The morphosyntactic spell-out of the functional category neg in Igbo

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Abstract

From a descriptive point of view, negation in Igbo is assumed to be morphologically marked by a discontinuous morpheme, 'e ...ghi' comparable to French 'ne...pas' (cf. Emenanjo, 1981; Clark, 1989; Uwalaka, 2003). However, Dechaine (1993), in line with the V-movement analysis adopted for Igbo, argues that the e- prefix is not a negative marker but a default agreement marker (it occurs only with non-clitic subjects in negative constructions) instantiated by a null T(ense). T is empty because V-movement to T is blocked by Neg. Following the theoretical assumptions and supported by available data, we argue in line with Dechaine (1993). We, however differ from her in arguing that the high tone borne by the default agreement prefix does not inherently belong to the prefix but rather a neg marker. The high tone then becomes a plausible candidate for the templatic analysis earlier proposed by Emenanjo (1981) and supported by Clark (1989) and Uwalaka (2003).

1.0 Introduction

Every human language possesses some formal ways of expressing negation. While the conveyed meaning and functions of negation are relatively uniform, the formal devices employed exhibit a considerable degree of variation across languages.

The aim of this paper is to re-examine the data on Igbo negation and review the proposed analyses in line with the current treatment of negation in the literature.

In the next section, we discuss 'Neg' as a functional category. In section 3, data on Igbo negation are presented and analyzed in line with the V-movement Analysis. It also shows the interaction of Neg with the other functional categories: Agr, T and Asp. Section 4 examines the role of tone in Igbo negation especially in the absence of the negative suffix. Section 5 is the summary of our findings.

2.0 Neg as a functional category

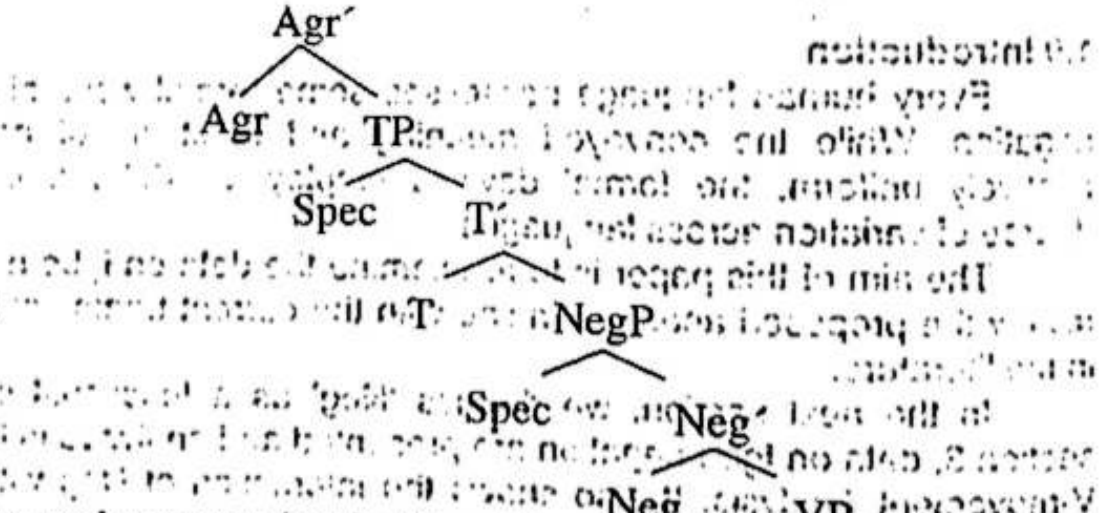
In recent works, much attention has been focused on the functional categories present in a sentential structure. Pollock (1989) suggests that the INFL node should be split into two components: Tense Phrase and

Agreement Phrase. Kitagawa (1986), Kayne (1989) and Pollock (1989) argue for the existence of a functional category Neg in Japanese, Romance languages and English respectively. While it is common knowledge that every language can express negation, it is not yet established whether the functional head NegP exists in every language. The overwhelming opinion is that some languages have functional Neg while some have lexical negation

Dechaine (1993:135) notes that "negation inhabits a borderline between functional and lexical projection". In French for example, negation is marked by an adjunct transparent to head to head movement. In Igbo, Neg has the status of a functional head, interacting with other functional heads such as Agr, T and Asp in X⁰-movement and feature-checking relationship (cf. Chomsky, 1995)

The relative order of Neg among the other functional and lexical heads is parameterized. Neg projects 'higher' than Tense in some languages and 'lower' in some others. Zanuttini (1996:182) argues that in both Romance languages and English, the presence of NegP implies the presence of TP because according to him "given a TP, the NegP will be generated to its left so as to satisfy the selectional requirements of its head". NegP occurs lower than TP in Igbo as shown in (1) below:

(1)



3.0 Negation and v-movement in Igbo

V-movement is attested for Igbo. Evidence for this lies with the fact that Igbo verbs bear different types of inflectional affixes: Tense, Aspect, Neg.The minimalist assumption is that the lexical items such as verbs, nouns and adjectives are fully inflected in the lexicon. In other words, they are taken from the lexicon fully inflected with inflectional affixes. The verb for example moves to check its features against the features of the relevant functional heads. It is only by such movement, that the verb can check off

its morphological features against the features of the relevant functional heads. Failure to eliminate the morphological features which can be visible at the interface levels: PF and LF, before spell-out causes the derivation to crash. (cf. Marantz, 1995; Chomsky,1995)

Igbo verbs bear tense, aspect and negative affixes and therefore have to move to the spec position of the functional heads TP, AspP and NegP to check-off its morphological features.

Let us leave V-movement for now and examine some relevant data on Igbo negation.

3.1 Negation of simple indicative constructions

Igbo has the *-rV* suffix[1] in the affirmative and the *–ghi* suffix in the negative as shown by (2)-(5)

(2) a. Ezè rì-rì nri
eat-rV(past) food
'Eze ate food'

b. Ezè e-rī-ghī nri
Agr-eat-Neg food
'Eze did not eat food'

(3) a. Ha mà-rà mmā
3P VR-rV(ass.) beauty
'They are beautiful'

b. Ha a-mā-ghī mmā
3P Agr-VR-Neg beauty
'They are not beautiful'

(4) a. Ò rì-rì nri
3S eat-rV(past) food
'He/She ate food'

b. Ò ri-ghī nri
3S eat-Neg food
'He/She did not eat food'

(5) a. È rì-rì m nri
Agr eat-rV(past) 1S food
'I ate food'

b. È ri-ghī m nri
Agr eat-Neg 1S food
'I did not eat food'

The data above show that the *-rV* past tense or assertive marker is mutually exclusive with the negative marker. The data also show that in the negative construction, the verb takes a high tone harmonizing prefix ***e-***, if the subject is a non-clitic as in (2b) and (3b). Clitics such as the third person pronoun as in (4) and impersonal subject pronoun as in (5) do not have the prefix.

Emenanjo (1981), Clark (1989), and Uwalaka (2003) treat the prefix ***e-*** as part of a discontinuous negative morpheme comparable to French 'ne...pas'. Uwalaka (2003:12) argues that the prefix is deleted when the

"subject NP is one of the singular pronouns". She gives economy principle as the reason for such deletion.

Dechaine (1993) however, does not agree with the templatic view of Igbo negation. She rather argues that the *e-* prefix is a default agreement marker which surfaces as a result of stranded tense. According to her, "Neg between T and V is a barrier for V to T movement. As V can't raise beyond Neg, T above Neg is empty" p.135. She argues further that clitic subjects as in (4) and (5) occupy the same position as the *e-* prefix seen in negation.

The presence of such a prefix in the perfective construction where no negation is implied may give support to Dechaine's analysis. Consider (6) below:

(6) a. Àda a/à-zà-a-la ụlọ̀
Agr-sweep-OVsuff-Perf house
'Ada has swept the house'

b. Ha e/è-gbu-o-la agū
3P Agr-kill-OVsuff-Perf lion
'They have killed a lion'

c. Ọ zà-a-la ụlọ̀
3S sweep-OVsuff-Perf house
'He/She has swept the house'

d. E gbu-o-la m̄ agū
Agr kill-OVsuff-Perf 1S lion
'I have killed a lion'

In the data, we used two verbs; *zà* 'sweep' a low tone verb and *gbu* 'kill' a high tone verb. We observed that just like in negation the non-clitic subjects allow the prefix *e-* as in 6(a) and (b), while the clitics do not allow it as in 6(c) and (d). Note that the tone on the prefix could either be high or low depending on the dialect or individual, while that of negation is always high. We shall return to this in section 4.

How do we then reconcile this near similarity with the Neg barrier analysis proposed by Dechaine (1993)? One can argue that in the perfective construction such as (6), there is an Aspect Phrase (AspP) which is also a barrier for V-T movement. In other words, Tense and Aspect are two distinct functional heads in Igbo. This is contrary to Uwalaka's (2003:10) assumption that since Igbo does not permit the co-occurrence of an aspectual morpheme with tense morpheme that TP and AspP share the same head and occur under one node.

V moves to Asp and since Asp and Tense do not co-occur, the complex structure V+Asp does not move further to T. This leaves T stranded just like in negation, thereby allowing the default marker to surface.

3.2 Negation of perfective constructions

7(a) – (d) are negative counterparts of 6(a) – (d) respectively

(7) a. Àda a-zā-bè-ghì ụlọ
Agr-sweep-Perf-Neg house
'Ada has not swept the house'

b. Ha e-gbu-bè-ghì agū
3P Agr-kill-Perf-Neg lion
'They have not killed a lion'

c. Ọ za-bè-ghì ụlọ
3S sweep-Perf-Neg house
'He/She has not swept the house'

d. È gbu-bè-ghì m agū
Agr kill-Perf-Neg 1S lion
'I have not killed a lion'

Our data show that two new elements are introduced in the negative perfective, the *-ghi* negative suffix and the perfective negative polarity suffix *–be*[2] 'yet'. Here, again the prefix ***e-*** occurs in its usual environment. The difference between the affirmative and the negative is that, in the negative, the prefix is always on a high tone. In the absence of the prefix, the verb assumes a high tone irrespective of the inherent tone of the verb. Again this is an indication that tone has a very important role to play in Igbo negation. We shall return to that in section 4.

We assume that in the negative perfective, V raises first to Asp and then V+Asp raises to Neg. The complex V+Asp+Neg does not raise to T. Dechaine(1993) gives explanation for this. According to her, "Igbo lacks morphological tense, there can be no morphological subcategorization of V by T, hence economy consideration prevents it from occurring". (cf Chomsky, 1989).

3.2 Negation of imperative constructions

Imperative sentences can be negated by the suffixation of *-la* and the prefixation of ***e-*** as shown by 8(b)-11(b).

(8) a. Gà-a ahia
go-Imp market
'Go to market'

b. A-ga-la ahia
Agr-go-Imp.Neg market
'Do not go to market'

(9) a. Gbù-o ewū
kill-Imp goat
'Kill a goat'

b. E-gbu-la ewu
Agr-kill-Imp.Neg goat
'Do not kill a goat'

(10)a. Gbụ̀-o-nụ̀ ọ̀kụ̀kọ̀
2P-encl. fowl
'You (pl.) kill the fowl'

b. Ụnụ̀ e-gbụ̄-lă ọ̀kụ̀kọ̀
2P Agr-kill-Imp.Neg fowl
'You (pl.) do not kill the fowl'

(11)a. Ha gbù-o ewū
3P kill-Imp goat
'They should kill a goat'

b. Ha e-gbū-lă ewu
3P Agr-kill-Imp.Neg goat
'They should not kill a goat'

Again, here we can assume that the same agreement prefix occurs in the imperative, and negation is marked by the suffix *-la*. Note that the affirmative imperative lacks an overt subject in 8(a) and 9(a) which is usually the implied second person pronoun. The prefix *e-* also occupies the subject Agr position in negative imperative constructions, as in the indicative and perfective constructions earlier discussed.

This analysis implies that V-T movement is equally blocked by Neg in imperative negative construction. If this analysis is correct, it then means that tense is an obligatory constituent of every sentence whether it is morphologically marked or not. We assume this to be the popular standpoint. In fact, Zanuttini (1996:181) rightly notes, "the functional category NegP is parasitic on the functional category TP". In other words, there can be no NegP without a TP. If Neg is dependent on T and T has scopal authority over V, then that explains why NegP (i.e as a functional head) is a predicate operator in languages where it exists. Igbo has only NegP and for that reason no constituent of an Igbo sentence can be negated without involving the predicate. Constituent negation in Igbo must involve clefting, where the negated constituent is focused and introduced by a copula predicator such as *bụ* and *dị* as in (12b) or the verb *nwe* which translates as 'there is' as in (12a).

(12) a. Ò nwe-ghī onye zụrụ akwụkwọ ya
ES cop-Neg person buy-rV book his
'Nobody bought his book'

b. Ò bụ-ghī Obi zụ̀rụ̀ ụgbọ̀àlà ahụ̀
ES cop-Neg Obi buy-rV vehicle that
'It is not Obi that bought that vehicle'

The constituents of the sentences: *onye* and *Obi* are negated by the cleft constructions *o nweghi* and *o bụghi*

4.0 The role of tone in Igbo negation

Dechaine (1993) rightly notes that the ***e-*** agreement prefix bears a high tone. We have shown in the previous section that the same prefix occurs in the perfective and can bear a low tone. It then means that the prefix has no inherent tone.

When the prefix occurs in the negative construction: simple indicative, perfective and imperative, it bears a high tone. This is an indication that high tone is a negative marker in Igbo. There are evidences in support of this claim.

4.1 Suffixless negative construction

The importance of tone in Igbo negation will be strongly felt in constructions and dialects where the negative suffix *-ghi* and its variants do not occur. Consider the examples below from Nnewi dialect:

(13) a. Ike yà è-rí nnī
Ike Fut. Nom-eat food
'Ike will eat food'

b. Ike a-yā e-rí nnī
Ike Agr.Neg-Fut. Nom-eat food
'Ike will not eat food'

(14) a. Ọ yà è-rí nnī
3S Fut. Nom-eat food
'He/She will eat food'

b. Ọ ya e-rí nnī
3S Neg.Fut. Nom-eat food
'He/She will not eat food'

(15) a. Àda nà a-zà unò
Ada Dur. Nom-sweep house
'Ada is sweeping the house'

b. Ada a-hā a-zà unò
Ada Agr.Neg-Dur. Nom-sweep house
'Ada is not sweeping the house'

(16) a. Ọ nà a-zà unò
3S Dur. Nom-sweep house.
'He/She is sweeping the house'

b. Ọ ha a-zà unò
3S Neg.Dur. Nom-sweep house
'He/She is not sweeping the house'

In the (b) examples in 13-16, negative meaning is implied. In all of them, the negative suffix is missing. The default agreement marker appears with non-clitic subjects as in 13(b) and 15(b). In 14(b) and 16(b), there is no agreement prefix and no negative suffix, yet negation is clearly implied. In 15 and 16, the auxiliary durative marker changes from *na* to *ha* in the negative, but that cannot be said to mark negation in the dialect. It is still possible to have 16(b) as (17) below

(17) Ọ na a-zà unò
3S Neg.Dur Nom.sweep house
'He/She is not sweeping the house'

Even main verbs can sometimes be negated without the negative suffix as in (18) (adapted from Uwalaka, 2003:11; glossing is mine)

(18) a. A mā Jizọs bụ ọrịà
Pro_{arb} Neg.know Jesus be sickness
'The lack of the knowledge of Jesus is sickness'

b. Madụ a-mā Jizọs bụ ọrịà
person Agr.Neg-know Jesus be sickness
'For a person not to know Jesus is sickness'

Igbo personal names provide good examples of economy in language. Most names are made as short as possible, but ensuring that the names retain the intended meaning. There are Igbo names that carry negative meaning but do not occur with the negative suffix. For example: *Ife anyighi Chukwu* 'nothing is too difficult for God' is rendered *Ifeanyichukwu. A māghī ńnà* 'Does not know father' is rendered *Amānnà*. The morphemic make-up of the two names are shown in 19.

(19) a. Ife-a-nyi-chukwu
thing-Agr.Neg-surpass-God
'Nothing surpasses God'

b. A-mā-nnà
Agr-Neg.know-father
'One that does not know the father'

4.2 High tone is the stronger neg marker

The data in section 4.1 are particularly revealing. In all the instances where negative meaning is implied, a high tone is found somewhere between the agreement prefix and the verbal element. In the prefix bears a high tone which influences the inherent low tone of the auxiliary *ya* to raise to a downstep. In the absence of the prefix, the verb takes over the high tone as in 14(b) and 16(b). In the personal names in 19, the negative meaning is also encoded by high tone on the Agr prefix. All

these are indications that high tone is a stronger negative marker than the negative suffix *-ghi*. The high tone and the negative suffix *-ghi* co-exist in a negative construction but the *-ghi* suffix can be deleted without affecting the negative meaning.

This analysis finds support in the work of Miestamo (2006) who discusses 'Negation without Negators'. He notes that the functional head carried by tone in Igbo is high, thus he concludes, (though incorrectly) "there is no overt segmental negator in Igbo. The distinction between affirmative and negation is expressed by the interaction of tone and the presence vs absence of prefix". This supports the view that tone is very important in Igbo negation.

4.3 É- is a joint spell-out of tense and neg

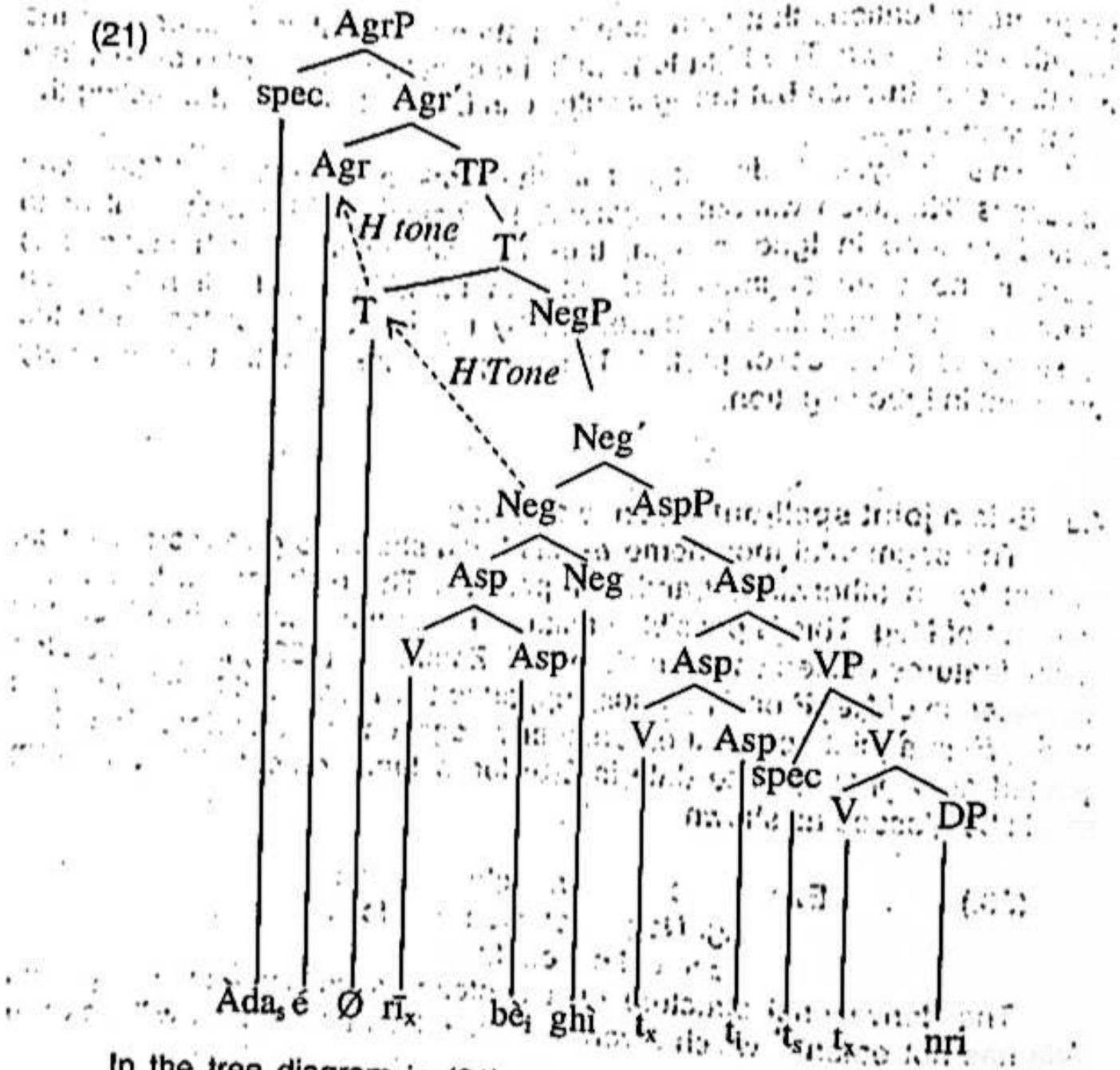
The segmental morpheme ***e-*** has been shown to give morphological content to an otherwise stranded T position. The high tone it bears is a spell-out of Neg. This is possible because T c-commands NegP in Igbo and so the features of Neg can percolate to T. Zanuttini's (1996) proposal on the dependence of NegP on TP, lends support to the Tense and Neg interaction on ***é-***. ***É-*** is a joint spell-out of tense and negation and therefore should be glossed as 'Agr.Neg'. The data in 2(b) for instance repeated here as (20) should be glossed as shown

(20.)	Ezè	e	-rī -ghī	nri
		Agr.Neg	-eat -Neg	food
		'Eze did not eat food'		

The derivational structure of a sentence such as: Àda eribèghì nri 'Ada has not eaten' which involves Tense, Neg and Aspect will look like (21)



(21)



In the tree diagram in (21) above, the subject in line with the VP Internal Subject Hypothesis moves to the Spec Agr position via the Spec nodes of the other functional categories (the Spec nodes are not shown on the diagram), leaving behind the trace t_s .The verb raises and adjoins to the head Asp, forming a complex head, V+Asp. The complex V+Asp head further raises to Neg, forming a more complex V+Asp+Neg. The complex structure does not raise further to T, but the negative high tone percolates to T. Since T is null, the high tone percolates further to Agr where it is realized on the *é-* default agreement marker.

5.0 Conclusion

The different views on Igbo negation are comparable to the fairy-tale of the seven blind men of Hindustan who went to 'see' the elephant, each describing the elephant from the point of view he could touch. Each analyst on Igbo negation has said something correct about the phenomenon, but the true picture of Igbo negation can only be seen by putting together all these different views.

We have argued in this paper, in line with Dechaine (1993) that V-movement occurs in Igbo and that V-T movement is blocked by NegP in negative construction which results in the surfacing of the default agreement marker to occupy the null T position. We however, differ from her in arguing that the high tone does not inherently belong to the prefix but rather it is a negative marker that is stronger than the negative suffix *-ghi*.

The high tone and the suffix *-ghi* form a discontinuous negative morpheme in line with the views of Emenanjo (1981) and Uwalaka (2003).

Endnotes

[1]The rV suffix has no inherent temporal reference. It denotes past for eventive verbs and nonpast for noneventive verbs. Welmers and Welmers (1968) refer to it as 'rV Factitive'.

[2]The negative perfective suffix *–be* is an NPI. Though not the negative marker but it carries a negative meaning

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