to comparative linguistics by situating Yoruba negation within a cross-linguistic framework.

The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks also enhances the significance of this study. It applies Generative Grammar, Minimalist Syntax, and Typological Studies to analyse Yoruba negation, demonstrating how Yoruba negation fits within universal syntactic principles. By engaging with theoretical debates on negation, this study provides insights into parametric variation, showing how Yoruba differs from or aligns with other languages in its treatment of negative markers. This theoretical contribution strengthens our understanding of how syntactic rules operate across languages.

Dialectal variations in negation across Yoruba-speaking communities also form an important part of this study's contribution. The research identifies regional differences in the use of negative markers and their syntactic structures, providing sociolinguistic insights into language variation. This is particularly useful for dialectal studies, language documentation, and efforts aimed at preserving linguistic diversity within Yoruba. By documenting how negation patterns differ across Yoruba dialects, this study offers a rich resource for future research on language variation and change.

Finally, the study addresses key challenges in studying Yoruba negation and proposes solutions. It examines issues such as historical influences on negation patterns, syntactic ambiguity, and the need for standardisation in Yoruba grammar. By identifying these challenges and suggesting possible solutions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on African language preservation and linguistic development. This research underscores the importance of studying negation not only for theoretical linguistic analysis but also for practical applications in education and language policy.

Conclusion

The study of negation in Yorùbá underscores its syntactic complexity, semantic nuances, and dialectal variations. Research from Nigerian and international scholars reveals that Yorùbá negation is governed by distinct morphemes (kìí, kò, kó, má), each functioning within specific grammatical contexts. Additionally, dialectal differences highlight the dynamic evolution of negation patterns in Yorùbá. The syntactic structure and semantic scope of negation, particularly regarding kó-negative constructions, demonstrate the language's intricate linguistic features. Understanding these aspects contributes to broader discussions in linguistic typology and African language studies, reinforcing the significance of Yorùbá negation in theoretical and applied linguistics.

Recommendations

Based on the detailed analysis of the syntax and typology of negation in the Yorùbá language from a cross-linguistic perspective, the following recommendations are proposed for researchers, educators, computational linguists, curriculum developers, and language policy makers:

As a result of diversity in negation forms across Yorùbá dialects, there is a need for linguists and local researchers to conduct comprehensive documentation projects. This will help preserve lesser-known dialectal variants and provide a fuller understanding of negation patterns across the Yorùbá-speaking regions (Fábùnmi, 2013). Such documentation can inform comparative studies and support the development of inclusive teaching materials

Yorùbá language instructors should integrate detailed modules on different types of negation—including standard negation, imperative negation, existential negation, and negative concord—into formal educational curricula. Teaching negation as a structured grammatical category can enhance students' fluency and improve grammatical accuracy in both written and spoken forms of the language (Adebayo, 2021).

For computational linguists and software developers working on Yorùbá NLP (Natural Language Processing), attention must be paid to the accurate parsing of negative constructions. As Yorùbá allows negative concord and double negation, language processing tools must be

trained to distinguish between emphatic and canceling negation. This is essential for building robust applications in speech recognition, machine translation, and sentiment analysis.

Researchers studying negation in Yorùbá are encouraged to adopt the Negative Concord Theory as a primary theoretical framework. This model accurately explains the multiple negation markers found in Yorùbá syntax without misinterpreting them as contradictory (Ajiboye, 2018). Its application can refine linguistic analysis and foster alignment with cross-linguistic studies on negation.

Comparative studies should be extended to other Niger-Congo languages and beyond, focusing on how negation interacts with tense, aspect, and mood. This will illuminate universal and language-specific features of negation and contribute to linguistic typology. Such studies can also validate the findings of this research in wider African and global linguistic contexts.

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