

The Phono-Syntax negation in Àbèsàbèsì: Case Study of Èkiròmì¹

By

Taiwo Opeyemi Agoyi

Department of Linguistics and Languages

Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

agoyito2006@yahoo.co.uk Agoyito@livemail.com taiwo.agoyi@aaua.edu.ng

Abstract

The interface between syntax and phonology has been a major issue in linguistic study. At the level of grammar, the three linguistic level: Phonology, Morphology and syntax interact to produce acceptable language utterance using constraint interaction in the language preference. Studies show that the levels dependent of each order. Agoyi and Emmanuel (2019) studied this interaction in relation to Àbèsàbèsì Pronoun system. The scholars found out that the pronoun and pronominal in Àbèsàbèsì. This paper investigates a similar phenomenon in Àbèsàbèsì using Èkiròmì as case Study. The minimalist theoretical framework was adopted. The outcome shows that the preverbal negation element are transparent to vowel harmony, while the post verbal elements are not.

1. Introduction:

Adeoye (2018:41) defines negation as 'a device employed to deny an affirmation or assertion'. Negation is a grammatical element that used in grammar to 'corresponding propositions are false' (Adeoye 2018:41). Negation is a universal linguistic phenomenon. Each language of the word chooses the graphemes from the acceptable phonemes to represent the concept. The arrangement of the lexical item in a grammatical string is language specific. Furthermore, the arrangement of the sounds to form the meaningful utterance and the utterance in a grammatical constituent are govern by the language most preferred constraints. Èkiròmì one of 'Àbèsàbèsì' language clusters. The phonological and syntactic behaviour of the negation element in Èkiròmì is interesting; therefore it is the focus of this paper.

1.1. Àbèsàbèsì

Àbèsàbèsì is the agreed name by the speaking communities of the known as Akpes language cluster. The cluster is made up of Akpes: Àkùnnù Ìlúdoṭun; Èkiròm: Ìkàràṃ and Àsẹ; Ìluẹ̀nì: Ìbàràṃ, Ìyàṅì Gèdègédé, and Èṣùkù and Dája. But for Àkùnnù that is in

¹ This paper presents a descriptive analysis of the phono-syntax of negation in Èkiròmì. Agoyi and Olaogun in preparation is working on a theoretical account of negation in Àbèsàbèsì, Ukaan, Ùhùàmì and Ukwè.

Àkókó North West all the speaking communities are geographically located in Àkókó North West local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria Agoyi T. O (2008:3-8). The speech form of all the communities are mutually intelligible. For an in-depth description analysis of data collected as well as space economy, this paper focuses the Èkiròmì variant of the language. Although Agoyi T. O and Emmanuel S (2019) analyses the interface between the phonology and syntax of Àbèsàbèsì pronoun system², this negation gives a deeper insight to the phono-syntax analysis of the language.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars have word on the concept of negation as a universal phenomenon in the linguistic field of study. Studies show that a negator is 'a functional element used to deny a proposition' Ilori (2010:153). It is an element use in 'contexts in which the reference argument has been introduced (Yusuf 2008:134). The implication is that a negation is a grammatical element that are speaker use to claim that a supposition is not true or that it is false. Scholars see negators as infl items which precedes the verb or predicators they are to negate (Adeoye 2018:41).

The main focus on studies of negation has been on the position in the syntactic, the function as well as basic standard of negation strategies languages use to negate declarative verbal main clause as well as the type of asymmetric negation of declarative sentences (Mihas Elena (2009:1). Studies shows that standard negation deals with the 'basic means languages use for negating declarative verbal min clauses' Miestamo (2007:553). In essence there are standard and non standard negations. The concept of non-standard negation involves environments such as existential, imperative, locative, nominal, adjectival, possessive, and subordinate clauses. Mihas (2009:198) citing Dahl, 1979, Kahrel, and van der Berg 1993, Miestamo 3005, Payme 1985, 1997, states that standard negation draws distinction between morphological and syntactic negation. The scholar believes that negation morpheme may be an inflectional category, which may fuse with other inflectional categories such as subject or tense marker; it may also be a phonologically integrated morpheme in which processes such as stress/tone unity, vowel harmony, morphophonemic manipulations are observed. Native morpheme most often occur close to the verb root. Negative morpheme also has syntactic operations observable in the syntactic independence or prosodic of the morpheme, it may also carry inflectional affixes. Syntactic treatment of negation may be prompted by orthographic convention of writing the negative marker as a separate word (Mihas 2009:198).

² Agoyi T O And Emmanuel S (2019) carried discusses the type of vowel harmony Àbèsàbèsì attest and its effect on the pronoun system of the language.

Mihas cited the examples of negation in 1 below from Miestamo (2005:302)

1. Congo, Bantoid, Niger –Congo
 - a. ba-nuní ba-dí-dí mba II-bird
II-bird II-eat-IM-PST palm.nut
'Thr birds haɛe eaten the palm nuts
 - b. ba-nuní ka ba-dí-dí: -a: mba kó
II-bird NEG II-eat-IM.PST-NEG palm.nut NEG

2. Luvale, Bantoid, Niger-Congo
 - a. auz e mw- eza
there (he is) FUT.1.SG-come
there he is coming'
 - b. k-exi kw- iza-ko
NEG-AUX INF-come-NEG
'He will not come (Mihas 2009:199)

The implication is that Benua Congo uses *ka* and *-a* for negation. *Ka* is a pre verb negative element while *-a* is a post verb negation element as well. In the second example the data shows that Benue Congo also attest *prre* and post negation elements: *K*-which is a prefix and *-ko* which is a suffix. Korongo, Kadugli, Niger-Congo also attests double negation (Mihas: 199).

Negation in Ewe

Schneider (2017) discusses the negation phenomenon in Ewe a member of the Gbe subgroup spoken in south East Ghana. The research search opines that 'all negation in Ewe is encoded by the preverbal particle *mé* and clause-final negation particle *o*. some of the examples the scholar cited examples from Nurse (no date):8) are in 3 below.

- 3 a. atí lá mé k'ó o
tree DEF NEG tall NEG
'the tree is not tall.'
- b. nye mé ga le tsitsi-m o
1st NEG ITR be. IPFV grow. Grow-PRG NEG
'I'm no longer growing'
- c. mé ga yi o
NEG ITR go NEG
'Don't go!'
- d. wó má ga yi o

- 3p NEG,POT ITR go NEG
 'They shouldn't go' (Schneider 2017:20).
- e. jɛ̃ mũ jì nã ò
 1SG NEG.POT go HAB PART
 'I don't go' (Schneider 2017:22)

The data reveal that Ewe negation is expressed 'by the bipartite morpheme' (Schneider 2017:20). There is a suggestion of cliticization process in the realization of the variant shapes of *mé* as *má* or *mú*. The morpheme is 'cliticized onto the first element of the verb phrase. The second morpheme *o* occurs at the end of the clause' (Schneider 2017:21). The phonological process observed in Ewe is similar to the Èkiròmì pre and post verbal negation element. The double negation feature in Niger -Congo language family is attested by other scholars. For instance

Mihas (2009) discusses the phenomenon of negation in Metta a narrow Grassfields Bantu language spoken in the mountain region of south West Provinces of Cameroon. The language attest double negation in preverbal and post verbal positions as well. The negation morphemes in the language are *ka* and *-i* respectively. In Metta the *Ka* morpheme is always accompanied with perfective markers Mihas (2009:209). Preliminary studies shows that the Èkiròmì pre verbal negation element is also perfective. This phenomenon is interrogated in the paper.

The phenomenon of double negation and its phonological features in Ekiromi is one of the issues the paper seeks to investigate in this paper. The paper focus the interaction between phonological processes in the speech of Èkiromi Native speakers in sentences featuring negation in the language. The researcher has no knowledge of a of any document addresses the issues in this paper.

2.1 Source of Data:

Most of the data used in this study are primary data collected on several field trips to Ìkàrà̀mù. One of the researches is a native speakers who spent most of her life time close in the community. In addition, some of the data are sourced from secondary sources such as appendix in Agoyi T. O 2008

3. Phonological Issues:

The lexical item Èkiròmì uses to express negation is disyllabic. It indicates not approved/not allowed/did not happen. Examination of data 1 proof this supposition.

Ekiromi	Yorùbá	Gloss
3. <i>héyé</i>	<i>rára</i>	'no'
4. <i>héyé; na yasi ye</i>	<i>rára mi ò gbà</i>	'no I is no acceptable

The data reveals that *héyé* is a disyllabic word. The two syllables are *hé-* and *yé*. The first syllable *hé* has a high pitch while the second *-yé* features a falling pitch³. In example 2 two negative markers to occur. However a close observation reveals that it comprises of two information. First *no* and the second one is it is not acceptable. In the second utterance *na yasi ye* 'it is not acceptable the negation element is at the final position in the string. This a syntactic issue for discussion in the latter part of this paper. The formation of the marker needs investigation in this section.

4. Phonological Process in forming *ye*

Let us presume *ye* 'no' and *héyé* to be two separate lexical items with similar consonant /y/ in the second syllable of *héyé*'no' which is *-yé*. Then one can assume the morpheme *ye* 'no' is independent of *-yé* the behaves like a bound morpheme. The argument above is not acceptable because the two lexical items share similar meaning 'no'. The implication is that the derivation of '*ye*' is traceable to '*héyé*'. The phonological process of deletion accounts for the realization of *ye* 'no' as a synonym of *héyé*'no'. The data indicates that Èkiròmì has ways to express negation as a sentence in isolation, and in a grammatical constituent.

The question that is begging for an answer is what happens to the tone on *-yé* the second *héyé*'no'. What is the motivation for the sudden change in pitch? This paper assumes that the language operates a set of rule that are syntactically controlled⁴.

It important to state that the occurrence of negative marker in Èkiròmì is not restricted to the two lexical items examined above. The third lexical item will be discussed after examining the position variable of *ye* in the next section.

4.1 *Yè* as a Post Verbal lexical item

Observation of data collected on our several field trips and other sources show that *ye* 'no' in Èkiròmì only occur in post verbal position of declarative sentences in Èkiròmì. Examples of such data are in 5-17 below.

³ Agoyi T. O and Emmanuel S (in Preparation) 'An Acoustic of Abèsàbèsì Tone System' argues that Abèsàbèsì features down step tone at syntactic level.

⁴ See Agoyi T. O and Emmanuel (in preparation) 'An Acoustic account of Abèsàbèsì Tone System' for more details

4.1.1 Post Verbal negation

I	II
+Declarative Sentences	-Declarative Sentences
5. ọ t̩si ẹmu 'he has/had money'	ọ tsi ẹmu ye he has/had money not 'he is poor'
6. ẹ' d̩gi 'Olú 'Olú is ill	ẹ d̩gi Olú ye Olú is ill not 'Olu is not ill'
7. ọ ye 'he sees/saw	ọ ye ye 'he did not see'
8. ọ s̩m̩ẹ na 'he greet/greeted me'	ọ s̩m̩ẹ na ye he greet(ed) me not 'he did not greet me'
9. i mi aw̩n̩ 'they survive'	í mi aw̩n̩ ye they survive not ' they did not survive'
10. Ojó s̩m̩ẹ sa 'Ojo' greet(ed) you	Ojó s̩m̩ẹ sa ye Ojó greet you not Ojó did not greet you
11. Ọgá s̩g̩i na 'master call/called me	Ọgá s̩g̩i na ye Ọgá call(ed) me not 'Ọgá did not in
12. n̩n̩ s̩à u 'I konw/new him'	'na s̩à u ye' I' know him not 'I do not know him'
13. ọ ba 'he comes/came'	ọ ba ye he come/ came not 'he did not come/came'
14. àà' k̩ni 'we quarrel/fight/fought	we quarrel(ed)/fight/fought not 'we quarrel(ed)/fight/ fought'
15. ọ h̩ni he cought	ọ h̩ni ye he cought(ed) not 'he did not cought'.
16. ẹ hu 'it dies/dead	ẹ hu ye it dries/dried/diead not idid not die
17. ọ n̩ 'he be there/went'	ọ n̩ ye he be there not 'he goes/went (perfective)

The data above has two columns I and II. Column I contains items with – negation while column II has items with +negation element. A careful observation of the data shows that the negative concepts are expressed with the introduction of *ye*. Not that the paper argued in favour of deletion process as the plausible explanation of the realization of the phonological shape of the item. The researcher proved further to find out how negation is expressed in other types pf sentences in the language. The data collected revealed that conditional sentences and imperfective sentences feature a deferent lexical item that is vowel harmony controlled. The item is

18. kinè ~kinò~kinà
 Examples of such data are in 19-34

4.1.2. Pre Verbal + Post Verbal Negation Elements

Data collected reveal that Èkiròmì attest pre verbal as well as post verbal negation. Examples of the feature are in 19-34.

Perfective	Imperfective
19. ọ ke t̩si ẹmu 'he has/had money'	ọ kiné tsi ẹmu ye he has/had money not 'he is poor'
20. ẹ' ke d̩gi 'Olú 'Olú is ill ill'	s/he NG have money NG ẹ kinè d̩gi Olú ye Olú is ill not 'Olu is not it NG sick Olú NG
21. i ke mi aw̩n̩ 'they survive' did not survive'	í kinè mi aw̩n̩ ye they survive not ' they

22. ọ ke ye 'he sees/saw
It(PL) NG do life (NG)
ọ kinè ye ye 'he did not see'
she NG see NG
23. ẹ́ ko hu 'it has dies/dead
'it did not die'
ẹ́ kinò hu ye 'it ne dries/dried/diead not
it NG dry NG
24. Àìná ke ko ohumo 'Àìná sing/sang song'
Àìná kinè ko ohumò ye 'Àìná has not sang a song'
Àìná NG sing song
25. Bọ̀sẹ̀ ke yo 'Bọ̀sẹ̀ has dance/danced
Bọ̀sẹ̀ kine yo ye Bọ̀sẹ̀ has not dance'
Bọ̀sẹ̀ NG dance NG
26. ọ́ ko du inyi s/he fetched water
ọ́ kinò du inyi ye 's/he has not fetch water'
s/he NG fetch water NG
27. Òjọ́ ko sugu
miss/missed road'
Òjọ́ kinò sugu ye 'Òjọ́ has not
Òjọ́ NG miss road NG
28. ọ́ ka sẹ̀mẹ̀ na 'he greet/greeted me'
ọ́ kinà sẹ̀mẹ̀ na ye 'he did not greet me'
s/he NG greet me NG
29. ọ́ ka tẹ̀gẹ̀ sa 's/he procreate(s/ed) after you
procreate(s/ed) after you
ọ́ kinà tẹ̀gẹ̀ sa ye s/he has not
he NG Procreate you
30. Ọ́gá ka sàgì na 'master call/called me
'Ọ́gá did not in
Ọ́gá kinà sàgì na ye Ọ́gá call(ed) me not
Ọ́gá NG call me NG
31. nń ka sà u 'I konw/new him'
not know him'
'na kinà sà u ye' I know him not 'I do
I NG know u NG
32. ọ́ ka ba 'he comes/came'
ọ́ kinà ba ye 'he did not come/came'
s/he NG come NG
33. ọ́ ka kọ̀ni 's/he quarrel/fight/fought
s/he ASP quarrel
ọ́ kinà ba ye 's/he did come
s/he ASP NG come NG
34. ọ́ ka họ̀ni s/he cought
she ASP cough
ọ́ kinà họ̀ni ye s/he did not cough
s/he ASP NG cough NG

Obsevation of the data reveal that the first negation element has two syllables. While the first syllable is made up of a voiceless velar consonant /k/ and front high vowel /i/; the second syllable is made up of a nasal consonant /n/ and vowel /e/~o~/a/. The vowels of the verbal elements in the sentences motivate the variant of the vowel that occur with/n/. For instance in 19-25 where the verbal elements /i, e, o/ with [+ATR] feature choose /-ne/;

in 26, 27 the verbal elements with vowel /u/ that has [+round, +back, +high, +ATR] Features select /no/ as the vowel of the second syllable of the preverbal negation element; no has [+round, +back, _high, +ATR] Features⁵. Finally examples in 28-34 where the vowels of the verbal elements feature [-ATR] e, a, and o select /a/ a [-ATR] vowel. Note that the negative sentences in column 2 feature two negative elements.

It is possible to argue that the aspectual marker ke~lo~ka are the root form of kinè~kinò~kinà.

Supposing the assumption is true, then deletion of nasal consonant /n/ will account for the realization of the /k/ + e~o~a taking the Èkiròmì deletion of the first contiguous vowel to consideration. If the above presumption is accepted, the process is as in

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 35. First Step Delete /n/ segment | Second Step Delete first contiguous vowel |
| del | del |
| kin/e~o~a ⇒ ki/ e~o~a | ki/ e~o~a⇒ke~ko~ka |

Data in 36-39 support the phonological process to account for the derivation of the preverbal negation kinè~kinò~kinà in 35.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 36. Olu ke bé je ewùlò | Olú kinè bé je ewùlò yè |
| Olú ASP eat yam | Olú neg ASP eat yam neg |
| 37. Olú ke bé mi isum | Olú kinè bé mi isum yè |
| Olú ASP do work | Olú Neg ASP do work Neg |
| 38. Olú ke bé yo | Olú kiné bé yo yè |
| Olú ke bó du inyi | Olú ki -nò bé du inyi yè |
| Olú ASP fetch water | Olú ASP Neg ASP fetch water Neg |
| 39. Olú ka bá sẹmẹ̀ | Olú kinà bá sẹmẹ̀ yè |
| Olú ASP greet | Olú Neg ASP greet Neg |

The language attests another preverbal element that may be argued as the root form of kinà~kinè~kinò as seen in 40-50.

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| A | B |
| 40. Olú ki té | Olú kinè té |
| Olú ASP (still) exist | Olú ASP NEG exist |
| 41. Olú ki ye | Olú Ki -ne ye yè |

⁵ Agoyi T. O 2008 The Phonology of Àbèsàbèsì 'Vowel Harmony' argues that the feature is evidence that the language feature [+ATR] Round vowel harmony. While Akpes still retail the full [+ATR +Round] vowel harmony in which vowel [+ATR] vowels /i, e/ select /e/; the [+ATR, +Round] vowels /o, u/ select /o/ and [-ATR vowels o,a, e] select /a/.

	Olú still see		Olú ASP NEG see NEG
42.	Olú ki mi isumì		Olú kine mi Isumì yè
	Olú still do work		Olu Asp Neg do work Neg
43.	ó ki t̥ʃi		o kinè t̥ʃi yè
	s/he still has		s/he Asp Neg has neg
44.	Olù ki kúdu	no	Olú kinò kúdu no yè
	Olú still get there before me		Olú Asp Neg get there before me Neg
45.	ó ki sugu		o kinò sugu yè
	s/he still miss road		s/he Asp Neg miss road neg
46.	Olú ki ta íʃo		Olú kinà ta íʃo yè
	Olú still build house		Olú Asp Neg exist house Neg
47.	ó ki ba		o kinà ba ye
	s/he still come		s/he Asp Neg come Neg
48.	Olú ki sẹ̀mẹ̀ na		Olú kinà sẹ̀mẹ̀ ye
	s/he still greets me		s/he Asp Neg greet me
49.	ó ki t̥ʃẹ̀rẹ̀ ẹ̀		o kina t̥ʃẹ̀rẹ̀ e yè
	s/he still mend it		s/he Asp Neg Mend It Neg
50.	bá ki kọn		ba kinà kọn yè
	they still fight		they Asp Neg fight Neg
51.	bá ki họn iʃòmò		ba kinà họn iʃòmò ye
	they still cultivate farm		they Asp cultivate farm Neg

The data reveal that Àbèsabèsì (Èkiròmì) attest another aspectual marker /ki/ 'still' that is time constraint. However, the aspectual marker does not respond to vowel harmony rules in the language as in the previous data where ke~ko~ka depending on the [+ATR] or [+ATR +ROUND +HIGH] feature of the vowel of the verbal element. Column I in 40-50 show that the vowel of the aspectual element /ki/ is not control by the type of vowel harmony the language attests in contrary to the behaviour of the Aspectual marker in in 17-32 and 34-37. The Aspectual element in the data under consideration suggest that the plausible account of /ka/ as the root morpheme is doubtful. The questions it raises is that if /ka/ is the root morpheme which is harmony control why does /ki/ in not harmony controlled? In addition to the question raised here, why is -i- kinv not responding to the harmonic feature of the vowel of the verbal element?

There are three possible argument for the phonological behaviour of the Aspectual elements under investigation. The first argument is to assume that the pre-negation morpheme kinv as earlier argued. The first morpheme is /kv/, which is the aspectual

marker that is harmony controlled. The second morpheme is assumed to have a VCV syllable shape and in this case the first syllable of the negation element is V shape which is constantly the front high vowel /i/ while the second syllable is CV shape with a nasal consonant and a vowel that is harmony controlled. The vowel of the aspectual marker is deleted (∅) because it is the first vowel in the morphological boundary. The shape of the vowel of the second syllable of the negation element is harmony controlled. The above explanation is capture in 52:

Root	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
52. kv- <i>inv</i>	k∅ <i>inv</i>	<i>kinv</i>	<i>kinè~kinò~kinà</i>

The account of the root morpheme in 52 still has some unanswered question. The question is if the vowel harmony feature in the language is expected to spread from the vowel of the verbal element to the Aspectual or pre-verbal elements⁶. Why is the high vowel in /ki/ not responding to the harmonic feature specification of the verbal element vowel?

The second plausible account is to assume an infixation of a front high vowel. The deletion of the first contiguous vowel in a morphemic boundary produces the *kinv* formant as in 53

Root	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
53. kv- <i>i-nv</i>	k∅ <i>nv</i>	<i>kinv</i>	<i>kinè~kinò~kinà</i>

The account in 53 has solved the problem of the high vowel in *kinv* vowel harmony opaque feature.

However, there is no justifiable reason for the insertion in the first instance. The implication of this supposition is there is need to posit a more tenable explanation for the phonological realization of the grammatical element /ki/.

A careful observation of the data19-34 and 35-39 with /ka/ element on one hand, 40-50 on the other, suggest that the aspectual marker has two variant. One variant /ka/ is harmony controlled while the second variant /ki/ is opaque/does not respond to harmony. The assumption is that /ki/ is the proto-root morpheme. The vowel is constantly the high front vowel that cannot be influenced by the feature of adjacent verbal element vowels. The resultant effect is seen in 54.

⁶ Agoyi T. O (2008, 2010, 2012 and Agoyi T. O and Emmanuel S. O 2020 say that harmonic feature in Àbèsàbèsì is bidirectional. It spreads from the verbal element rightward to the pronouns objects and from the same element leftward to the preverbal element.

Root	STEP 1	STEP 2
54. Ki-nv	kinv	kina~kine~kino

From 54 the assumption presents a simple account and more tenable reason for the unchanging for of the high vowel of the first syllable of ki-. While the vowel of the negation element subscribes to changing form by the spread of the harmonic feature of the verb element. The four argument are presented in a table formant in 55.

55.

	Root	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
1	Ka	Kv-	Kv-	ki
2	Ka	Kv-inv	kv-i-nv	Ki-nv
3	Ka	kvinv	kØinv	kinv
4	Ki-	Ki-nv	kinv	kinv

There is another interesting negation element in the language is *ko*. The grammatical element *ko* has an underling meaning of inability? Consideration of the data below attest to this supposition.

	A	B	C
		Completive	emphasis
56.	Olú t̥ʂiga Olú stand up	Olú t̥ʂiga kò Olú standup neg	Olú t̥ʂiga kò yè Olú stand up Neg Neg
57.	áyé u sàg u mother pro call pro	áyé ú sàg u kò mother pro call Pro neg	áyé u sàg u kò yè mother Pro call pro neg neg
	'his/her mother calls him/her'		
58.	bé dò ɛmu they find money	bé dò ɛmu kò they find money neg	be dò ɛmu ko yè they find money neg neg
	'they raise fund'	'they could not raise fund'	'they have no problem raising fund'
59.	bé dò ɛ̀nì they want trouble	bé dò ɛ̀nì kò they want trouble NEG	be dò ɛ̀nì kò yè they want trouble NEG NEG ⁷
	'they seek problem'	they failed to creat trouble	they did not fail to creat trouble

⁷ In data the research perceived a tonal change in the production of the data in column C. The phenomenon needs a phonetic laboratory test to confirm. The perceived feature is one of the cure issues under investigation in an ongoing research by Agoyi and Emmanuel on Acoustic account of Àbèsàbèsì tone system.

In 56-59, column B features *kò* as the negation marker while column C attests the occurrence of *kò* and *yè* as post verb negation in the syntactic structure. The semantic meaning of the sentence shows that it has an opposite negation meaning. The structure is a universal linguistic feature (Mihas 2009, Adeoye 2018, Schneieder 2017). There is a perceivable tonal change in column which is not very obvious. This issue will be addressed in another paper. The researcher heard from native speakers a curious sentence structure. The sentence features the three-negation elements *kinv*, *ko*, and *ye* thus:

A	B	C	D
60. Nń je ẹ kò yè I eat it NEG	Nń je ẹ kò I eat it NEG	ne je ẹ kò yè I NEG eat it NEG NEG	ne ki -nè je ẹ I NEG ASP NEG eat it NEG
'I eat/ate it'	I am failed to eat it'	I was able to eat it	I have not failed to eat it
61. ọ mi ẹ ye s/he do it NEG NEG	ọ mi ẹ kò s/he do it NEG	ọ mi ẹ kò yè s/he do it NEG NEG	ọ ki -ne mi ẹ kò s/he ASP NEG do it
's/he do/did it'	's/he failed to do it'	s/he was able to do it'	's/he has not failed to do it'

Data 60 and 61 feature grammatical function of tone. In columns A and B a high tone // features on the pronouns. The tone changes to a mid tone/- to indicate negation in columns C and D.⁸

5. Findings.

The paper presents and discusses the phonological issues observed in the syntactic process of negation in Èkiròmì. Findings reveal that Ekiromi has three negative elements *héyé* 'no' which results in *yè* after the phonological process of deletion. Syntactically *héyé* occurs in isolation while *yè* is a post verbal/sentence final negation element. The second negation element is *kinè/ kinà/kinò* 'yet to'. The element is argued to be a product of *ki* ASP and a suffix negation element *-nv*. The paper argued in favour of *ki* as the proto form of the ASP kv (ka~ke~ko). The presumption is that *ki* ASP in sentences that have time constraint such as *ki tṣi* still has and *ki-nv* 'yet to'. The third negation element is *kò* 'unable' (perfective negative marker). The kv negation element in Èkiròmì is similar in form/shape as well as position in syntactic string to the negation element in Luvale a Bantoid family of Benue

⁸ The tone on the pronoun elements in columns C and D appears as high tone if the sentence has a probability implication with /if/. Eg. né bé je ijei nń bá sàgì sa `if I will eat pouded yam I call you', The tone on the pronoun in the sentence is a high tone implying 'if'

Congo (Mihas 2009:198). The use of *kò* NEG and *kì i* NEG occur in Yoruba but the elements always occur post verbal in sentences.

The three-negation element can occur in a complex sentence in the language as observed in data 60 and 61 above.

5.1 Conclusion

The behaviour of negation element in Àbèsàbèsì is similar to the Bantoid language family. The consonant *ki* is a root infl element for perfective ASP in Èkiròmì. The element blocks the spread of the harmonic feature when it is time constraint. Therefore, it is presumed to be the proto element. The fact that the shape of negation infl elements in some other Niger-Congo languages are similar affirms the supposition. There is the need to carry out similar research on other endangered Niger-Congo languages. The process will unmask the unresolved controversies surrounding the classification of the languages.

ⁱ Àbèsàbèsì: The four groups of language speakers that know themselves as Àbèsàbèsì are Akpes, Èkiròmì, Iluṣeni and Òṣùgù (Agoyi T.O 2008, 2014, 2021)

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