

## MORPHOSYNTAX OF NEGATION IN OKIGWE IGBO

By

**Samuel Obinna Ejinwa**

Dept. of Linguistics and African Languages  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
ejinwasamuel647@gmail.com

&

**Ugonna Nwanneoma Ofoha**

Dept. of Linguistics & Communication Studies/Igbo  
Abia State University, Uturu  
chinyereugonna@gmail.com

### Abstract

*This paper examined the morphosyntax of negation in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. The descriptive research design was adopted. The study found out that simple declarative sentences in Okigwe Igbo are negated through the suffixation of the negative marker –hu/hụ on verb roots, which is realized in standard Igbo using –ghi negative marker. The study further found out that imperative sentences in Okigwe Igbo are negated through the suffixation of the negative maker –la/le on verb roots. While perfective sentence type in Okigwe Igbo is negated with the suffixation of the negative marker –bé, it is realized as –beghi in standard Igbo. The study concludes that negation is a very rich morphosyntactic construction in Igbo. The suffixation of a negative marker to a verb form or verb root in Okigwe Igbo is followed by a harmonizing verb prefix e/a if the subject of the sentence is a noun phrase (NP).*

**Keywords:** morphosyntax, negation, Okigwe Igbo, sentence, verb form.

### Introduction

The term negation is a very important linguistic operation both at the morphological and syntactic level of language analysis. It is a universal but a parameterized or varied property of all languages of the world as no language is without negative expressions or sentences. Negative expressions are usually constructed through the use of negative makers such as “not” in English. Negation is found in all languages of the world. But the positions, number, morphological make up and operations of these negative makers in sentences or expressions may differ from language to language and dialect to dialect. Thus, we shall use a descriptive approach in our analysis of negation in Okigwe Igbo. According to Payne (1992), negation is a universal category, and one of the most striking features of negation in natural languages is its syntactic ubiquity. Payne (1992) further posits that virtually all linguistic categories from clause to individual word can, in principle be negated; although in practice, individual languages display arbitrary restrictions. Crystal (1980) states that negation is a construction in grammatical and semantic analysis that typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of the sentence meanings. As our working definition, we however define negation as a morphological and syntactic operation of transforming positive sentences into negative sentences through the suffixation of negative markers to lexical and auxiliary verbs of sentences in a language.

For example the negative marker “-ghi” which Ndimele (2009) describes as standard and general negative marker in Igbo can be used to change a positive sentence such as *Anosike bụ oke enyi mụ* “Anosike is my intimate friend” to a negative sentence such as *Anosike abughị Oke enyi mụ*. “Anosike is not my Intimate friend”. Our definition here attempts to show that the study of negation is an interface of morphology and syntax. (morphosyntax).

Series of studies have been carried out on Negation in Igbo. These include studies notably carried out by Enweonye and Egwuekwe (2004), Ndimele (2006), Okee (2016), Maduagwu and Obiamalu

(2016), among other recent studies. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have been carried out on negation in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. Our focus in this study is to carefully examine the operations of negation on sentence types in Okigwe Igbo. We shall equally review recent literatures on negation in Igbo and identify how negation operates in some other dialect of Igbo. At the end, we shall show the uniformity and variations that exist on the operations of negation in Okigwe Igbo and some other dialects of Igbo. This approach will indeed make clearer the negative makers in Okigwe Igbo and how they operate in sentences.

Okigwe is one of the largest local government areas in Imo State, Nigeria. Okigwe dialect, according to Nwaozuzu (2008) in Ejinwa (2016), falls under the East Central Group of Dialect. In a different style of classification, Ikekeonwu (1987) classifies Okigwe as part of the Central Inland East Igbo Satellite Group of Dialect. The tone marking convention of Green and Igwe (1963) which leaves the high tone unmarked and uses the accent (˘) for low tone and the raised macron (ˉ) for down-step tone is used in our analysis of Negation in Okigwe and standard dialect of Igbo. In terms of glossing we shall adopt the Leipzig glossing rules.

## Literature Review

### Conceptual Review

Okee (2016) observes that the process of converting affirmative to negative is called negation. Obiamalu (2003) equally states that negation is usually seen as a sub-category of the category known as polarity and that polarity bifurcates into affirmation and negation. He further states that in most languages, only negation is marked and the absence of negative marker implies affirmation. According to Alerechi (2015) who notes that negation is a natural phenomenon in human languages, defines it as a grammatical term for the process that result in changing an affirmative (positive) sentence or clause into a negative one. In the words of Lyon (1977), negation is a denial of an assertive proposition or a predication that a proposition is untrue. In other words, a negative proposition is an equivalent to the denial of the corresponding positive proposition.

However, several attempts have been made to classify negations in languages. For instance, Dahl (1979) identifies two distinct types of negation and they are morphological negation and syntactic negation. According to him, morphological negation comprises prefix, suffixes, circumfixes, prosodic and reduplication negations, while the syntactic negation involves a negative marker which may be uninflected particle or auxiliary verb, etc. Payne (1985) equally recognizes a kind of negation which he describes as standard negation. Payne (1985) observes that standard negation form is different from other forms. In his own contribution, Miestamo (2007) posits that standard negation can be characterized as the basic means that languages have for negating declarative clauses. In supporting Miestamo (2007) observation, Maduagwu and Obiamalu (2016) observe that the English language possesses a form of standard negation, whose primary function is to negate the positive declarative sentences. They further posit that in English, standard negation is either the negative particle “not” following a finite auxiliary verb as in *Mary is not lazy* or the bound negative morpheme “n’t” attached to a finite auxiliary verb as in *Mary isn’t lazy*. However, it has been observed by Ndimele (2005 and 2009), among others that the functional category *ghj* is the standard negative maker in Igbo. It has equally been observed that negation marking in Igbo is an interface of morphology and syntax.

According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010), the term morphosyntax refers to a situation where a word is engineered and the order of the engineering is sought to describe how lexical structure may have implication for a post lexical form. According to the Crystal (1980), morphosyntactic is an adjective; it is a term used in linguistics to refer to grammatical categories or properties for whose definition criteria of morphology and syntax both apply, as in describing the characteristics of words.

It is the study of the morphological and syntactic properties of linguistic or grammatical units. For instance, negative markers which are morphological are not used in isolation; they are affixes which must be attached either before or after a verb form in a sentence in order to transform the sentence into a negative one. This form part of the idea why some studies on negation is tagged morphosyntax. It creates an interface between morphology and syntax.

### Empirical Review

According to Ndimele (2009), negation marking is a rich morphosyntactic process in Igbo, and that negation can be express in Igbo through the use of negative inflectional affixes, inherent negative auxiliary verb, tonal alternation and contrastive focus. According to him, the main strategy for expressing negation in standard Igbo is through the addition of the negative suffix *ghi* to the base or root of verbs. He however presents the following examples.

1. (a) *Ogbara egwu.*  
(3 scl-dance-pt dance)  
He/she danced.
- (b) *O gbaghi egwu.*  
(3 scl-dance neg dance)  
He/she did not dance.
2. (a) *O sara efere*  
(3 scl wash pt plate)  
He/she washed plate.
- (b) *O saghi efere.*  
(3 scl wash neg plate)  
He/she did not wash plate.

According to Ndimele (2009), in the example above, the general negative suffix *-ghi* in standard Igbo is added to the auxiliary verb *gba* and lexical verb *sa* respectively. The different realizations of the general negative maker-*ghi* in some other dialects of Igbo are seen in the table below:

**Table 1.0**

Lects	General negative suffix
Onicha	<i>-ro</i>
Ohuhu	<i>-ghi</i>
Owere	<i>-hu</i>
Igbouzo	<i>-sho/ho</i>
Nnewi	<i>-ho</i> (harmonizing)
Echie	<i>-v</i> (harmonizing)

Source: (Ndimele 1995)

According to Okee (2016) the general negative suffix or marker in Egbema Dialect of Igbo spoken in Imo State Nigeria, is realized as *-ye*. He presents the following sentences in Egbema Igbo:

- 1 (a) *Nkechi jere afia.*  
(Nkechi ft went market)  
Nkechi went to the market.
- (b) *Nkechi ejeye afia.*  
(Nkechi pas went neg market)  
Nkechi did not go to the market.

From the above example presented by Okee (2016), it is observed in (1b) that the verb form is negated with the suffixation of the general negative marker *-ye*.

In their own contribution, Enweonye and Egwueke (2016) observe that the general negative marker in Amaiyi dialect of Igbo is realized as *-hi, he, and hu*.

Ndimele (2009) also identifies other kinds of the negative marker in Igbo such as *beghi* which is used in perfective verb form and can be hosted by any lexical verb particularly the non-statives verbs. He however presents the following examples to back his claim:

- 1 a. *O sie-la nni*  
(She/he has cooked food)
- b. *O siebeghi nni*  
(She/he has not cooked)
- 2 a. *O zala ulo*  
(She has swept the house)
- b. *Ozabeghi ulo*  
(She has not swept the house)

Enweonye and Egwueke (2016) also observe that the perfective negative marker in Amaiyi Igbo, (a dialect of Igbo spoken in Enugu State, Nigeria) is realized as *-behe, -behu, -behj*. On imperative negative maker, according to Okee (2016), The negative imperative or what is sometimes referred to as the prohibitive is marked by *-“la”* in Egbema Igbo. He however presents the following examples.

- 1 a. *Ria ji.*  
(eat – ovs yam)  
Eat (some) yam.
- b. *E rila ji.*  
(pr-eat ovs-proh yam)  
Do not eat yam.
- 2 a. *Unu shia nri.*  
(2scl cook ovs food)  
You people should cook food.
- b. *Unu e shila nri.*  
(2scl pr cook ovs proh food)  
You people should not cook food.

### The Morphosyntax of negation in Okigwe Igbo

We shall examine negation or the operations of negation in Okigwe Igbo and standard Igbo base on sentence type such as declarative sentence, imperative sentence, the perfective and future tense sentence types.

#### Negation in declarative sentences in Okigwe dialect

First, we shall look at how negative marker operates on declarative sentences in Okigwe Igbo. The negative marker *-hu/hụ* is what is used to mark declarative sentences in Okigwe dialect, just like the negative marker *-ghi* is used to mark negative declarative sentences in standard Igbo. The negative marker *-hu/hụ* is usually suffixed to the root verb of declarative sentences in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. We however present the following sentences in Okigwe Igbo to show how this negative marker is suffixed to root verbs.

- 1 a. *Obi gbù-rù ewu*  
Obi kill -rV PST goat  
'Obi killed the goat'
- b. *Obi e-gbu-hu ewu*  
Obi PRE-kill-NEG. goat (Where: PRE=prefix, PST=past tense, NEG= negative marker)  
'Obi did not kill the goat'. (PRF= Perfective, rV& IV= suffixes, AUX=auxiliary verb).
- 2 a. *Ọ gà-rà ahia*  
3SG go -rV PST market.  
'He/she went to the market'.
- b. *Ọ ga-hu ahia.*  
3SG go- NEG. market  
'He/she did not go to the market'.
- 3 a. *Ọ sa-ra akwà*  
3SG wash-rV PST cloth.  
'He/ she washed cloth'.
- b. *Ọ sa-hu akwà*  
3SG wash-NEG. cloth  
'He/she did not wash cloth'
- 4 a. *Ngozi mù-rù nwa nwoke*  
Ngozi give-rV PST child male  
'Ngozi gave birth to a baby boy'
- b. *Ngozi a-mụ-hụ nwa nwoke*  
Ngozi PRE-give-NEG. child boy  
'Ngozi did not give birth to a baby boy'
- 5 a. *Ha nwe-re ụlọ*  
3PL have-rV house  
'They have a house'
- b. *Ha e-nwe-hu ụlọ*  
3PL PRE-have-NEG house  
'They don't have a house'

From the examples 1b, 2b, 3b and 4b above, the declarative sentence is negated through the suffixation of the negative marker –*hu* to the verb roots in the sentences. It is equally observed that both the negative marker and the verb form in Okigwe Igbo obey the rules of vowel harmony. Thus, the negative marker-*hu*, is suffixed to the verb form in sentence (4b).

From the examples in our empirical studies above, the declarative negative marker *ghì* in standard and Ohuhu dialect, *-ro* in Onicha, *-ye* in Egbema, (Ndimele 1995, Enweonye & Egwueke 2016, Okee (2016), is realized as –*hu/hu* in Okigwe dialect of Igbo.

### Negation in perfective sentence in Okigwe dialect.

In Okigwe, we observe that perfect sentences are negated through the suffixation of the negative marker-*be*. We however present the following examples below to show how the perfective negative marker –*be* in Okigwe Igbo is used to transform perfective affirmatives to negatives.

- 1 a. *O rie-le edè*  
3SG eat-IV PRF cocoyam  
'He/she has eaten cocoyam'
- b. *O rie-bè edè*  
3SG eat-NEG. cocoyam  
'He/she has not eaten cocoyam'
- 2 a. *Oluchi e-me-le yà*  
Oluch PRE- done-IV PRF. it  
Oluchi has done it
- b. *Oluchi e-me-bè yà*  
Oluchi PRE-done-NEG. it  
'Oluchi has not done it'
- 3 a. *O gba-la ọso*  
3SG AUX-IV PRF. race  
'He/she has run'
- b. *O gba-bè ọso*  
3SG run-NEG. race  
'He/she has not run'

From the examples above, in examples (1b), (2b) and (3b), the perfective marker –*bè* in Okigwe dialect is suffixed to the perfective verb form to create a contrast in meaning. In terms of variations, the perfective marker –*bè* in Okigwe Igbo is realized as –*beghì* in standard Igbo. Other examples in Okigwe dialect are seen below:

- 4 *O nwe-te-bè ọrụ*  
3SG get-PRF-NEG job  
'He/she has not gotten a job'
5. *O zu-bè àlà*  
3SG buy-NEG. land  
'He/she has not bought a land'

6. *Ada a-mu-bè nwa*  
 Ada PRE- give-NEG child  
 Ada has not given birth

### Negation in imperative sentences in Okigwe.

On imperative markers, according to Ndimele (2009), the negative imperative marker or what is sometimes referred to as prohibitive is marked by *-la* in standard Igbo. However, in Okigwe Igbo, the negative imperative marker is realized as *-la/le* on imperative sentences. We present the following examples below to show how they are suffixed to verb roots.

- 1 a. *Unu gbà ọsọ*  
 2PL run race  
 ‘You people should run’  
 b. *Unu a-gba-là ọsọ*  
 You people PRE-run-NEG. race  
 ‘You people should not run’
- 2 a. *rie jì*  
 eat yam  
 ‘eat some yam’  
 b. *e-ri-le jì*  
 PRE-eat-NEG yam  
 ‘don’t eat yam’
- 3 a. *unu guọ akwụkwọ*  
 2PL read book  
 ‘you people should read book’  
 b. *unu a-gu-la akwụkwọ*  
 2PL PRE-read-NEG book  
 ‘you people should not read book’

From the examples above, in sentences (1b) and (3b), the imperative negative marker *-la* is suffixed to these imperative sentences, which in turn transforms them into negative imperative sentences, while in sentence (2b) the imperative negative marker *-le* is suffixed to the verb root which makes the sentence a negative one.

### Negation of future sentences in Okigwe

Also, the anticipative or predictive auxiliary verb form *-ga* in Okigwe Igbo is negated through the suffixation of the negative marker *-hụ* in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. This can be seen in the following examples

- 1 a. *Nkechi gà-àga ọrụ*  
 Nkechi AUX- go INF work  
 ‘Nkechi will go to work’  
 b. *Nkechi a-ga-hụ àga ọrụ*  
 Nkechi PRE-AUX-NEG go INF work  
 ‘Nkechi will not go to work’

- 2 a. Uche gà eri jì  
 Uche AUX eat yam  
 ‘Uche will eat yam’
- b. Uche a-ga-hụ eri jì  
 Uche PRE-AUX-NEG eat yam  
 ‘Uche will not eat yam’

From the above examples, in sentences (1b) and (2b), the general negative marker *-hụ* in Okigwe Igbo is suffixed to the anticipative auxiliary verb form *-ga*. We equally observe generally that in Okigwe Igbo, the suffixation of a negative marker to a verb form or verb root is accompanied by a harmonizing verb prefix *e/a* both in the auxiliary verb form and lexical verb form if the subject of the sentence is an NP and not a pronoun. As in:

1. Uche a-ga-hụ eri jì  
 Uche PRE-AUX- NEG eat yam  
 ‘Uche will not eat yam’
2. Obi e-si-hụ jì  
 Obi –PRE cook- NEG-yam  
 ‘Obi did not cook yam’

From the above examples, the default harmonizing prefixes *-e/a* is attached to sentences with NP as subject. Thus, this prefix marks agreement between verb forms and negative markers.

### Summary of Findings and Conclusion

We examined in this study the morphosyntax of negation in Okigwe dialect of Igbo and also took into cognizance the negative markers in standard Igbo. We observed that the declarative general marker *-ghị* in standard Igbo is realized as *-hụ/hụ* in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. Also the perfective negative marker *-beghi* in standard Igbo is realized as *-bè* in Okigwe dialect.

On imperative negative marker, which is realized as *-la* in standard is realized as *-la/le* in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. We equally found out that negative markers in Okigwe obey the rule of vowel harmony and they can be suffixed both on auxiliary and lexical verbs.

In conclusion, negation is universal among dialects and languages of the world. However, it is a very rich morpho-syntactic activity in Igbo, and in Okigwe dialect of Igbo. But as we have seen in our study, the morphologic al forms and operations of these negative markers varies from dialects to dialects with little similarities.



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