Negation in Màda: An X-bar Perspective

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Abstract
This paper discusses negation patterns in Màda, a Benue-Congo language spoken in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. It investigates the structure of negative constructions in Màda and how negation is marked in simple declarative sentences and on negative polarity items. Moreover, the aim of this paper is to describe the particles that are used to negate a clause in Màda within the X-bar theoretical model (Chomsky, 1970). Within the X-bar model, negation projects a negative phrase (NegP) which hitherto c-commands the VP and its internal elements. Data for this study were collected using monolingual and introspective method. The study reveals that Màda shows a unique pattern using the discontinuous morpheme la…yo to negate a clause. However, the structure of negation in Màda is S-Neg-VO-Neg. The first morpheme precedes the V while the second morpheme occurs preferably at the end of a clause. The second negation functions to reinforce negation in Màda. The paper concludes that the discontinuous morphemes also known as templetic morphemes are obligatory, as such function to mark standard negation in Màda.

Keywords: Negation, NegP, X-bar, Negative polarity Item, Màda

Introduction
Màda is mainly spoken in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, and it is one of the most widely spoken languages in Sanga and Jama’a Local Government Areas of Kaduna state (cf. Samuel, 2012; 2016). It is a platoid language of West Benue-Congo sub-family of the Niger-Congo phylum. Greenberg (1963), Williamson (1971), Hansford et al (1976), Gerhardt (1989; 2011), Crozier and Blench (1992), and Blench (2000; 2005; 2010) have classified Màda as belonging to the famous Benue-Congo sub-family. In spite of being one of the major languages spoken in Nasarawa state, Màda is poorly documented and very little has been written about its grammar. A few studies include Price (1989), Ridan (1991), Blench (2006; 2010), Sabo (2011), Nsamwa (2013), Samuel (2012; 2016; 2017) among others. Thus, the attempt in this paper is to examine the syntactic operation of negation and how it is marked in simple declarative sentences in Màda within the X-bar. The motivation for this paper stems from the fact that negation is quite productive and significant in Màda. However, our attempt in this paper is to investigate into the structure of negation and how it is marked and the nature of marking within the grammatical model of X-bar.

Negation is one of the most widely researched areas in syntax and has continued to attract attention in linguistic discourse. There are quite a number of literatures on the syntactic concept, particularly how it is rendered in individual languages. Lyons (1968) defines negation as a denial of a positive proposition, or a prediction that a proposition is untrue. Along this view, Crystal (2008) remarks that negation is a process in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence. Still, Imoh (2012) quotes Anagbogu (2005) as saying that negation is a grammatical process by which an affirmative sentence is negated. In other words, Anagbogu (2005) considers a negative sentence as one that has at least a negative operator in form of an affix. In the literature, the primary focus of negation is to negate a sentence. No wonder Payne (1997) argues that the function of negation is to negate that clause which refers to an affirmation of an event, situation or state of affairs.

Following Quirk & Greenbaum (1975), there are two types of negation: clausal negation which negates the whole proposition of a sentence, and the lexical negation which negates only a constituent. This means a language either negates a constituent or the whole sentence. Alas,
negation is a universal grammatical category and its realization is often not the same in all languages. Zeijlstra (2013) asserts that languages may vary in the form, number or even the position of the negative operators in order to negate a sentence. For instance, Ndimele (1995) reports that negation is expressed both phonologically and morphologically as in Echie, a variety of Igbo. There is no any universal strategy in negating a sentence, rather marking is parametric. In lieu of this, this paper among other things, aims at examining the strategies of marking negation, and the productivity or unproductivity of negation in Màda language.

A Cross-linguistic Study of Negation

Negation is seen as one of the most distinctive properties of human language and it is overtly expressed in all natural languages (Horn, 2001). As a result, different languages employ different strategies of marking negation. Along this view, Löber (2002), as cited in Obiamalu (2014), expresses that “it is no surprise then that all languages have a systematic means of the polar contrast of a sentence”. In other words, all natural languages have either a device or operators to mark negation. According to Xiang et al (2014), every natural language includes at least one device that can express the negation of an affirmative constituent.

Negation is marked either phonologically, morphologically, syntactically or semantically. In sum, negation is marked by the use of particles, affixation, prosodic feature (intonation/tone), independent lexical item, etc. Agbedor (1995) investigates negation in Ewe and concludes that negation is marked morphologically. He presents the following examples below:

1. a. Kofi de suku
   3SG go-PST school
   ‘Kofi went to school’.

   b. Kofi me de esuku o
   3SG Neg. go school Neg.
   ‘Kofi did not go to school’.

From the foregoing, the negative operators me...o are discontinuous morphemes. The morpheme me- occurs before the verb de while the second morpheme o occurs at the end of the sentence. This shows that negation is marked morphologically with the use of affixation in Ewe. It is noteworthy to say that the negative elements in Ewe behave like the French ne...pas. This can be shown below:

2. a. je suis étudiant
   1SG be student
   ‘I am a student’.

   b. je ne suis pas étudiant
   1SG Neg. be student Neg.
   ‘I am not a student’.

In French, as observed in (2), negation is marked by the use of affixation. In other words, French allows double negation marking. In Basà, there is a case whereby the negative marker attaches to the verb root to express negation. Imoh (2012) presents the following data to demonstrate how negation is marked in Basà.

3. a. ẹezhe a ritautakàda
   3PL Aux AGR read book
   ‘They will read a book’.

   b. aàzhà-shé a ritautàkāda-ò
   3PL Aux Neg. AGR read book Neg.
   ‘They will not read the book’.

With critical observation in (3), the negative suffixes in Basà attach to the verb (Aux) to express negation. Notice also that there is tonal change in (3b) which, however, introduces phonological contents as presented above. As in the case of Akan, Dolphyne (1995) reports that negation is phonologically marked. He presents the example as follows:

4. a. Kofi ba ha
   3SG come here
   ‘Kofi comes here’.

   b. Kofi m-ba ha
   3SG Neg. come here
   ‘Kofi does not come here’.

From the above, negation is marked by a homorganic nasal prefixed to the verb stem. We can see further that the negative marker m-appears before the verb, hence attaches to the verb stem based on the defining features of the verb, such as tense and aspect. In Kiswahili, the
negative marker is prefixed to the verb (Ngonyani, 2001). For instance,

5. a. nitaondoka ‘I will have’
    sitaondoka ‘I will not have’

b. utaondoka ‘You will have’
    hutaondoka ‘You will not have’

Seeing example (5), it is clear that the negative marker is realized in various forms depending on the status of the pronoun as shown by Ngonyani (2001). From the foregoing, the first person pronoun *ni-* changes to *si-* to mark negation in Kiswahili. Given the illustrations above, negation is a universal syntactic feature of natural languages, hence a productive syntactic phenomenon.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Chomsky’s (1970) X-bar theory. It was first introduced in grammatical analysis in Chomsky’s *Remarks on Nominalization*. However, X-bar is the central theme of Principles and Parameters theory (a revised version of GB). According to Webelhuth (1996), X-bar is the central module of Principles and Parameters theory (henceforth, P&P) because other sub-theories such as Case, Theta, Government, Binding, Bounding, etc. in one way or the other, draw on the basic structure of the X-bar principle. Haegeman (1991) remarks that X-bar principle regulates the structure of phrases and brings out what is common in them. Following Giorgi&Longobardi (1991), X-bar theory establishes that whenever there is a head (X), there will also be a maximal projection, referred to as XP and at least one intermediate projection, call it X\(^1\); it also defines the levels where the arguments of the head must be attached. The intermediate projection (X\(^2\)) consists of (X) and its complement. In lieu of this, Ndimele (1992) says that proponents of X-bar theory, however, argue that the number of projections for the head is endlessly iterable. The basic structure of X-bar is seen below:

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**Fig. 1. A basic structure of the phrase**

From the above, the head of the phrase (XP) scopes over its complement as shown. This allows recursiveness such that a phrase can give birth to another phrase within the same structure, or a complement of another phrase. Negation, being the theme of this paper, falls under this category.

Within X-bar, negation functions as the head of the negative phrase (NegP). For instance, it takes the VP as its complement. This relation is what Carnie (2003) describes as C-command. We could render this assertion technically as thus, A c-commands B if every node dominating A dominates B. Still on negation, Ouhalla (1999) remarks that what is known as negation belongs to a category known as negative phrase. In other words, negation functions as a syntactic head which projects into a NegP. That is, negation is an independent category that projects its own X-bar structure. See the diagram below for visual impression:

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**Fig. 2. Structure of NegP**

From the diagram above, the following observations are made: (a) Neg is the head of the negation phrase, hence the maximal projection; (b), it c-commands the VP and its internal
elements. Going by this proposition, natural languages build within the x-bar scheme to represent negation and all possible projections. Along this view, however, Déchaine (1993) discusses four possible projections of the negation in various languages. She considers negation as a closed class item that occupies the borderline between the lexical and functional heads, that is, a quasi-functional head. The possible projections of the NegP is thus; as a functional head; as a VP-adjunct, as TP (to generate negation in tense phrase) and as a projection in C1 (Comp). Against this background, however, our attempt in this paper is to examine the structure of negation in Màda as well as the possible projection of negation within a specified pattern.

**Methodology**

The technique employed in collecting data for this study is the monolingual and native intuition approach. The motivation for this choice stems from the fact that the researcher is a native speaker of the language under study, hence possesses the linguistic knowledge of the ideal and correct speech form. Samples were taken from English data and their equivalent given in Màda. In order to verify the token of data collected, the researcher employed the services of other native speakers of Màda as facilitators.

**Negation in Màda: An Analysis**

This section discusses the nature and pattern of the negative markers in Màda, their position and how negation is projected in the X-bar theory. In Màda, negation is marked by the discontinuous morphemes là...yo similar to French ne...pas, Hausa ba...ba and Ewe me...o. The negative operators occur within the VP with the negative operator yo occurring at the end of the sentence. Consider, for example, the data below:

6. a. gunyankri
   3SG love yam
   ‘S/he loves yam’.

6. b. gu lá nyankri yo
   3SG Neg love yam Neg
   ‘S/he does not love yam’.

7. a. tenga reguləgəyə
   father my buy-PST him shirt the
   ‘My father bought a shirt’.

7. b. tenga lá reguləgəyə yo
   father my Neg buy him shirt the Neg
   ‘My father did not buy him a shirt’.

8. a. ngalətsəbə
   1SG FUT beat them
   ‘I will beat them’.

8. b. ngalə là tsəbəyo
   1SG FUT Neg beat them Neg
   ‘I will not beat them’.

9. a. Nuhu ywēkə
   3SG go-PST house
   ‘Nuhu went home’.

9. b. Nuhu là ywēkəyo
   3SG Neg go house Neg
   ‘Nuhu did not go home’.

Seeing the data above, it is clear that the particles là...yo are negative markers. The first marker là precedes the verbs (rԑ, tsɛ, ywɛ) while the second particle occurs preferably at the end of a clause as shown in each example above. This means that we cannot negate a simple declarative sentence in Màda without following the definite pattern of simultaneously placing the negative elements in their specified positions. Thus, we can render the possible sequence or pattern as follows: S...Neg...TVO...Neg. this is further shown in (10):

10 a. gunjũng̃g̃ỹgũ
   s/he kill-PST dog
   ‘S/he killed (the) dog’.

10 b. [s [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ]]]] [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ [ŋ̃gũ]]]]]
   3SG Neg. kill-PST dog Neg.
   ‘S/he did not kill the dog’.

In the illustration above, the negative operators occur at the level of preverbal position and post verbal slot respectively. Therefore, negation in Màda is clausal. There is hardly a distinction between which lexical category is negated because all the elements are negated within the sentence (sentence negation). Recall that negation is a quasi-functional head
and has its own X-bar structure (cf. Déchaine, 1993). See example (11) below:

11. a. Nuhu rɛ matɔ
   3SG buy-PST car
   ‘Nuhu bought a car’.

   b. Nuhu làrɛmatɔ yo
   3SG Neg. buy car Neg.
   ‘Nuhu did not buy a car’.

For visual impression, the negative construction is rendered within the X-bar schema below:

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NegP
  Spec
    Neg
    VP
      V
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Fig. 3. ‘Nuhu did not buy a car’.

As could be observed, it appears that là is the head of the NegP with yo at the end of the clause. The question that may arise is whether the first negative particle là is the head of the NegP and if it is, what then is the status of the second negative element yo? We could see from the diagram that the second negative particle occurs preferably at the end of the sentence and it is likewise seen as a projection of NegP. It is noteworthy to say that the interpretation of là is dependent on the second negative particle. Consider the data in (12) below:

12. a. kpɔ bānsɛcɔ
    bag those be wet
    ‘Those bags are wet.’

   *b. kpɔ bān sɛcɔ yo
    bag DEM be wet Neg
    ‘Those bags are not wet.’

As illustrated above, sentence (12b) cannot be considered a negative construction because we cannot rely on yo to interpret negation. Similarly, the construction in (12b) is unacceptable to the native speakers of Màda based on the fact that we rely on the là to negate a sentence. Two cardinal points must be considered: the negative particle là bears all the agreement features, such as tense, aspect and mood (TAM); and it is obligatorily present in all negative constructions. The correct form of (12) is given in (13) below:

13. a. kpɔbān là sɛcɔ yo
    bag DEM Neg be wet Neg.
    ‘Those bags are not wet’.

Given the structural pattern of negative construction in Màda as S-Neg-TVO-Neg, the schema below shows the representational structure of NegP in a larger construction.

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IP
  Spec
    I
    NegP
      Spec
        Neg
        VP
          V
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Fig. 4. ‘Nuhu did not buy a car’.
Negative Polarity Items (NPI)

Negative polarity items are words that can occur in context that are in some sense negative and are found in every natural language (Lawler, 2007; Giannakidou, 2008; Penka&Zeijlstra, 2010). According to Lawler (2007), negative polarity item is a term applied to lexical item, fixed phrase, or even syntactic construction types that demonstrate unusual behaviour around negation. For instance, Giannakidou (2008) gave the following examples to demonstrate NPIs:

b. *Bill bought any books.

He explains that any occurs in negative context as shown above, but not in positive sentences as in (14b) respectively. Ampofo (2015) quotes Rothschild (2009) as saying that “NPIs seems happy under negation and are sometimes unhappy without negation. Interestingly, NPIs are found in Màda and are evenly distributed within the negative structure [là…yo]. NPIs are productive in Màda, though very few in number. For example, we have gba (not even), gbánygor (never), kàdә (don’t). NPIs may occur in the following:

15. Babà la rēkìmē gbánygor yo
   3SG Neg eat thing this never Neg
   ‘Babà may never eat this thing.’

16. tə̅  lə la rēlàmē gba yo
   1PL FUT Neg eat food this not even Neg
   ‘We will not even eat this food.’

Notice that all NPIs occur within the structure, hence we can render the structure of NPIs as follows: S-Neg-TVO-NPI-Neg

Concluding Remarks

Our focus in this paper has been to examine the nature and structure of negation within the X-bar theory. It has been shown in this paper that Màda makes use of the templetic morphemes là…yo in standard negation. The discontinuous morphemes are obligatory in every negative construction with là preceding the verb and yo at the end of a clause. Contrary to what obtains in other languages examined (see examples above), Màda uses the templetic morphemes to negate simple declarative sentences in all tense and aspect. Interestingly, we have seen from the volume of data examined that the structure of negation in Màda is S-Neg-TVO-Neg, which allows other negative items (also known as negative polarity items) to occur within the definite structure or pattern with the second negation (NegP2) functioning reinforce negation. From our analysis, negation in Màda is seen as a predicate operator. This paper, among other things, has examined and revealed the pattern of negative construction in Màda, the syntactic positions of the discontinuous morphemes as well as the position of negative polarity items within the X-bar schema, and importantly document this aspect of syntax.

End Notes

i. Data for this study is taken from Rījà variety of Màda. Thus, wherever the term Màda is used, it depicts Rījà.

ii. The interlinear translation, gloss and orthography are mine.

Abbreviations

1SG First Person Singular
1PL First Person Plural
3SG Third Person Singular
PST Past Tense
FUT Future Tense
TAM Tense Aspect Mood
AUX Auxiliary
AGR Agreement
DEM Demonstrative Pronoun
P&P Principles and Parameters Theory
GB Government and Binding Theory
NEG Negation
NEGP Negation Phrase
NPI Negative Polarity Item

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