



## NEGATION IN ENGLISH AND YALA LANGUAGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Negation is a denial, or a way of expressing a rejection of a positive proposition. It is a universal feature of human language in the sense that every language has a way of expressing a denial of fact, action, idea, or some such thing. Seeing that every language has a way of expressing negation, it was the aim of this work to examine the contrasts that exist in the ways in which negation is expressed in English and Yala languages. Yala is among the Idomoid group of languages. These languages are chosen due to their contact situation as well as the need that arises for comparative linguistics when languages come in contact. The study reveals that significant differences exist between the negation strategies of English and Yala languages; English is said to have more negation operators than Yala, thus displaying a fairly richer morpho-syntactic process in terms of negation. However, while the scope of negation commands certain phonological changes in Yala, it does not in English. It is also evident from the study that negation is marked with the use of cleft-like sentences in both languages. Moreover, in English, modal negation may have a wide or narrow scope, while in Yala, modal negation usually has a narrow scope. It was found from the study that to express non-modal negation, English and Yala use 'not transport'; however, English marks non-modal negations through other means as well. Therefore, contrastive statements are made after establishing contrasts in different aspects of negation in both languages, and predictions of difficulty are made after each contrastive statement. The essence of the contrastive statement and predictions is to help teachers of Yala learners to place in the proper perspective the problems of the learners in relation to English negation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Negation, English, Yala, Languages



## INTRODUCTION

In the world today, contact has resulted into several languages. The factors that necessitated such contacts in the past ranged from trade and slavery to colonialism. Today, sports, trade, and globalization among other factors have all contributed in no small way to language contact situations. Many linguistic phenomena develop when languages come into contact. Some of such phenomena include bilingualism—a situation where people imbibe a second language outside their mother tongue; code-mixing—a situation where people combine codes from their host language and a foreign one; and also pidgin and creole. With these linguistic phenomena in place in a linguistic community, there is the tendency for one of the languages to be viewed in the system of the other. The need therefore arises for comparisons and contrasts to be made to establish similarities and differences so as to help the users of these languages to properly acquire the features and systems of the foreign language. One useful method which modern linguistics has devised for studying the differences and similarities between languages in contact is contrastive analysis. This method of studying languages helps to bring out the disparity amongst lingos, with a view that the differences may adversely affect the learning of some specified features of the second language (L<sub>2</sub>).

Any aspect of two languages can be compared—sound systems, word structures/formations, sentence structures, meaning, discourse and pragmatics. In this work which is a contrastive analysis of English and Yala, however, the point of comparison is negation—how to express denial, which may generally be considered to come under the aspect of pragmatics. Inquiry into the subject of negation has continued to interest scholars of language (Ndimele, 121). This is because negation is a universal feature of human language. Many scholars of language in trying to describe what negation is have often done so by making a distinction between negation and affirmation, thus presenting the idea that negation cannot be sufficiently discussed without reference to affirmation.

Yala language is among the idomoid group of languages. It is spoken by the people in Yala LGA of Cross Rivers State, with the headquarters at Okpoma in the eastern section of the State. According to the National Population Census of 2006, Yala Local Government Area has an area of 1,739 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 210,843. Going by this population census, Yala is second only to Akpabuyo in the Local Government Area. Yala is also the dominant tribe with the following towns and villages: Okuku, Yahe, Ugaga, Ijegu, Oloko, Imaje, Oke, Echumoga, Woda, Ebo, Itekpa, Maa, Wonye, Uchu, Osina, Mbuor, Aliforkpa, Echumofana, Wanihem, Wanikade, Wanikom, etc. Yala is a name for the people, language and land. The inhabitants of Yala LGA are mixed and the majority speak Yala; others such as Igede-Edii (Anyadaha, Anyugbe, Eminyi, Ibilla, Igbakobor and Opiriku), Itekpa, Gabu, Ukele, and Yache speak Igede, Ukele and Yache languages. Yala is blessed with large salt deposits and other solid minerals.

### Significance of this Study

As a result of human activities two languages often come into contact; when this happens, the propensity is for one of the languages to be viewed in the light of the system of the other. Therefore, in an environment where two or more languages are used, the need arises to make a linguistic comparison of the languages. Such comparison will help to illuminate and highlight the correspondences and disparities that exist in various aspects of the languages which are to be studied. The present study is therefore significant in that it will help to meet the need that arises for a comparative study when two languages come in contact. The results of the study



will be helpful as it will highlight the differences and similarities between English and Yala languages. These differences and similarities will be useful in language teaching as they will help to place in proper perspective the problems of Yala learners of English in relation to negation. Our paltry effort here will guide and/or trigger more contrastive studies carried out in other aspects of the two languages, other than negation. Furthermore, the study will add to the existing pool of literature on linguistic studies in Yala and English languages.

### **Contrastive Analysis (CA)**

This study focuses on a contrastive analysis of negation in English and Yala. Negation was chosen by the researchers because it is a universal feature of human languages that has attracted much interest from linguists, based on a general interest in language typology and language contact. Again, being the most essential way of expressing the denial of an action, a fact, a quality, or other propositions, it forms an important part of the grammar of any language and thus, deserves worthy attention.

In this study, the researchers employ a contrastive analysis because the two languages studied are in a contact situation and are therefore used side by side in the same environment. In such a situation as this, one of the languages may be viewed in the system of the other. Thus, it becomes necessary to carry out a contrastive analysis between the two languages in order for their users to know areas of similarities and differences. Such a task in linguistics can only be achieved through contrastive analysis. The study was carried out in Cross River State, specifically the Yala Local Government Area.

Historically, experts posit that it is possible to use contrastive analysis to inaugurate linguistic genealogy. According to Katar (2009, p. 4), contrastive studies are rooted in behaviorism and structuralism schools of thought. It was deployed in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and 1970s mainly to explain the reason for the difficult experience while acquiring the target language. During this period (in the 60s and 70s), when CA was used extensively, it was opined by the behaviorist theories which were prevalent then, that lingos learning is synonymous with habit formation, and thus new habits are strengthened or hampered by current old habits. Therefore, the problem which learners encounter in becoming proficient in the grammar of a second language is predicated on the simplicity and/or complexity of their mother tongue (L<sub>1</sub>) and the structure of the target language (TL).

Although it has been stated that CA was put to extensive use, it was then called the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) articulated by Lado in his work *Linguistics across Cultures*. It is stated that Lado in his work asserted that analogous structures in the learner's indigenous and target languages are easier for him to learn than the features that are problematic. It is also noted that while Lado's assertion was not novel, he was the first to put forward all-inclusive, and/or wide-ranging theoretical analysis of the subject matter. He further suggested an efficient, logical and organized set of methodological techniques for studying languages contrastively. The procedure includes a description of the lingoes (using structural linguistics), comparison of the structures, and prediction of the learning outcomes, complications and challenges.

The widespread enthusiasm which followed this technique during the 1960s was evidence in the many languages in Europe which were contrastively analyzed and described and funded by the centers for Applied Linguistics in Washington DC. Linguists expected that with a good



knowledge of contrastive analysis, it is feasible to design language courses more competently because the areas of latent difficulty are planned out via CA. Thus, CA in conjunction with behaviorism and structuralism wielded an insightful effect on SLA curriculum design and language teacher education. This provided the theoretical pillar for Audio-Lingual Method.

Contrastive analysis has been seen as a branch of modern linguistic science which is regarded as a method of foreign language teaching. It is basically a scientific or descriptive study of several languages, or dialects, to find out resemblances and dissimilarities. Track (1997) refers to contrastive analysis as contrastive linguistics and defines it as the systematic comparison of two languages or of specified parts of those systems. He also notes that contrastive analysis is particularly important in second language teaching.

Bussmann (1996, p. 102) opines that CA is a sub-branch of linguistics that is preoccupied with synchronic comparison of more than one language or dialects of a language. He contends, like all others before him, that CA is all about seeking out the resemblances and dissimilarities in the two languages under investigation but the emphasis is mostly in the differences because it is the difference that triggers interference. Furthermore, he posits that in contrastive analysis, the function of the linguistic theory consists majorly in designing appropriate structural models, which enable the researcher to systematically compare the lingos, with a view to eliminate interference. Crystal (1987, p. 243) also states that CA is a well-patterned evaluation of L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>, with the intent to forecast areas of challenges in the learning curve.

Finnegan (2008, p. 535) buttresses this further that contrastive analysis is a technique for language analysis for pedagogical reasons, where an indigenous language and a foreign and/or target language are examined to establish points of convergence and divergence that will probably trigger learning difficulties for learners. In the view of Hartmann and Stock (1973, p. 53), contrastive analysis is a linguistic technique for analysis geared towards finding linguistic resemblances and disparities between two languages, to locate postulations that can be applied to solve practical language problems of teaching, translating, transfer and interference, and establish equivalences.

Nickel (1972) appears to be the only person who posits that contrastive analysis is focused on contrasts and correspondences within languages and the extent that those contrasts aid linguistic study and the construction of language teaching courses. Ojukwu (1981, p. 2), in his well-considered opinion, defines contrastive analysis as the comparative analysis of equivalent proposition of two languages for reasons of isolating the possible complications that speakers of one language will have in acquiring the other. Falk (1973, p. 361) also delineates contrastive analysis as “the comparison of the linguistic systems of the source and target languages”. In sum, these writers make clear that CA is seen as a way of identifying what must be emphasized and what must be ignored in a second and/or foreign language teaching.

From all of the above definitions, it may be deduced that CA involves a comparison of at least two languages or dialects, to establish the parallels and variances that exist within structures of such languages that are compared. CA concerns itself with similarities and differences that exist between languages and how those contrasts help in teaching and learning the languages. In considering these similarities and differences however, the fundamental assumption that must be kept in focus, according to Lado (1957, p. 134), is ‘transfer’. He asserts that learners form the habit of relocating the systems and values, and spreading the forms and meanings of



their indigenous languages and cultures to the target language and culture (hence, mother tongue interference).

These distortions in grammar and phraseology could be attributed to the differences that exist in the L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>. As posited by Lado (1957, p. 2), the problematic aspects from the point of view of target language learning are the areas where differences exist between L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>; areas of similarities will not pose serious challenges. Consequently, he asserts that instructions in language ought to be focused on the areas of differences; problematic cases demand that the teacher takes cognizance of, demonstrates insight, and offers considerable lots of exercises to the learner. At the same time, similar items occurring in both languages need to be highlighted or touched lightly during lessons. In other words, CA requires that in teaching a target language, prominence must be mounted on the areas of differences that exist between the L<sub>1</sub> and the L<sub>2</sub>. Emphasizing the areas of differences implies that the errors of the learners are also taken into consideration. Thus, Wilkinson (1972) states that the contrastive study of a non-indigenous language is fundamentally learning to overcome those problems, so that where the structure of the language is similar, little or no difficulty will be encountered, but where differences exist, emphasis will be placed on them to include them in the school syllabus (p. 198). Therefore, 'the main objective of CA is to predict and explain the likely errors of a given group of learners [so as] to provide linguistic inputs to language teaching materials' (p. 198).

Contrastive analysis involves four different techniques. The first in the series is describing; the next is to select; this is followed by contrasting; and finally predicting. In the first process, which is describing, the researcher or instructor, employing linguistic tools, succinctly explains the specific grammatical unit in question in both languages. In the next procedure, which is selecting, a selection of specific language forms, structures, and rules are chosen for contrast. This is because a linguist cannot possibly contrast in one study all aspects of the grammar of both languages. The third procedure is contrasting the chosen structures for similarities and differences, if any. Prediction, which is the fourth method, involves formulating or predicting mistakes, errors or difficulties on the foundation of the first three processes. We posit that this predicting could be achieved by formulating a hierarchy of difficulties or by a subjective application of psychological and/or linguistic theory.

### **Negation Markers in English**

There are different ways of marking negation in English, and the means by which this is achieved is called negation strategies. According to McArthur (1996, p. 613) an English sentence or utterance gets negated by the introduction of the word *not* or its contracted form *n't* after the first or only verb. For example:

- a. It is snowing.
- b. It is not snowing.
- c. It isn't snowing.

McArthur (1996) further argues that the presence of an auxiliary verb in a sentence will engender enclitics, as in (c) above. Ballard (2001) also notes that if a sentence contains more than one auxiliary verb, the negative particle *not* is added after the first auxiliary. For example:



- a. Ella should have travelled by train.
- b. Ella should not have travelled by train.

Apart from the use of the negative particles, *not* negation in English may be marked through some other ways which may not necessarily involve a verb. Examples of this form of negation strategy are inherently negative pronouns like:

*nothing, nobody, none, and no one.*

Instances of usage include:

- a. Nobody saw her
- b. No one brought anything.
- c. None of the boys passed the exam.

The use of negative adverbials (*never, seldom, rarely, few, nowhere, neither, hardly, barely, and scarcely*) is another negation strategy in English, as noted by Quirk and Greenbaurn (2000). Most of these words listed above are notionally negative but not in form. They resemble the ordinary negative items in the following ways:

(i) They accompany non-assertive rather than the assertive forms (the assertive forms are underlined in this study, while the negative words are italicized), e.g.,

- a. I *seldom* get any sleep.
- b. I've spoken to *hardly* anyone who disagrees with me.
- c. *Few* changes in government have overtaken so many people by surprise.
- d. Only *few* of us had any experience at sailing.

(ii) Their occurrence in pre-subject position, for some of them, can cause subject-operator inversion, e.g.,

- a. *Rarely* does crime pay so well as Mr. Jones seems to think.
- b. *Scarcely* ever has the British nation suffered so much obloquy.
- c. *Little* need I dwell upon the joy of that reunion?

(iii) Many of these attract positive rather than negative tag questions, e.g.,

She *scarcely* seems to care, does she?

Another way through which negation is marked in English is morphologically; through certain affixes like *un-*, *a-*, *de-*, *dis-*, *in-*, with its variants (*il-*, *im-*, and *ir-*), *-less*, and *non-* (Norquist 2011). These affixes are often used to form negative words and their presence in a sentence also brings about the idea of negation. Apart from *-less* and *non-*, which are negative suffixes, all the other affixes are negative prefixes. Examples of some negative words formed by these affixes include the following:

**Table 1: Negative Affixes**

Affix	Word	Glossary
<i>a-</i>	<i>Amoral</i>	not moral
<i>de-</i>	<i>De-industrialize</i>	become less industrial
<i>dis-</i>	<i>Disapprove</i>	not approve
<i>in-</i>	<i>Inaccurate</i>	incorrect
<i>im-</i>	<i>Immoral</i>	lacks morality
<i>ill-</i>	<i>ill-advised</i>	not well advised
<i>ir-</i>	<i>Irregular</i>	not regular
<i>un-</i>	<i>unavailable</i>	not available
<i>non-</i>	<i>non-alcohol</i>	not containing alcohol
<i>-less</i>	<i>Careless</i>	lacks care

As presented on Table 1, all the words listed which carry negative affixes usually render a sentence negative. Worthy of note also is the fact that whenever these words are used to mark negation, the negative particles *not* and *no* are no longer necessary. However, if they are used together with these words that carry negative affixes, the negative items cancel out each other and nullify the negation.

For example:

- a. Teenage rebellion is not *uncommon* nowadays.

*Meaning that*

- b. It is common to find teenage rebellion nowadays.  
c. Our proposal met no *disapproval*.

*Meaning that*

- d. It was approved.  
e. He is not *incapable* of doing the work.

*Meaning that*

- f. He is capable.  
g. Larry worked at the project with no *uncertainty* that it would be ratified.

*Meaning that*

- h. He was certain that the project would be ratified.

**Table 2: The Negation Strategies**

English	Yala
Negative particle: <i>not</i>	Negative Particle: <i>ni</i>
Inherently negative pronouns	Nil
Negative adverbials	Nil
Negative verbs, adjectives and prepositions	Only negative verbs
Negative affixes	Negative affixes
Idiomatic expression	Idiomatic expression
Alternative negative elements	Alternative negative elements
Negation via contrastive stress	Nil
Use of <i>not</i> before <i>to-infinitives</i>	Nil
Use of <i>no</i> or <i>not</i> before certain nouns or noun phrases	Nil
Notional negative	Nil
Double negatives	Nil
Litotes	Nil
Negative content words	Nil
John <i>travelled</i> to France. (positive)	Ijonni <i>gi</i> Furanci. (positive)
John did not travel to France. (negative)	Ijonni <i>gi</i> Furanci <i>ni</i> . (negative)
We are <i>coming</i> . (positive)	Alor <i>yabor</i> . (positive)
We are <i>not</i> coming. (negative)	Alor <i>yabor ni</i> . (negative)

Based on the data collected for the study, fourteen negative operators have been identified in English, while only five negative operators have been identified in Yala language. This is to say that the English language has more strategies of marking negation than Yala. However, the particles differ in form and syntactic behaviour. The negative particle of English is *not*, while that of Yala is *ni*. Typically, the negative particles in English are attached to auxiliary verbs except when used to negate certain adverbials and quantifiers. On the other hand, in Yala, the negative particles can be attached to both main verbs and auxiliaries. Also in Yala, the auxiliary verb can be separated such that the auxiliary appears after the object of the verb.

English has seven negative affixes *-un-*, *a-*, *de-*, *non-*, *dis-*, *in-* (with its variants), which are prefixes and *-less* which is a suffix. Yala on the other hand has no negative affix. The negative affixes of English usually attach to nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with relative specificity.

**Table 3: Contrast of Negation**

English	Yala
<i>Not only</i> did he quarrel her, he also beat her up.	O gbapokee <i>ni</i> , ogworijechoba.
<i>Hardly</i> does one receive such favours these days.	Olichichi <i>ni</i> oche twowobo mmama.
You <i>did not</i> sweep this place.	Afieebe onuma <i>ni</i> .
He/she has not gone.	O pia e <i>ni</i> .





In Yala, on the other hand, there is no such expression where there is the presence of a negation in pre-subject position. In fact, there is no such word as *hardly* in Yala. There can only be an expression—*olichichi* (it is difficult).

### **Contrastive Statements**

1. English has more negative operators than Yala.
2. The negative particle in English typically attaches to auxiliary verbs, while that of Yala typically attaches to both main and auxiliary verbs.
3. English has more negatives affixes than Yala.
4. The negative affixes of English can be attached to nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, while those of Yala attach only to adverbs.
5. The presence of certain negatives in pre-subject positions can lead to subject-operator inversion in English, whereas in Yala, there is no such thing as ‘subject-operator inversion’.
6. English has negative pronouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and adverbials, while Yala has only negation verbs.

### **Predictions**

Since the negative operators in English are more in number than those in Yala, Yala learners of English are likely to have difficulties learning and mastering all the negative operators in English. They may have difficulty in learning to negate via affixation in English since their L<sub>1</sub> has no negative affix. Moreover, there are great differences in the class of words to which each affix attaches in English. Yala learners of English may encounter difficulty in learning to mark negation through negative pronouns, adjectives, adverbials, and prepositions in the L<sub>2</sub> because this class of ‘negators’ do not exist in the L<sub>1</sub>.

### **Implications**

One of the observations of the study is that English has more negative operators than Yala. English also has negative affixes while Yala has none. In addition, while the negative particle in English attaches to auxiliaries and certain adverbials and quantifiers, the negative particle in Yala only stands alone. The implication on languages should be incorporated in the instructional material for the benefit of teachers and learners. Based on the result that there are significant contrasts which exist in the modal and non-modal negation of English and Yala, it is recommended that in the classroom, the English language teacher of Yala speakers should mark these areas of contrast for emphasis. In addition, instructional materials which highlight these differences should be provided for the benefit of both the teachers and learners, so as to furnish them with firsthand information on the issue of modal and non-modal negation in Yala.

Based on the result that there are contrasts in the negation of the various parts of speech in English and Yala, the researchers recommend that all points of contrast for each part of speech should be emphasized when teaching English negation to Yala speakers. The researchers also recommend the provision of relevant materials of instruction which should take into consideration these contrasts. It is equally recommended that teachers be trained in Yala



language so as to equip them with information on how negation works with the various parts of speech in Yala.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that there are significant contrasts which exist between English and Yala in general and the negation patterns in particular. With respect to strategies, scope and focus of negation, modal and non-modal negation, and negating various parts of speech, we assert that lots of work need be done on Yala. Since differences are said to be the sources of learning difficulty in contrastive analysis, it can be concluded that any difficulty which Yala learners of English encounter, in respect to negation in English, should be attributed to differences that exist in the learners' L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>.

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