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Tense and Negation in Yoruba

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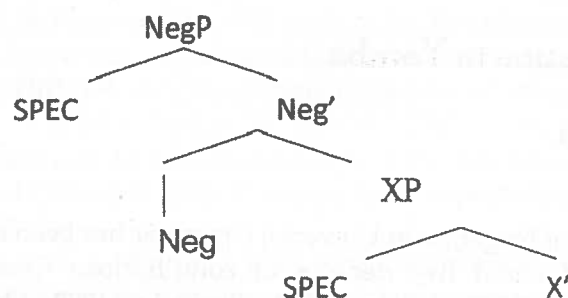
Abstract

The status of Negation in Universal Grammar has been controversial in spite of about five decades of contributions from generative grammarians (Fujita 1975, Pollock 1989, Chomsky 1989, Ouhalla 1990, Déprez and Pierce 1993, Ernst 1995, Awoyale 1995, Decahine 1995, Lona 2000, Harves 2002, Wiltschko 2002, Landau 2002, Kaiser 2006, Spencer 2008, Aboh 2010, Alqassas 2015, de Sousa 2015, and Albu 2017). Its status is even less clear in Yoruba where limited generative grammar work has been done on Negation. This chapter will focus on one of the questions plaguing negation in the literature – its relationship with Tense. Zanuttini (1996) claims that negation could only be present in a sentence if it has Tense as its complement while Dechaine (1995) notes that negation is actually in Tense in Yoruba. Zanuttini (1996:181) concludes (based on her comparative analysis of English and Romance languages (like Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Romanian, and Galician) that the negation phrase (NegP) is parasitic on the Tense phrase (TP) – if NegP, then TP. She adds that the NegP must be generated to the left of the TP to fulfill the selectional requirements of the head of the Neg P. This chapter would show that neither of the two claims is accurate for Yoruba. Yoruba negations are not parasitic on Tense because negation can occur in complementary distribution with Tense. This chapter also provides empirical evidence to show that negation is not in Tense in Yoruba. Other syntactic elements that are also in complementary distribution with the non-future tense marker are not in Tense. So, negation cannot be in Tense either. Also, negation markers do co-occur with the future tense marker in Yoruba. This indicates that Tense and Negation are able to head distinct terminal nodes. The chapter expands on the proposal sketched in Awoyale (1995) that negation heads its own NegP in Yoruba. In fact, Yoruba can project multiple NegPs with only one TP.

1. Introduction

Scholars have explored the occurrence of negation in a lot of human languages (Fujita 1975, Adewole 1991, Déprez and Pierce 1993, Ernst 1995, Lona 2000, Kim and Sag 2002, Landau 2002, and Fabunmi 2013). One of the main claims is that negation can project and head its own phrase – NegP as in (1) (Pollock 1989, Chomsky 1989, Ouhalla 1990, Awoyale 1995, and Wiltschko 2002).

1.



In this chapter, I assume that Yoruba negation markers fit the structure that is shown in (1). Yoruba negation markers can head the NegP. Thus, each of the Yoruba negation markers such as *kò*, and *má* can project a NegP. The variant of the imperative negation marker *má* which is *yéé* can also project a NegP. In the same way, each of the variants of the sentential negation marker *kò* such as *kií*, *kií ɕe*, and *kò ní* can also project a NegP. Even the nominal (constituent) negation marker *kọ* can project a NegP.

One of the fine details of the analysis in Zanuttini (1996:181) is that we can have a NegP only if we have a TP in a sentence – if NegP, then TP. She claims that the occurrence of the negation in NegP is dependent on the occurrence of Tense in the sentence. Therefore, NegP must have a TP as its complement. Therefore, the prediction would be that negation is parasitic on tense. As we will see below, this prediction is not borne out in Yoruba. Yoruba negation is not parasitic on tense. It can occur in a sentence whether tense is present in the sentence or not. In fact, the Yoruba negation can occur in complementary distribution with the Tense in certain contexts. It is perhaps their complementarity that leads Dechaine (1995) to propose that negation is in Tense in Yoruba. This chapter would show that neither of the two claims are accurate for Yoruba. Yoruba negations are not parasitic on Tense because negation can occur in complementary distribution with Tense. And, there are at least two reasons why we can conclude that negation is not in Tense in Yoruba. Other syntactic elements that are also in complementary distribution with the non-future tense marker are not in Tense. So, negation cannot be in Tense either. Also, negation markers do co-occur with the future tense marker in Yoruba. This indicates that Tense and Negation are able to head distinct terminal nodes in the language.

The chapter is organized as follow. Section one is the introduction. In section two, we will highlight the pattern of occurrence and the distribution of negation markers in Yoruba. Section three is on the interaction of Tense and Negation in Yoruba. We propose the structures for negation in Yoruba sentences in section four. Section five is the conclusion.

2. Negation Markers in Yoruba

In this section, we will look at the pattern of occurrence of negation markers in Yoruba. The most commonly used negation marker in Yoruba is the sentential negation *kò* (2a). Its form varies in the sentence depending on the verb, tense, and aspects in the sentence. It could show up as *kií* (2b), *kií ɕe* (2c), or *kò ní* (2d). Another negation marker that Yoruba uses is *má* (3a). It is imperative. Its variant in some dialects is *yéé* (3b). The constituent negation marker *kọ* can only occur with the specificational copular verb – *ni* as in (4). Negation markers are usually used when a sentence is false at a time *t*, which is before or equal to the local evaluation time. So, Yoruba negation markers occur to indicate that a proposition is not true. For example, for *Kò a* to be true, it must be the case that *a* is false at a time preceding the time at which the sentence in which *kò a* occurs is uttered. The same can be said of the imperative negation marker in the language – *má*. Similarly, we can infer the same for the variants of the negation marker *kò* including *kií*, *kií ɕe*, and *kò ní* (2).

- 2a. Adéwuyì *kò* lọ New York.
Adewuyi NEG go New York
'Adewuyi did not go to New York.'
- 2b. Adéwuyì *kií* lọ New York. (Habitual)
Adewuyi NEG go New York
'Adewuyi doesn't go to New York.'
- 2c. Adéwuyì *kií ɕe* akẹkọp (Predicational Copular)
Adewuyi NEG-BE student
'Adewuyi is not a student.'
- 2d. Adéwuyì *kò ní* lọ New York. (Future tense)
Adewuyi NEG-FUT go New York
'Adewuyi will not go to New York.'
- 3a. Má lọ New York. (Imperative)
NEG go New York
'Don't go to New York.'
- 3a' Yéé lọ New York (Imperative)
NEG go New York
'Stop going to New York.'
- 3b. Ẹ má lọ New York. (Imperative)
You (plural) NEG go New York

'Don't go to New York.' (Used for more than one person or for an elderly person)

- 4a. Bọwálé kọ ni ọba. (Specificational Copular)
Bowale NEG BE king
'Bowale is not the king.'

- 4b. New York kọ ni Adéwuyi lọ (Specificational Copular)
New York NEG BE Adewuiy go
'It wasn't New York that Adewuiy went.'

In each of the sentences in (2) and (3) except (2c), the proposition, going to New York is false. In (4a) there is a king, but Bowale isn't his name. And in (4b), Adewuyi went to some place but he did not go to New York. Next we highlight the distribution of negation markers in Yoruba.

2.1. The Distribution of Negation Markers in Yoruba

Zanuttini (1996) highlights the fact that negation markers could occur pre-verbal or post verbal. Negation is preverbal in many languages of the world. And, languages that have post-verbal negation also usually have preverbal negation. Yoruba negation markers always occur before the verb. So they are pre-verbal. Even when multiple negation markers are used as we would see later, they are all pre-verbal. This explains why the (b) examples are unacceptable.

- 5a. Olúkòràìwé
Olu NEG buy book
'Olu did not buy a book'

- 5b. *Olúràkòìwé
OlúbuyNEG book

- 6a. Má lọ New York
NEG go New York
'Don't go to New York.'

- 6b. *Lọ má New York.
Go NEG New York

Furthermore, unlike in languages like Passamaquoddy (Algonquian) as shown in Bruening (2001), Yoruba negation markers cannot occur at the left edge of the sentence. Unlike in Passamaquoddy, Yoruba negation markers cannot precede the subject NP. This is why the example in (7b) is unacceptable.

- 7a. Adéwuyi kò ra ìwé
Adewuyi NEG buy book
'Adewuyi did not buy a book.'

- 7b. *Kò Adéwuyi ra ìwé
NEG Adewuyi buy book

Furthermore, Yoruba negation cannot be preceded by another adverb. It always c-commands any adverb that co-occurs with it in a sentence. This is why (8b) is not acceptable.

- 8a. Olúkòtètèràìwéré
OlúNEGquick buy book his
'Olú did not buy his books on time'/'Olu did not buy his book quickly.'

- 8b. *Olútètèkòràìwé
Olu quick NEG buy book

Similarly, negation markers cannot be preceded by an aspectual marker in Yoruba. This is probably why (10) is unacceptable.

9. Adéwuyi kòtùràìwé
Adewuyi NEG ASP buy book
'Adewuyi has not bought a book'

10. *Adéwuyi tìkòràìwé
Adewuyi ASP NEG buy book

This suggests that there is a somewhat strict order among the elements that are encoded between the subject and the verb in Yoruba sentences. As we will see below, negation, modal verbs, aspects, and tense can occur between the subject and the verb in Yoruba. It is evident from what we have seen so far that negation precedes all the other possible syntactic elements that can occur between the subject and the verb.

Also, as in many languages of the world, Yoruba negation markers can also license the occurrence of a negative quantifier as in (11) (Aboh 2010). In the absence of a negation marker, the negative quantifier cannot occur in a sentence (12). Thus, we have the implication in (13).

- 11a. Olú kò rí ènìkankan
Olu NEG see no one
'Olu has not seen anyone'/'Olu saw no one'

- 11b. Ènikankan kò rí Olú.
no one NEGsee Olú
'No one saw Olú.'

12. *Olú rí ènikankan
Olu see no one

13. If negative quantifier, then negation marker.

Lastly, multiple negation markers can co-occur in a sentence. This is common in world languages. For example, in the Ewe language, when there are two negation markers in a sentence, Agbedor (1995:131) reports negative cancellation. Dechaine (1995) also notes the same effect for Yoruba where one negation would cancel out the other negation. We assume that this is essentially accurate with a caveat. If the sentential negation *kò* co-occurs with the imperative negation marker *má*, the negative effects in the sentence would be neutralized (15). However, if two variants of the sentential negation *kò* co-occur, they would only serve to emphasize the negative effects of the sentence (14a). Also, if the constituent negation marker *kò* co-occurs with the sentential negation marker *kò* as in the biclausal sentence in (14b), the negative effects are still retained and perhaps enhanced. Therefore, no negation cancellation would take place.

- 14a. Adéwuyì kò kǐjẹ ìrẹ̀sì. (Negation not cancelled)
Adewuyi NEG NEG-habitual eat rice
'Adewuyi doesn't usually eat rice.'

- 14b. Olúkònikò jẹun (Negation not cancelled)
Olú NEG be NEG eat
'It wasn't Olu who did not eat'

15. Adéwuyì kò lẹ̀ má jẹ̀ ìrẹ̀sì. (Negation cancelled)
Adewuyi NEG can NEG eat rice
'Adewuyi cannot do without eating rice.' / 'Adewuyi always eats rice.'

It appears that each negation cancelling context involves the occurrence of at least one modal verb. And, it also appears that negation cancellation involves the sentential negation *kò* and the imperative negation *má* in all cases. And, in all instances, *kò* must be the first negation marker in the sentence.

- (16a) Olú gbọ̀dọ̀ lẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ yíí
Olu must can do work this
'Olu must be able to do this work'

- (16b) Olú kò gbọ̀dọ̀ má lẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ẹ̀ yíí
Olu NEG must NEG can do work this
'Olu must be able to do this work'

- (17a) Olú gbọ̀dọ̀ tíjì
Olu must ASP wake
'Olu must have woken up'

- (17b.) Olú kògbọ̀dọ̀ má tíjì
Olu NEG must NEG ASP wake
'Olu must have woken up'

- (18a)¹ Olú gbọ̀dọ̀ tètèdẹ̀
Olu must quickly arrive
'Olu must arrive quickly'

- (18b.) Olú kò gbọ̀dọ̀ má tètèdẹ̀
Olu NEG must NEG quickly arrive
'Olu must arrive quickly'

One way to explain the possibility of multiple negation is to allude to the fact that there are usually two elements with verbal features in (16) to (18). In these cases, there are main verbs and modal verbs. If this multiple verbal element requirements were true, then we would expect multiple negation to be possible with serial verb constructions in the language. However, multiple negation is not attested in serial verb constructions in the language. For example, (19b) is not acceptable.

- 19a. Adéwuyì ga tó Àdió.
Adewuyi tall reach Adio
'Adewuyi is as tall as Adio.'

- 19b. *Adéwuyì kò ga má tó Àdió.
Adewuyi NEG tall NEG reach Adio

Therefore, we would probably need to appeal to other factors different from the occurrence of two words with verbal properties to fully account for the occurrence of multiple negation in Yoruba. For now, it suffices to say that Yoruba does not use multiple negation in serial verb constructions. It uses only one negation marker as in (20).

¹The possibility of (18b) suggests that *má* might not be adjoined to the VP (cf. Dechaine 1995).
An additional adverb, in this instance *tètè* 'quickly', can intervene between them.

20. Adéwuyi kò ga tó Àdió.
Adewuyi NEG tall reach Adio
'Adewuyi is not as tall as Adio.'

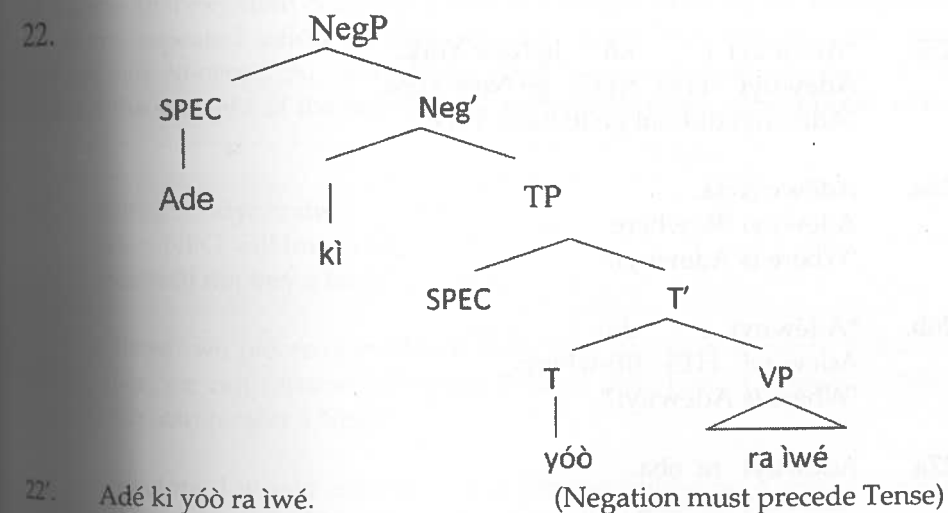
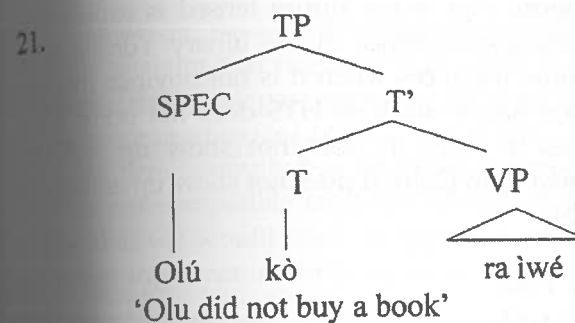
Next we turn to the possible structures for Negation in Yoruba.

3. The Structure of the NegP in Yoruba

Since Pollock (1989), it has been shown in the literature that negation can project a NegP. Some languages (like Berber and Turkish) realize negation in the head position, Neg^o while others (like German and Swedish) put negation in the Specifier position of the NegP (Ouhalla 1990:191). For Yoruba, we assume following Awoyale's (1995) work on functional categories that negation is a head. One possible argument that has been used to differentiate between when negation is a head and when it is a specifier in the literature is the ability of the head to merge with other syntactic elements (Aboh 2010). However, Yoruba is not rich in inflectional morphology like many other languages that were used to make the argument. One strand of related evidence that we can provide is in the fact that negation and the habitual marker seem to merge in the derivation of the habitual negation marker *kii*. Akinlabi (p.c. March 10, 2010) points it out to me that the word is derived from the sentential negation *kò/kì* and the habitual progressive marker *n*. The fact that the negation marker *kì* merges with the *í* that cliticizes with it to derive *kii* as in (21) could be used as an evident that negation is a head.

21. Adéwuyi kii lọ New York.
Adewuyi NEG-HAB go New York
'Adewuyi doesn't go to New York.'

There are two leading hypotheses on the structure of the negation phrase in Yoruba. The first proposal is due to Dechaine (1995) who claims partly based on the fact that the non-future tense cannot co-occur with the sentential negation *kò* that negation is in Tense in Yoruba (21). Thus, we would not need an independent NegP if this is correct. The second proposal is due to Awoyale (1995) who claims that negation can project its own phrase – NegP like other functional categories as in (22).



- 22'. Adé ki yóò ra iwé.
Ade NEG will buy book
'Ade will not buy a book'

- 22'' *Adéyóòkìraiwé.
Ade will NEG buy book

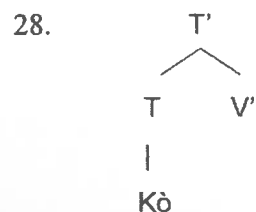
It appears that both of them could not be accurate at the same time. Perhaps a closer look at the complementarity of the non-future tense marking HTS and negation would shed some light on the issue. Yoruba has a two-tense system – future and non-future (Bamgbose 1990, Awoyale 1991, Dechaine 1995, Awobuluyi 1999, and Olumuyiwa 2013). The future tense is marked with *yóò*, *máa*, or *á* as in (23), while the non-future tense is marked with a high tone syllable (HTS) as in (24).

23. Adéwuyi máa/yóò/á lọ New York.
Adewuyi FUT go New York.
'Adewuyi will go to New York.'
24. Adéwuyi í lọ New York.
Adewuyi HTS go New York.
'Adewuyi went to New York.'

So, every Yoruba sentence that is not future tensed is expected to have an HTS as a non-futuretensed sentence in the binary Yoruba tense system. However, there are some instances when it is not obvious that this expectation is fulfilled. The non-future marking HTS does not occur when there is a negation marker as in (25b). It does not show up with the interrogative verbs like *dà* or *ńkọ* as in (26b). It does not show up either with the predicate head *ni* as in (27b).

- 25a. Adéwuyì kò lẹ New York.
Adewuyi NEG go New York.
'Adewuyi did not go to New York'
- 25b. *Adéwuyì í kò lẹ New York.
Adewuyi HTS NEG go New York.
'Adewuyi did not go to New York'
- 26a. Adéwuyì dà.
Adewuyi BE-where
'Where is Adewuyi?'
- 26b. *Adéwuyì í dà.
Adewuyi HTS BE-where
'Where is Adewuyi?'
- 27a. Adéwuyì ni ọba.
Adewuyi BE king
'Adewuyi is the king.'
- 27b. *Adéwuyì í ni ọba.
Adewuyi HTS BE king
'Adewuyi is the king.'

Thus, the (b) examples in (25) to (27) suggest that negation, interrogative verbs, and the predicate head cannot co-occur with the non-future tense marker in Yoruba. It is tempting to follow Dechaine (1995) to use the paradigm in (25) to argue that negation is in Tense in Yoruba. This would suggest following Dechaine (1995) that the structure in (28) is attested in Yoruba.

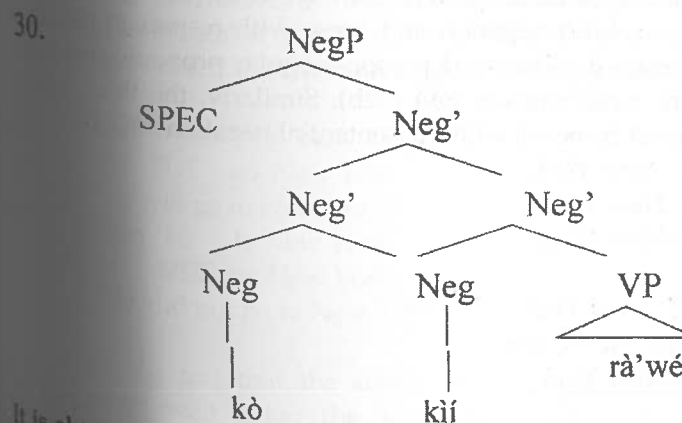


However, we would not take that route. For starters, it does not look plausible to claim that negation is in Tense in (25a) since we cannot extend the same claim to the paradigms in (26) and (27). So, interrogative verbs and the predicate head in (26) and (27) are not in Tense either. The claim that we will make here is simply that negation, interrogative verbs and the predicate head are not compatible with the non-future tense marker in Yoruba. This implies that we would need to appeal to other possibilities different from occupying the Tense node to account for the complementarity of syntactic elements like negation, interrogative verbs, and the predicate head *ni* with the non-future tense. Thus, in the absence of any other evidence, we would not assume that negation occurs in Tense in Yoruba. More so, the example in (22) above repeated below as (29) actually shows that future tense and negation can co-occur. So, there is no need to assume that negation is in Tense on the strength of the fact that the non-future tense cannot occur with negation.

29. Adé kiyódráiwé.
Ade NEG will buy book
'Ade will not buy a book'

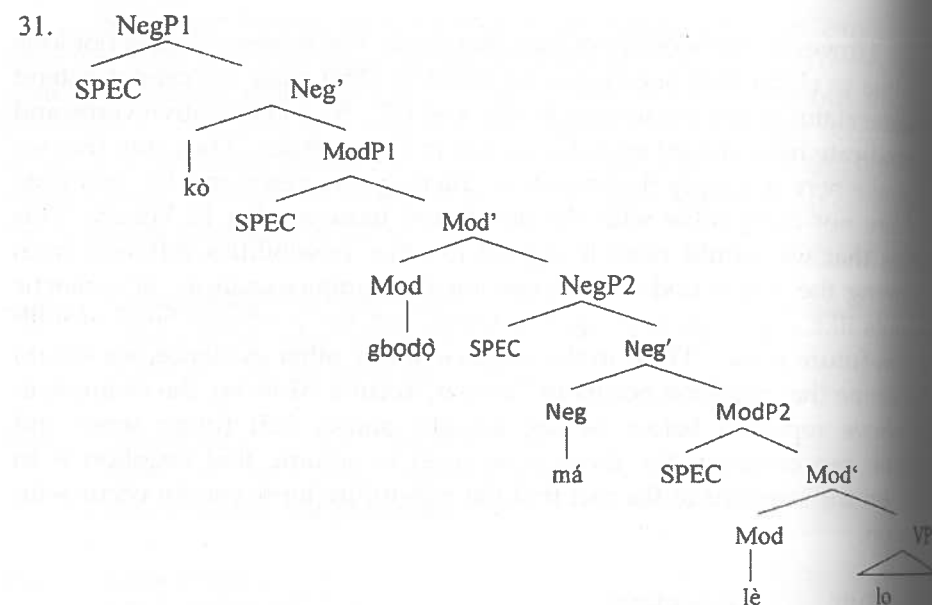
If these two pieces of evidence show that negation is not in Tense in Yoruba, then we can assume following Pollock (1989) and Chomsky (1989) that negation can project a NegP.

Therefore, I would assume in this chapter following Awoyale (1995) that Yoruba negation markers can project a NegP. It is indeed possible for the NegP to have two heads² as in example (14a) above. Its structure would look like (30).



It is also possible for a Yoruba Sentence to have multiple negation phrases. They must occur pre-verbally.

² See Baker (1989)'s Head Licensing Condition for more on doubly headed projections.



4. Negation and Tense

We have seen it in the preceding section that negation, aspects, modal verbs, and tense are all encoded between the subject and the verb. We have also seen it that the sentential negation *kò* must precede all the other syntactic elements that it co-occurs with between the subject and the verb. We have also seen it that the sentential negation always occurs in a fixed position. It must always precede the Tense in case of the future tense (22"). We leave the question of why the non-future tense marking HTS cannot co-occur with negation aside for now.

One important occurrence pattern that we need to highlight here points to a similarity in both negation and tense with respect to the third person singular pronoun, *ó*. The third person singular pronoun cannot co-occur with the future tense marker *yóò* (32b). Similarly, the third person singular pronoun cannot co-occur with the sentential negation *kò* (33b).

32a. *Ó máa lọ New York.*
3s FUT go New York
'He will go to New York.'

32b. **Ó yóò lọ New York.*
3s FUT go New York
'He will go to New York.'

32c. *Yóò lọ New York*
FUT go New York.
'He will go to New York.'

33a. *O kò lọ New York.*

You NEG go New York
'You did not go to New York.'

33b. **Ó kò lọ New York*
3s NEG go New York

33c. *Kò lọ New York*
NEG go New York
'He did not go to New York.'

Thus, the grammatical sentences in (32c) and (33c) do not have a subject. This is not to say that having a subject is incompatible with the sentential negation or the future tense marker. Sentences like (32a) and (33a) clearly show that the sentential negation and the future tense marker are both compatible with subject pronouns. Indeed, the ungrammatical examples in (32b) and (33b) would become grammatical if we change the [Number] feature of the pronoun. For instance, if we use the third person plural pronoun instead of third person singular pronoun, the examples would be grammatical as in (34) and (35).

34. *Wọn yóò lọ New York.*
3pl. FUT go New York
'They will go to New York.'

35. *Wọn kò lọ New York*
3pl. NEG go New York
'They did not go to New York.'

In the alternative, the ungrammatical examples in (32b) and (33b) can become grammatical if we change the subject third person singular *weak* pronoun to a subject third person singular *strong* pronoun as in (36) and (37).

36. *Òun yóò lọ New York.* (Contrastive)

3s. FUT go New York
'He will go to New York.'

37. *Òun kò lọ New York* (Contrastive)
3s. NEG go New York
'He did not go to New York.'

So, the fact that the subject third person singular weak pronoun cannot occur with either the sentential negation *kò* or the future tense marker *yóò* is a (little) mystery. It is perhaps related to why the non-future tense marker cannot co-occur with the sentential negation marker *kò* as we have seen it in a preceding section. The resolution of the mystery would potentially require further research.

It is important to note however, that the fact that the grammatical sentences in (32c) and (33c) do not have a subject is not excepted in Yoruba which according to Adesola (2005, 2010) has a strong Extended Projection Principle (EPP) requirement. And, to make it more complicated, those are not the only two contexts in which the subject requirement is not fulfilled in Yoruba.

The subject position is not filled in the third person singular with several aspectual markers in Yoruba. The subject position is null in the third person singular with the conditional marker *ibá* (38).

38. *Íbá lẹ, bí Adé bá lẹ.*
COND go if Ade meet go
'He would have gone if Ade went.'

The subject position is not filled in the third person singular either when the habitual sentential negation is used (39).

39. *Kíí jẹ ìrẹ̀sì*
NEG- HAB eat rice
'He doesn't eat rice.' ọọ

Thus, we have more candidates for the violation of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). It has been suggested in the literature (Chomsky 1995 among many others) that certain functional heads – notably T – require a specifier (/subject). This is known as the EPP requirement. Put another way, EPP is the structural requirement that certain configurations should have a subject (Lasnik 2001). So, what do languages do to avoid violating this principle? They ensure compliance by either by raising an NP or by inserting an expletive pronoun in the subject position. Adesola (2010) notes that Yoruba uses both strategies. These are seen in how Yoruba uses the non-agreeing resumptive pronoun *ó* and in copy raising and expletive constructions. However, none of the two repair strategies is available to ensure EPP compliance in the contexts highlighted in (32) through (39). Resolving this issue would require further research. Perhaps the most straightforward way to resolve the puzzle is to assume that Tense is absent whenever the subject position is null. This approach has been used in the literature to account for the absence of subjects in imperative sentences (Branigan 1996, Platzack and Rosengren 1998). Another alternative is to assume that the D-Feature of T is weak in instances when EPP is violated in Yoruba (Rupp 2003:99). The third alternative is to assume that there is in fact an invisible pronoun namely a *pro* in the subject position in each case. We would not attempt to decide in favor of one or the other alternative in this chapter. However, the first two alternative are more appealing than the third alternative for empirical reasons. For example, it has been shown in Adesola (2010) that a null operator cannot satisfy the EPP requirements of T. This follows from how null operator movement works in the derivation of

questions and focus constructions in Yoruba (Adesola 2005, 2006). If this is correct, perhaps an invisible pronoun could satisfy the EPP requirements of T either. So, in those cases in (32) to (39), it is either the case that Tense is absent or the D-feature of T is weak if Tense is present in those contexts.

5. Conclusion

We have explored the pattern of occurrence of negation in Yoruba and its relationship with Tense. We show that syntactic elements like negation, interrogative verbs, and specificational copular *ni* cannot co-occur with the non-future tense marker. This could be because Tense is absent in the contexts. We also show that there are instances in which the future tense, conditional markers, and negation cannot license a third person singular pronoun in the subject position. We made three conclusions from the exploration. One, we note that Yoruba negation is not parasitic on Tense because they could actually be in complementary distribution in a sentence. We note further that the complementarity of the non-future tense marker and negation is not enough evidence to suggest that negation is in Tense in Yoruba. This conclusion was based on two reasons: the fact that negation can co-occur with the future tense marker and the fact that none of the other syntactic elements that are also in complementary distribution with the non-future tense marker can occur in Tense in Yoruba. The third conclusion that we made is that in the instance where the future tense and negation do not allow a subject because of the feature deficiencies of the subject third person singular weak pronoun we can assume that the EPP requirement is switched off. This we note could be because Tense is apparently absent in those instances or its D-feature is weak.

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