

**NEGATION STRATEGIES IN THE IRRUA VARIETY OF ÉSÀN**

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BENIN CITY,**

**NOVEMBER 2025**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS  
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**APPROVAL PAGE**

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## **PLAGIARISM/CERTIFICATION**

I, **Esther Osewe ALIKA** with matriculation Number **ART2100727**, declare that this work titled; **NEGATION STRATEGIES IN THE IRRUA VARIETY OF ÉSÀN** has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test and so does not violate copyright regulation.

**SIGNED;**

**Esther Osewe ALIKA**

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This project work is dedicated to Almighty God, the source of all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, for being with me throughout my studies. I also dedicate it to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Alike for their constant love, parental care, and unwavering support, to my siblings and my friend Paul for their encouragement. Your faith in me has been my greatest inspiration.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined negation strategies in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. The aim of the research was to investigate the negation strategies in Irrua, by identifying the negation markers used in the dialect. Also, to examine the syntactic positions of negation markers in Irrua sentence structures, and analyze how negation is realized in Irrua when applied to other construction-specific rules. The motivation for this study is to showcase the various negation markers in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. The method of data collection was both primary and secondary. The primary source for data collection involved 6 native speakers of Irrua, specifically elderly and linguistically competent individuals who possess fluent command of the traditional and contemporary use of Irrua. The secondary sources such as published grammars, previous research works, language textbooks, and online linguistic resources on É̀s̀n language were also consulted to provide a broader perspective and to support the elicited data. The theoretical framework used for the research was Chomsky's X-bar theory of (1970). The findings revealed that negation in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n employs lexical strategies, with four distinct negation markers used based on tense and context. These markers consistently appear before the verb, maintaining a fixed NEG–V structure. Furthermore, negation integrates seamlessly with complex syntactic processes such as passivization, relativization, and reflexivization, without altering sentence structure. This highlights the systematic and flexible nature of negation strategies in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. The research recommends further study on this research work and areas not touched in this research work or any aspect of negation strategies in Irrua Variety of É̀s̀n language or É̀s̀n language in general be carried out by scholars, linguists and any other person interested in the syntax of Irrua and É̀s̀n language.



# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Negation is an important part of every language. It is used to deny, reject, or say that something is not true (Ogar & Isaac, 2022:39). All human languages have ways of showing negation, but the methods are often different. As Iwuala and Imu (2021:437) explain, negation is found in every natural language because people often need to deny, disagree, or say the opposite of what someone else has said.

Many studies have been carried out on how negation works in Nigerian languages. Some works has also been done on Edoid languages, which include É̀s̀ǹ. However, not much research has focused specifically on how negation works in Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ. For example, Nyarks and Imooje (2020:69) asserted that negation in É̀s̀ǹ is preverbal and identified two negative markers: *i* and *bhá*.

Although these studies have looked at some aspects of negation in É̀s̀ǹ, they do not explore how negation works in other types of sentence structures in Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ.

This study seeks to examine the negation strategies in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ. It will look into the various negation markers in the variety, the position of these

markers in sentence constructions, and how negation is realized with other construction-specific rules in the variety such as passivization, relativization, and reflexivization

## **1.1 Irrua Variety and Its People**

Irrua is a Variety of É̀s̀à̀n language spoken in Edo State, Nigeria. It is a regional variation of É̀s̀à̀n, with other dialects including Uromi, Igueben, and Ewatto. These dialects exist within the broader linguistic family and are mutually intelligible, though with regional variations in pronunciation and vocabulary. É̀s̀à̀n is a language spoken by the people commonly known as "Ishans". The speakers call themselves "É̀s̀à̀n" (Yuka & Ikoyo-Eweto, 2022). It is the native language in five Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Edo State, located in southern Nigeria. These LGAs are É̀s̀à̀n Central, É̀s̀à̀n West, É̀s̀à̀n South-East, É̀s̀à̀n North-East, and Igueben. É̀s̀à̀n belongs to the North Central branch of the Edoid languages. The Edoid group is part of the New Benue-Congo languages, which fall under the larger Niger-Congo family (Elugbe, 1989). On the language classification chart, É̀s̀à̀n is placed between Edo and the Ora-Emai-Iuleha dialect cluster (Yuka & Ikoyo-Eweto, 2022).

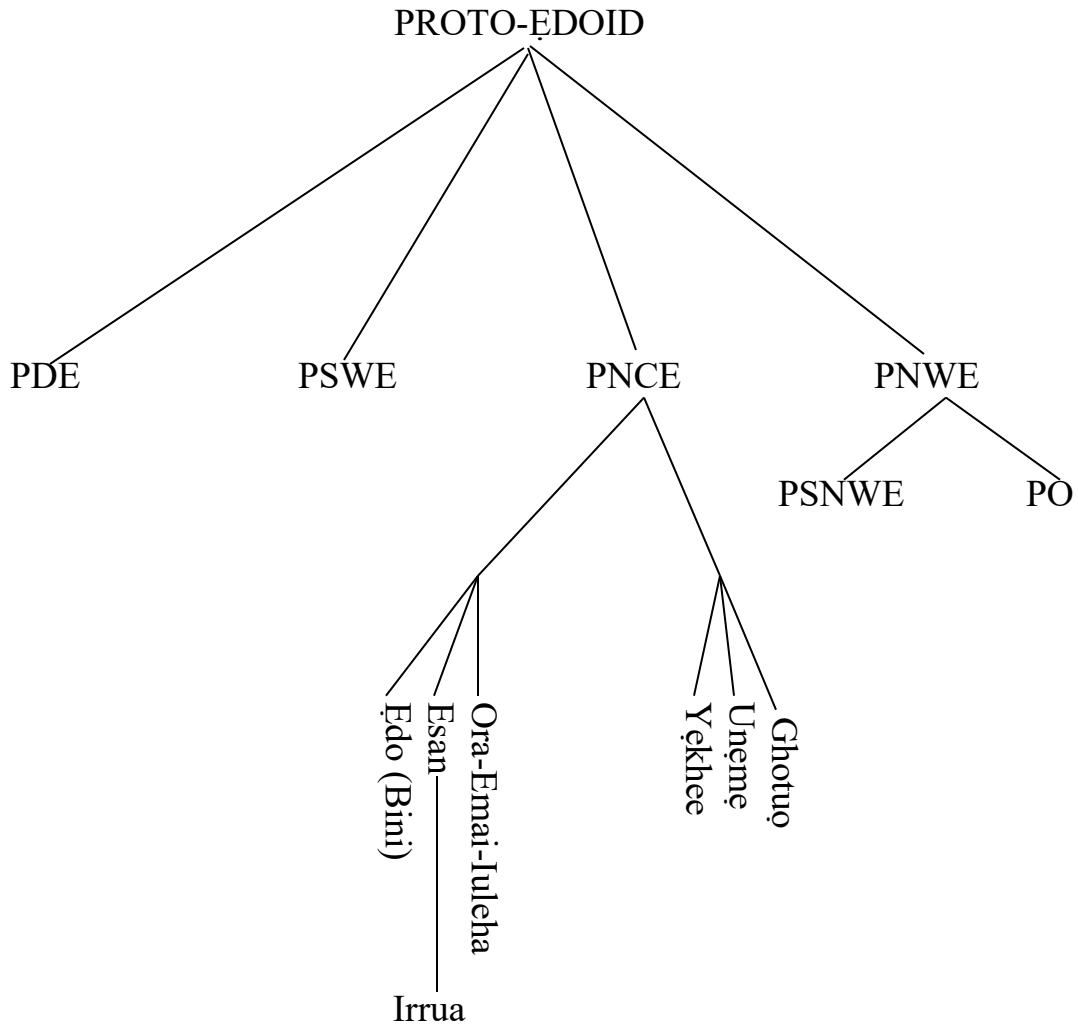
É̀s̀à̀n land shares borders with Benin to the south, Agbor to the south-east, Etsako to the north and east, and River Niger to the west. From Ewu to Benin City, the

capital of Edo State, is a distance of about 100 kilometers. Major towns in É̀s̀n land include Uromi, Ewatto, Igueben, Irrua, Ubiaja, Ebele, Ehor, Ekpoma, and Ewu, all located in the central part of Edo State, South-South Nigeria. The Irrua people are primarily known for their traditional agriculture which was the foundation of their pre-colonial economy and involved both men and women. They are also known for being part of the larger É̀s̀n ethnic group who has a large history as farmers, traders and warriors as well as for having distinct ancestral religious beliefs. They trace their roots to ancient Benin. The É̀s̀n language has many varieties, which sometimes makes it hard for native speakers from different areas to understand one another.

Historically, Irrua (known locally as Ir̀̀a) traces its origin to migrations from the ancient Benin Kingdom, sharing deep cultural, linguistic, and historical ties with other É̀s̀n communities. The people are predominantly farmers, traders, and civil servants, and they uphold rich traditions expressed through festivals, proverbs, folktales, and music.

The Irrua variety of É̀s̀n, which belongs to the Edoid languages, a subgroup of the Kwa branch within the Niger-Congo language family. Irrua maintains mutual intelligibility with other É̀s̀n dialects such as those spoken in Ekpoma, Uromi, and Ewu, though it features distinct phonological and lexical variations that mark its unique local identity. The language serves as a key medium for cultural

transmission and communal identity among the Irrua people, reflecting both their shared É̀s̀n heritage and their particular historical evolution within the Edoid linguistic family.



(Adapted from Elugbe, 1989)

**Key:**

- PDE – Proto Delta Edoid
- PSWE – Proto South Western Edoid
- PNCE – Proto North Central Edoid
- PNWE – Proto North Western Edoid
- PSNWE – Proto South North Western Edoid
- PO – Proto Osse

**Figure 1:** The Edoid language group

The figure above shows how É̀s̀ǹ is related to other languages in the Edoid group, and how the Irrua variety is mapped to the É̀s̀ǹ language. This group is part of the KWA branch of Niger-Congo languages.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Negation is a key feature in every language, and speakers use it to express denial or contradiction. While some research has been done on negation in Nigerian and Edoid languages, there is still a gap when it comes to a detailed study of how negation works in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ language. Previous studies have noted some negation markers in É̀s̀ǹ, but they do not fully agree on how many there are or how they function. Some say there are two, others say three. In this research, four negation markers have been identified in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ. The research also looks into how negation works in different sentence types like passive, relative and reflexive which previous research did not fully address. Because of these gaps, the full picture of negation strategies in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀ǹ is still unclear. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the forms, positions, and functions of negation in Irrua, and how it affects the sentence structure.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The project work will be guided by the following research questions

1. What are the negation markers in Irrua?
2. Where are negation markers positioned in Irrua sentences?
3. How does negation interact with other construction-specific rules in Irrua?

### **1.4 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to investigate the negation strategies in Irrua. Its objectives are:

1. To identify the negation markers used in the variety.
2. To examine the syntactic positions of negation markers in Irrua sentence structures.
3. To analyze how negation is realized in Irrua when applied to other construction-specific rules.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on how negation works in the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. It looks at the different negation markers used and where they appear in sentences. It also checks how negation is formed in different sentence types like passive, relative, and reflexive. This study will not examine how tones function in negation and only the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n is considered for the research. The research is based on data collected from native speakers and written sources. It will not cover other Edoid languages.

## **1.6 Methodology**

In conducting this research, the methodology is carefully structured to ensure the authenticity, reliability, and relevance of the data used for analysis. The method of data collection is both primary and secondary. The primary source for data collection involve 6 native speakers of the Irrua variety of É̀s̀n (2 males and 4 females), specifically elderly and linguistically competent individuals who possess fluent command of the traditional and contemporary use of Irrua. In addition, secondary sources such as published grammars, previous research works, language textbooks, and online linguistic resources on É̀s̀n language was also consulted to provide a broader perspective and to support the elicited data. To facilitate the data collection process, the instrument used is a structured interview and elicitation

method, which involved a set of questions and translation exercises designed to prompt native speakers to produce both affirmative and negative constructions in various tenses, aspects, and sentence types. These interviews were conducted in person and, in some cases, recorded for further analysis and translated.

In terms of tools for data collection, audio recorder was used to capture spoken data during interviews with native speakers. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation was employed by cross-verifying information gathered from different speakers and comparing it with existing literature. This process helped to eliminate inconsistencies and confirm the authenticity of the Irrua variety of É̀s̀an use. Furthermore, linguistic consultants with expertise in Irrua was consulted to review the translations and interpretations of the data. Reliability of the data was established by conducting repeated elicitation sessions with the same set of speakers. This help to ascertain the consistency of the negation strategies in the variety.

For the method of data analysis, the research will use the X-bar theory by Chomsky (1970) which is a theory under GB theory framework by Chomsky (1981) and the presentation will adhere strictly to the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of the negation strategies in Irrua. By focusing on the types of negation markers, their placement in sentence constructions, and their interaction with other construction-specific rules, this research fills a gap in the existing linguistic literature on the variety. The beneficiaries of this study include linguists, especially those interested in the syntax of African languages, as it provides new insights into how negation manifests in different construction in Irrua. Additionally, language learners, teachers, and speakers of Irrua will benefit from the study's findings, which can aid in improving the teaching and learning of the Irrua variety of É̀sà̀n. This study also serves as a reference for future research, particularly in the field of syntax and the study of other Edoid languages. Lastly, this research contributes to the preservation and deeper understanding of the Irrua variety of É̀sà̀n, helping to highlight its unique grammatical features in the context of the larger Edoid language family.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews relevant literature which are related to this research work "Negation strategies in Irrua variety of É̀s̀̀n". The chapter is divided into three sections which are: conceptual review or theoretical review as may be called, previous studies which gave rise to the motivation of this current study, and lastly, the concern of the present study.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

This part of the work reviews concept which are related to this study. The purpose of reviewing this concept is to give a better understanding of what this research is all about.

##### **2.1.1 Negation**

Negation, as a linguistic concept, is recognized across all natural languages. As Wills, Lucas, and Breitbarth (2013:1) state, "negation is one of the few truly universal grammatical categories: every language seems to have some grammaticalized means to deny the truth of an ordinary declarative sentence." This universality is also highlighted by Khemlani et al. (2012:544), who observe that

"negation is part of all natural languages, yet its psychology is mysterious given that languages contain terms for true and false."

At its core, negation involves the denial or contradiction of a proposition or statement. According to Jackson (2007:43), "negation is the expression of the denial or reverse of the state of affairs." Similarly, Crystal (2008:323) defines it as "a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence and meaning." Echoing this, Iwuala and Imu (2021:439) explain that "negation implies the assertion that a certain proposition is false, the act of contradicting a statement or allegation." Ezebuilo et al. (2024:3) frame it as "a denial or contradiction of another proposition, which can be obtained from that other proposition by the appropriate insertion of the word 'not'."

From a syntactic perspective, negation has attracted considerable attention in linguistic research. Sanusi and Oyewole (2019:78) affirm that "negation is a syntactic phenomenon that has generated a lot of investigations in the field of linguistics." Scholars such as Uba and Adioha (2021:151) add that "negation as a concept in linguistics is basically known to be the denial of an assertion." Furthermore, there have been efforts to study the specific syntactic positions occupied by negators in grammatical constructions.

Structurally, negation is often realized through negative markers, which are grammatical devices used to express the negative meaning within a sentence. Enweonye and Egwuekwe (2015:193) point out that "negative markers are those suffixes that go with the verbs to produce negation in sentences." These markers play a central role in the syntactic construction of negation across different languages.

This collection of definitions presents a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of negation in linguistic theory. The sources collectively highlight its universality, as a feature common to all natural languages. Semantic function, as a way of denying or contradicting propositions. Syntactic complexity, as an area of deep grammatical investigation. Psychological intrigue, due to its abstract nature in human cognition. Structural manifestation, through the use of negative markers and other grammatical devices.

The progression from universal and psychological perspectives (Wills et al., Khemlani et al.) to semantic definitions (Jackson, Crystal, Iwuala, Ezebuilo et al.), and finally to syntactic and morphological considerations (Sanusi & Oyewole, Uba & Adioha, Enweonye & Egwuekwe), reflects a well-rounded and logically linked overview.

This array of viewpoints demonstrates that negation is not merely a grammatical function, but a deeply embedded, cognitively significant, and linguistically rich phenomenon. The definitions are not redundant but rather complementary, offering layers of understanding from theoretical, functional, and applied perspectives.

## **2.2 Previous Studies**

This part of the work discussed and highlights previous works which are related to this present study.

Fabunmi (2013) examined the various morpho-syntactic distributions of negation in sixteen Yorùbá dialects and comes up with some interesting questions, observations and claims. E asserted that some of the NEG formatives are used to negate the indicative expressions, others are used in the imperative mood while some others are mainly used to negate the focus marker. Nearly all the NEG Morphemes examined precede the verb except *má/mó* [+NEG] which may be used at the end of the VP. The work believed that within the scope of *àì* [+NEG], it is not a complex negative morpheme; the low-toned “à” is regarded as the negator in the syntax of Yorùbá negation. NEG is taken as an independent category which projects its own X-bar structure NegP; it inhabits a borderline between functional and lexical projections. It was observed that the differences between the morphemes of negation in these sixteen Yorùbá dialects are of linguistic change. It

was also realised in the work that in as much as morphemes of negation in Yorùbá dialects commute with the aspecto-modal marker of negative polarity, they can be placed in the position of the functional category Asp. The various NEG morphemes of the Yorùbá dialects discussed in the paper showed that the verbo-aspectual negative polarity subsumes very much as a strong feature.

Evbuomwan and Usenbo (2019) investigates an aspect of negation in Èdo language, using primary data obtained from native speakers. Three overt morphemes: *í*, *má*, and *ghẹ* were identified as markers of negation in the language. The study focused on negative utterances which lack the *í*-morphemes in overt realizations. The utterances were extracted and analysed with PRAAT 6.0.30. Data analyses revealed that negative constructions which lack an overt marker typically contain underlying *í*-marker which can be deleted. Another finding revealed that the high tone it bears is left to float regressively or progressively, depending on the morphophonological environment. In cases deletion is suspended, vowel height reduction applies, in which case, the segment of the negative morpheme changes from a tense to a lax vowel. The study concludes that tones should be recognized as a strategy for negation in the language.

Ezenwafor (2019) asserted that negation in Igbo is a rich morpho-syntactic process and equally varies from one dialect of Igbo to another. Adopting a descriptive frame work, the researcher, observed the operation of the category „NEG“ in the

Ekwulobia Igbo in relation to standard Igbo and other Igbo lects, where necessary. It was observed that the tonal behaviour of negation in Ekwulobia, is quite same with that of the standard Igbo. As seen in the work, the difference is observed in the negation marking suffix. In the Ekwulobia Igbo, the standard form of negation is the suffixation of the negation marking suffix „-hv“ (where v harmonizes strictly to the vowel of the verb root) and the harmonizing open vowel prefix „a-/e-“ when the accompanying NP is a noun or 3pl pronominal. Some negation marking suffix like: „-ha“, suffixed to an aux. „na“, „-he“, suffixed to an aux. „jè“, the suffix „-bèhè“ are used for other forms of negation, while a periphrastic negation marker „mehē“ is observed in constituent negation. All these negation marking suffixes in the Ekwulobia Igbo differ from that of the standard Igbo and other Igbo lects.

George-Essien (2020) discussed negation marking in Defaka. She asserted that negation in Defaka is basically morphological, with a clause level clinic = re attached to the verb, other markers of negation according to her are, the low toned sentence final particle Kòm which is used to mark the unfulfilled negative, the existential negative jáilè and the negative imperatives kírì and nìnì. She asserted that tone plays a secondary role. The characteristic tonal pattern of a negative sentence in Defaka is a falling tone; this pattern does not change even with questions, except instances where a verb with a high tone spreads its high tone

through the last syllables of an utterance, giving the utterance a final raised intonation pattern.

Nyarks and Imooje (2020) sought to find out the position of verb particle in negative sentences in Èsàn language and to find out whether her genetic nature, being member of Edoid, reflects the language universal validity about negative marking. Based on the copious and relevant empirical data, the study made the following discovery amongst others about the preverbal negation in Èsàn language.; that there are two verbal negators in Èsàn language: “i” and “bha”; that the morpheme i on the last syllable on the subject in negative sentences is a negator in imperfective sentence. One of the recommendations made was that preverbal negations must be addressed in order to give linguistics beforehand knowledge on its usage and application, considering the fact that every language exhibits a device to reverse the true conditions of a sentence and that natural languages show a surprisingly large range with respect to the syntactic and semantic behaviour of negative elements.

Iwuala and Imu (2021) examined negation and types of tense negation in Urhobo. It also identified negation marker(s) and the manner in which these negation marker(s) are used in sentences. Transformational generative grammar theory of analysis was used in the work. The aim of this study was to determine the syntactic characteristics of negation in Urhobo. The study showed that negative construction

in the Urhobo language involved the doubling of the last vowel of the last word in sentences; or what may be called the lengthening of the last vowel of the lexical item in the sentence. Also, the low-high tone can do the same function as the lexical or grammatical tone. It was observed that negation is a natural phenomenon that cuts across Urhobo, and that the orthographic representation of the low tone, which is the copying of the final vowel, is written contiguously while other negative markers are written separately. It was also observed that Urhobo operates suffixation. Finally, the study work reveals *ejo*, *je*, *odie* and *and oyen* as negative markers in Urhobo.

### **2.3 Concern of the Present Study**

The previous studies focused on negation in various Nigerian languages like Yorùbá, Èdo, Igbo, Defaka, Èsàn, and Urhobo, each highlighting different aspects such as morpho-syntactic distribution, tonal behavior, morphological markers, and the influence of dialectal variation. For example, Fabunmi (2013) looked at how negative morphemes behave across different Yorùbá dialects, while Evbuomwan and Usenbo (2019) explored how deletion and tone function in Èdo negation. Similarly, Ezenwafor (2019) discussed negation suffixes and vowel harmony in a dialect of Igbo, and George-Essien (2020) examined different morphological negation markers in Defaka. Nyarks and Imooje (2020) briefly looked into preverbal negation in Èsàn, and Iwuala and Imu (2021) focused on vowel

duplication and tonal marking in Urhobo. Previous studies in Edoid languages identified various negative markers in É̀s̀à̀n. However, it is important to consider negation in Irrua, a Variety of É̀s̀à̀n to establish the common ground and the point of departure between them which partly forms its designation as a variety of É̀s̀à̀n.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the theoretical framework selected for the examination of negation strategies in Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. It begins with a presentation of the chosen theory, detailing its operational mechanisms. The chapter concludes by justifying the selection of this theory for analyzing negation strategies in Irrua variety of É̀s̀n. In essence, we will clearly articulate how this theoretical approach will aid in addressing our research problem.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework adopted for this research is Chomsky's (1981) Principles and Parameter theory. According to Snyder and Lillo-Martin (2019), the fundamental concept underlying the principles and parameters theory is the differentiation between the invariants of human language, referred to as principles, and the significant aspects of cross-linguistic variation, known as parameters. Both principles and parameters are posited to represent biologically determined characteristics inherent to the human brain (see universal grammar). Throughout the typical process of child development, however, these two elements begin to diverge: principles tend to function similarly across all children, exhibiting

minimal responsiveness to environmental influences, whereas parameters assume specific values influenced by the linguistic input received by the child.

The P&P framework is rooted in the fundamental inquiries of contemporary linguistics as articulated by Chomsky (1981): What knowledge do individuals possess regarding their native language? Additionally, what processes lead to the acquisition of this knowledge? To adequately respond to these inquiries, one must consider the concept of the poverty of the stimulus, which highlights that children often do not receive consistent feedback when they commit grammatical mistakes (Brown and Hanlon, 1970; Marcus, 1993).

The theory also known as the Government and Binding theory was formulated to address the shortcomings identified in transformational generative grammar (T.G.). This framework introduces seven sub-theories of grammar. The structures produced at different levels are governed by a series of theoretical constraints that delineate the permissible relationships within a grammatical system. The sub-theories of Government and Binding are as follows:

- a. X-Bar Theory ( $X^1$  theory)
- b. Theta theory ( $\theta$  theory)
- c. Case theory
- d. Bounding Theory
- e. Binding Theory

f. Control theory

g. Government theory

Source: (Adedeji, 2011).

The aforementioned sub-theories of Government and Binding theory function in a closely related manner within the theoretical framework. However, the theory utilized in this research is the "X-Bar Theory."

### **The X-Bar Theory**

The X-bar theory was formulated to address the limitations inherent in the phrase structure rules (PSR) of the Standard Theory (Haraguchi et al., 2016). Anderson (2018) posits that X-bar theory asserts a uniform structural organization for every phrase within the mental grammar of all human languages. Central to this theory is the concept of the head, which serves as the terminal node of a phrase, characterized by the absence of daughters. The category of the head dictates the overall category of the phrase. For instance, if the head is a noun, the resulting phrase is classified as a Noun Phrase (NP). Similarly, if the head is a verb (V), the phrase is designated as a Verb Phrase (VP). In the case of a preposition (P) as the head, the phrase is termed a Prepositional Phrase (PP), while Adjective Phrases (AP) are identified by having adjectives as their heads.

In the standard framework of X-bar theory, it is assumed that there exist three hierarchical levels: X, X-bar, and XP. The head is designated as the initial level

(X), while the phrase is represented at the XP level, with X-bar serving as an intermediary tier. The complement of a head consistently constitutes an X-bar level, articulated as X-bar deriving from X in conjunction with the complement of X. Furthermore, XP is structured as the specifier of X combined with X. The fundamental P-rules that facilitate the expansion of XP to X-bar and subsequently to X are as follows:

(1)  $XP \rightarrow (\{D, NP\}) X\text{-bar}$

(2)  $X\text{-bar} \rightarrow X (PP)$ .

Radford (2016) asserts that the X-bar theory is founded on two fundamental principles.

a. Headedness principle: Every phrase has a head.

b. Binarity principle: Every node branches into two different nodes.

According to Jackendoff (1977), the X-bar schema is structured around a head and its associated components, adhering to the principle of headedness. The components are defined as follows:

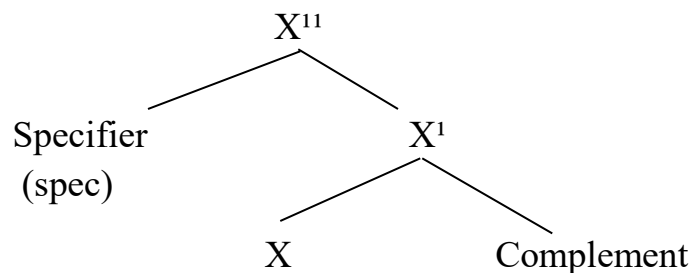
Specifier: [obligatory] This node is in a sister relationship with an X' node (Araki, 1999), representing the syntactic position itself.

Head: [obligatory] The central element of a phrase, into which a lexeme is integrated. The head plays a crucial role in determining the overall form and characteristics of the phrase.

Complement: [obligatory] An argument that is necessitated by the head.

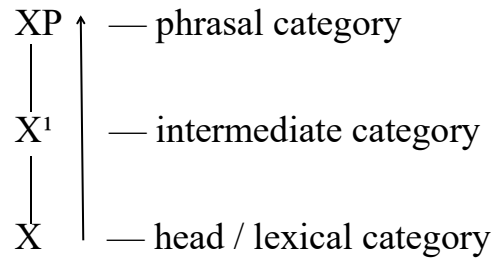
Adjunct: [optional] A modifier that provides additional information about the phrase formed by the head.

The specifier, head, and complement are mandatory, which means that a phrasal category XP must include one specifier, one head, and one complement. Conversely, the adjunct is not required, allowing for a phrasal category to have zero or more adjuncts. The internal structure of X-bar describing a phrase is presented below:



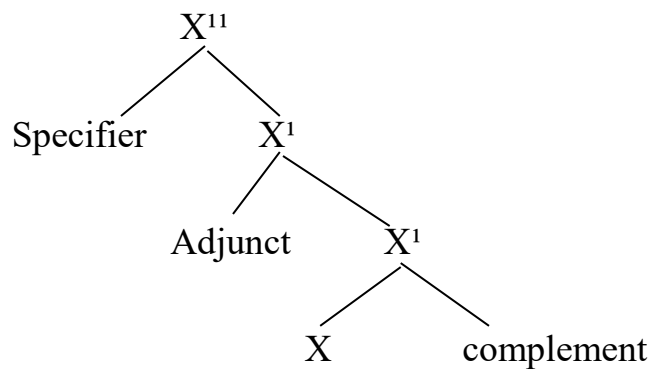
The head 'X' takes a complement to create a high X'. The X-bar includes a specifier and extends maximally into a complete phrase, referred to as X-double bar. The element X is obligatory within the phrase, while both the specifier and the complement are considered optional components.

The head 'X' can project into;



Source: Ndemele (1992:17)

In X-bar theory, there also exists a category known as adjuncts. Adjuncts represent sub-classes within the X-bar framework. A phrase that includes a specifier, an adjunct, and a complement would be structured schematically as follows:



### 3.2 The Relevance of the X- Bar Theory

The X-Bar Theory holds significant importance due to its universal applicability across languages, making it a fundamental component of formal linguistics. This theory has contributed to the identification of the core principles of Universal Grammar. It posits that every phrase within any sentence, regardless of the language, is structured in a consistent manner. This understanding aids in

comprehending how our cognitive processes organize sentences, as our mental grammar systematically groups words into phrases and phrases into sentences. Tree diagrams serve as a valuable tool for illustrating the relationships among words, phrases, and sentences.

The theory adopts a binary approach, facilitating the analysis of phrases and sentences in a hierarchical manner. It encapsulates the notion that all phrases possess certain essential structural characteristics, thereby enabling an exploration of the relationship between the head and its constituents. Furthermore, X-Bar Theory provides a clear perspective on the internal structures of words within a language. It allows for the representation of syntactic qualities through analogous tree structures, enabling languages with shared syntactic features to be depicted concurrently.

As a transformative framework for describing syntax, X-Bar Theory builds upon earlier phrase structure theories, significantly influencing contemporary linguistic perspectives on syntactic models. It clarifies and streamlines the fundamental principles of phrase structure grammars, facilitating generalizations across diverse languages through the application of traditional mathematical rules. This theory lays the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of constituent formation and aids in the design of part-of-speech tag sets. Additionally, the use of tree

diagrams enables the representation of syntactic dominance and precedence among the elements within a language.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyzes the data for this research. The X-bar theory of the GB theory framework will be used for the analysis of the work and the analysis will reflect the specific objectives of the research. The analysis will adhere strictly to the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR)

#### 4.1 Negation Markers in Irrua

This work will examine the different manifestations and syntactic behaviors of negation in the Irrua variety of Èsàn. It will investigate how various negation markers function across different grammatical contexts past, present, and future tenses and how they interact with other syntactic processes such as passivization, relativization, and reflexivization. The study will identify and analyze four major negators in Irrua: **bhá**, **hí**, **yí**, and **sàbó**, with each performing distinct grammatical roles. The **bhá** negator is used for past tense negation, while **hí** marks negation in future expressions. The **yí** negators are used to convert active sentences into Negative sentences, and **sàbó** functions in reflexive and future constructions. The work will also explore how these negators are positioned in relation to the verb, noun phrase, and other syntactic constituents, showing that most are pre-verbal in nature.

The study will also extend its analysis to the relationship between negation and passivization, negation and relativization, and negation and reflexivization, demonstrating how negators influence sentence structure and meaning across these grammatical domains.

#### 4.1.1 bha negator

The bhá negation marker is used for past tenses in Irrua dialect of É̀sà̀n. Below are some of the examples of past tenses in Irrua using bha negator.

1(a). ọ̀lẹ̀ gbọ̀nọ̀ ọ̀tọ̀

She/he sweep floor

"She/he swept the floor"

b. ọ̀lẹ̀ **bhá** gbọ̀nọ̀ ọ̀tọ̀

She/he NEG sweep floor

"She/he did not sweep the floor"

2(a). ọ̀lẹ̀ gbé nọ ọ̀fẹ̀n

S/he kill the rat

"S/he killed the rat"

(b). ọ̀lẹ̀ **bhá** gbé nó ọ̀fẹ̀n

S/he NEG kill the rat

"S/he did not kill the rat"

3(a). Ìmè dè

I fall

"I fell"

(b). Ìmè **bhá** dè

I NEG fall

"I did not fall"

4(a). Ìmè lè ízèé

I eat rice

"I ate rice"

(b). Ìmè **bhá** lè ízèé

i NEG eat rice

"i did not eat rice"

As seen from the data in (1 - 4) above, the *bhá* negation marker in Irrua is pre-verbal. They precede the verb and are responsible for changing the affirmative utterances in (1a, 2a, 3a and 4a) to negative utterances. The *bhá* negation marker always appear in a kernel sentence, imperatives etc before the verb.

### 4.1.2 hi negator

The hí negation markers in Irrua are used for future tenses. It is used as a form of denial to whatever is to happen later in time. Below are some of the examples of future tenses in Irrua using hi negator.

1(a). èlè vádé

They come

"They will come"

(b). èlè **hí** vádé

They NEG come

"They will not come"

2(a). úwé à vádé

You come

"You will come"

(b). úwé **hí** vádé

You NEG come

"You will not come"

As seen from the data in (1& 2) above, the hí negation marker changes a future possible statement to a future impossible utterance. In Irrua, there are no specific word to denote future tense but is embedded in the speech of the speaker. When one makes reference to a particular thing in the future there is no particular

marker denoting that the statement is in the future but is understood by the person being spoken to. It is only when something is not likely or will not likely to happen in the future is the marker introduced, which is the hí negation marker.

#### 4.1.3 yí negator

The yí negation markers in Irrua is used for changing active sentences to negative sentences. Unlike other markers previously discussed which negates utterances in the affirmative form. Below are some of the examples.

1(a). ìmè á nyèné èbàlè

Me will cook the food

"I will cook the food"

(b). é yí ímè á nyèné èbàlé

it is NEG me will cook the food

"I will not cook the food "

2(a). è. rìè ní íghó ná lèn

They give the money to him

"They gave the money to him"

(b). é yí lán rìè ní íghó ná lèn

it is NEG them give the money to him

"The money was not given to him by them"

As seen in the examples above (1& 2), there is no negation marker before the verb because it is a positive Active utterance. When it was introduced, the active utterance changed to a negative utterance, it precedes the pronoun, as seen in (1b & 2b) above.

#### 4.1.4 Sabo negator

The sabo negation marker is used in Irrua when coming together with other construction-specific-rules, specifically reflexives.

1 (a). Ímái tobomái lú òlè

we ourselves do it

"We will do it ourselves"

(b). Ímái khían **sàbó** **tóbomái** lú òlè

we go NEG ourselves do it

"We cannot do it ourselves"

2(a). ùwéi á lú òlè **négbéèi**

You will do it yourself

"You will do it yourself"

(b). ùwéi khían **sàbó** lú òlè **négbéèi**

You go NEG do it yourself

"You will not do it yourself"

As seen in the examples above, we can see the positioning of the sabo negative marker in (1b), the reflexive pronoun is immediately dominated by it. Both the negation marker and the reflexive come side-by-side, while in (2b), it is being separated by the verbal element "do it".

#### 4.2 Negation and Passivization in Irrua

Negation is the grammatical process of making a sentence negative.while passivization transforms an active sentence into a passive one, making the object of the action the subject. Both processes alter sentence structure while preserving core meaning. Consider the examples below.

1(a). é lè né ébàlé

they eat the food

"They ate the food"

(b). é yí lán lè nè ébàlé

it is NEG them eat the food

"The food was not eaten by them"

2(a). Osewe kpé nè kpánkú

Osewe wash the plate

"Osewe washed the plate"

(b). é yí Oseiwe kpé nè kpánkú

It is NEG Oseiwe wash the plate

"The plate was not washed by Oseiwe"

3(a). ìmè á nyèṅ né èbàlé

I will cook the food

"I will cook the food"

(b). é yí ímè á nyèṅ né èbàlé

it is. NEG me will cook the food

"The food will not be cooked by me"

4(a). éé rìè ní íghó ná lèn

They give the money to him

"They gave him the money"

(b). é yí lán rìè ní íghó ná lèn

It is NEG them give the money to him

"The money was not given to him by them"

As seen in the data above (1 - 4), we can see the positioning of negative markers in forming passive sentences in Irrua. Negative markers in passive sentences take different forms. We can see how simple past negative utterance was realized through the introduction 'yí' which also functioned in changing the active sentence to a passive sentence.

### 4.3 Negation and Relativization in Irrua

Negation is the grammatical process of making a sentence negative, while relativization in linguistics, refers to the grammatical process of forming a relative clause, such as adding "who", "which", "that" etc to modify a noun. Consider the examples below;

1(a) olè. támá lén we o iheomlèn  
He/she tell he/she that he/she love  
“He told her that he loves her”

(b) òlè **bhá** támà lén **wẹ** òìhòèmlèn  
he NEG tell her that love her  
"he did not tell her that he loves her"

2(a) eni ókpíà wén ányòn odé  
the man drink drink yesterday  
“the man got drunk last night “

(b) é **yí** eni ókpíà, **wẹn** ányòn nòdè  
It is NEG the man that drink yesterday  
"It is not the man who got drunk last night"

3(a) olé támà lèn ébolékhin  
He/she tell he/she who he/she is  
“He told her who he was”

(b) òlè **bhá** támà **é**bolékhin

he/she NEG tell who he/she is  
"he did not tell her who he was"

In the data above (1 - 3), we can see how relative markers are affixed to negative sentences in Irrua. In (1b & 3b), the negation marker *bhá* precedes the relative marker *wɛn* and *ébo* respectively. In (2b), the negation marker *yí* precedes the relative marker *wɛn*. These examples show the various manifestation of negation markers in forming relative utterances in the dialect. It can take the *bhá* form and can also take the *yí* form depending on the sentence.

#### 4.4 Negation and Reflexivization in Irrua

Negation is the grammatical process of making a sentence negative, while reflexivization is a grammatical process in which an action or relation described by a verb (or predicate) refers to the same participant as both the agent and the patient or object, often expressed by a reflexive pronoun (e.g., "myself," "himself") or a reflexive verb form. Consider the examples below;

1(a). *imé tóbɔmwɛn lú òlè*

me myself do it

"I did it myself"

(b) *é yì mé tóboómwɛn lú òlè*

It is NEG me myself do it

"I did not do it myself"

2(a). Ímá **tóbomái** lú òlè

we ourselves do it

"We will do it ourselves"

(b). Ímáí **khíán sàbó tóbomái** lú òlè

we go NEG ourselves do it

"We will not do it ourselves"

3(a). ùwé à lú òlè **négbèèi**

You will do it yourself

"You will do it yourself"

(b). ùwé **khíán sàbó** lú òlè **négbèèi**

You go NEG do it yourself

"You will not do it yourself"

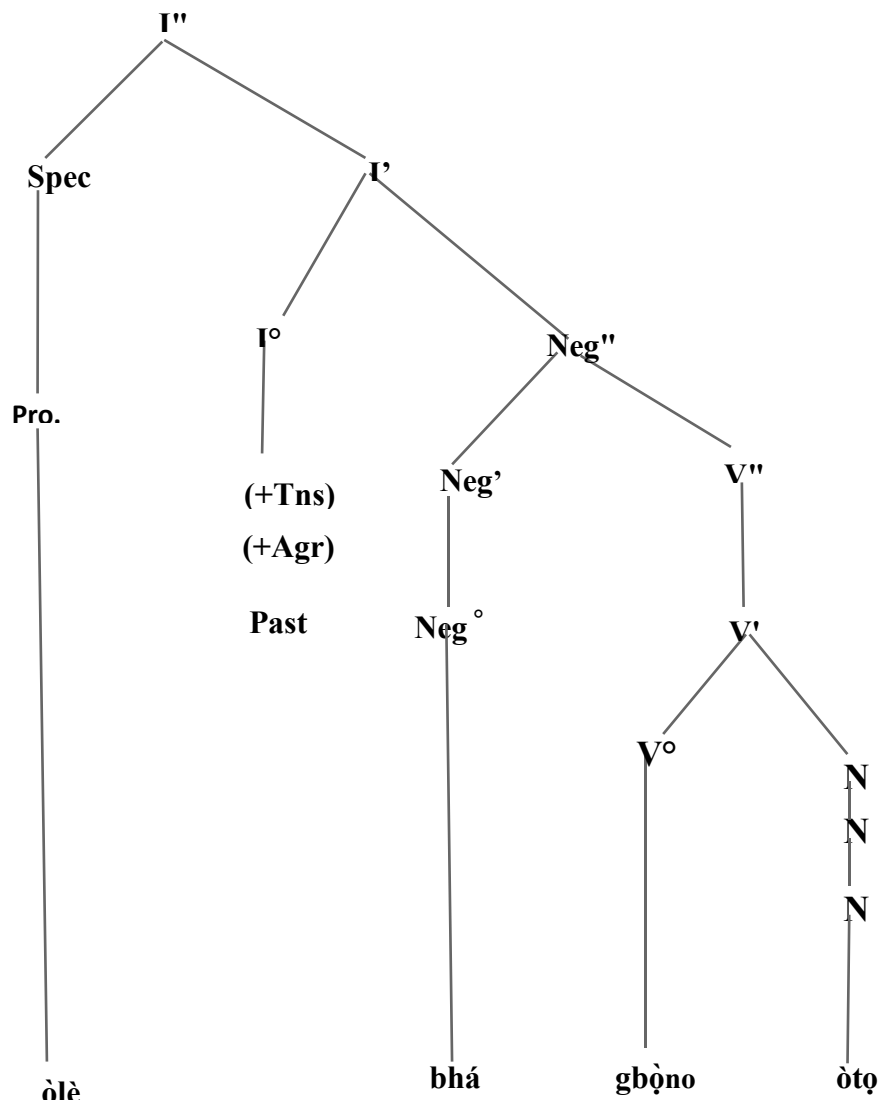
As seen in data (1 - 3) above, we can see how the personal pronouns and anaphors are co-indexed in the same governing category or local domain (Binding Condition/Principle A: Anaphors (reflexives) are bound in their local domain)). The negation markers take different forms as seen from the data above, in (1b), the negation marker 'yì' comes before the first person object pronoun "me" and its reflexive "myself", while in (2b & 3b), the negation marker is 'sàbó' which is a future negation marker.

## 4.5 X-bar representation of Negation in Irrua

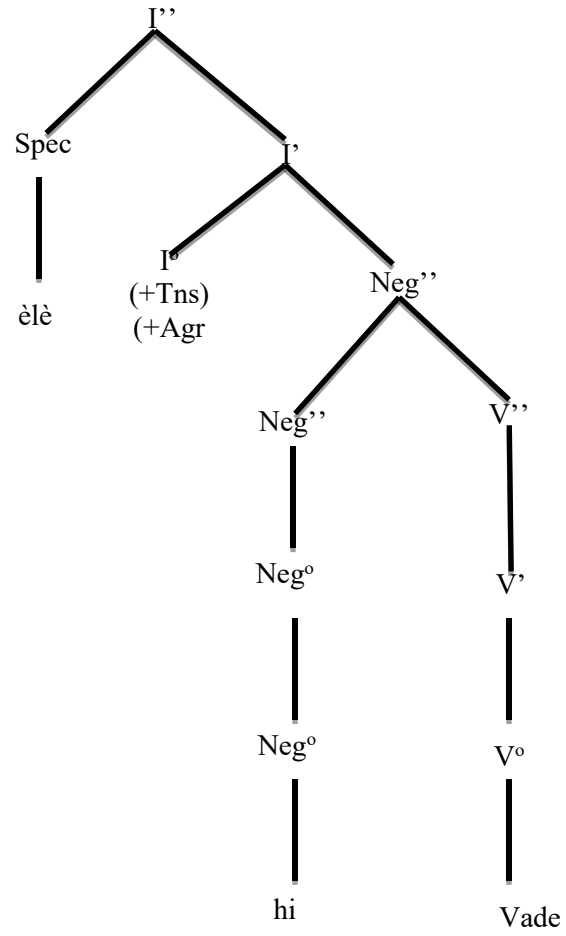
Below is a tree diagram showing all the identified negation markers in Irrua as seen from the analysis in (4.1.1 - 4.1.5)

### Using the X-bar theory

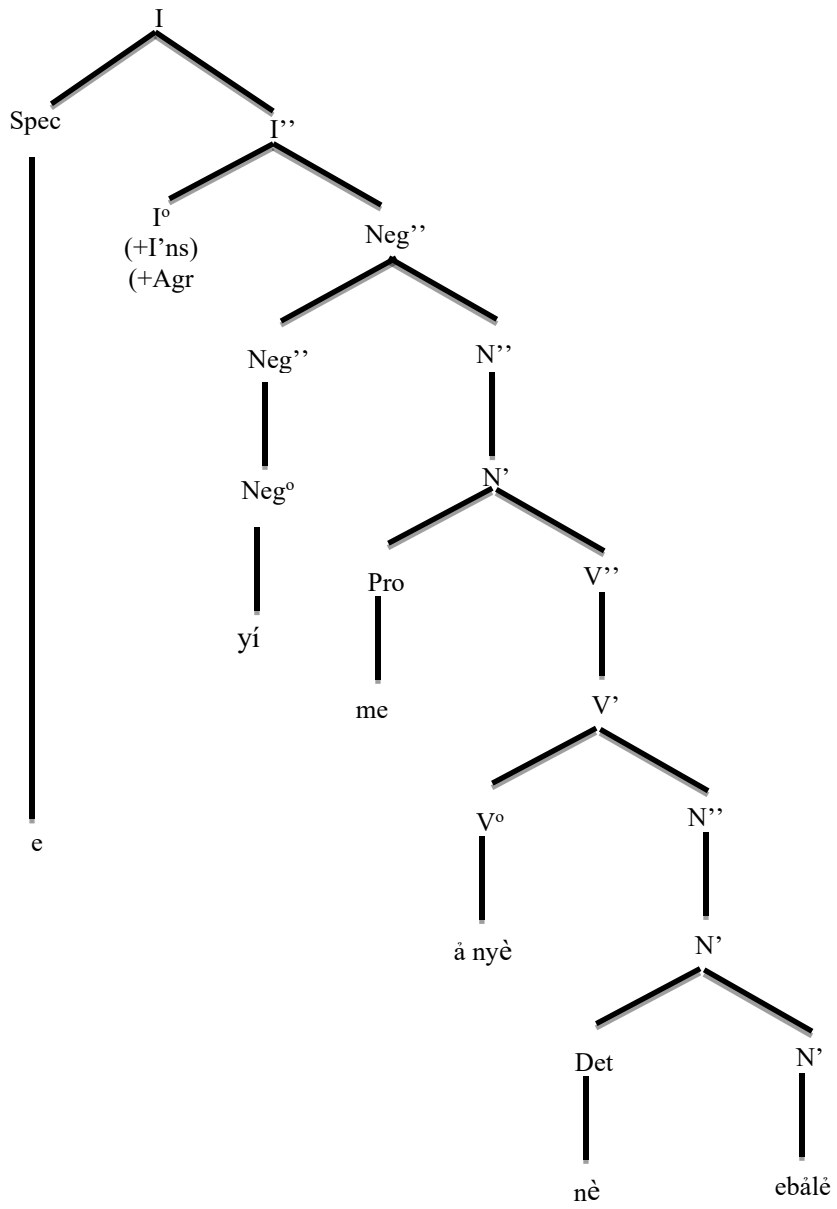
bhá negator



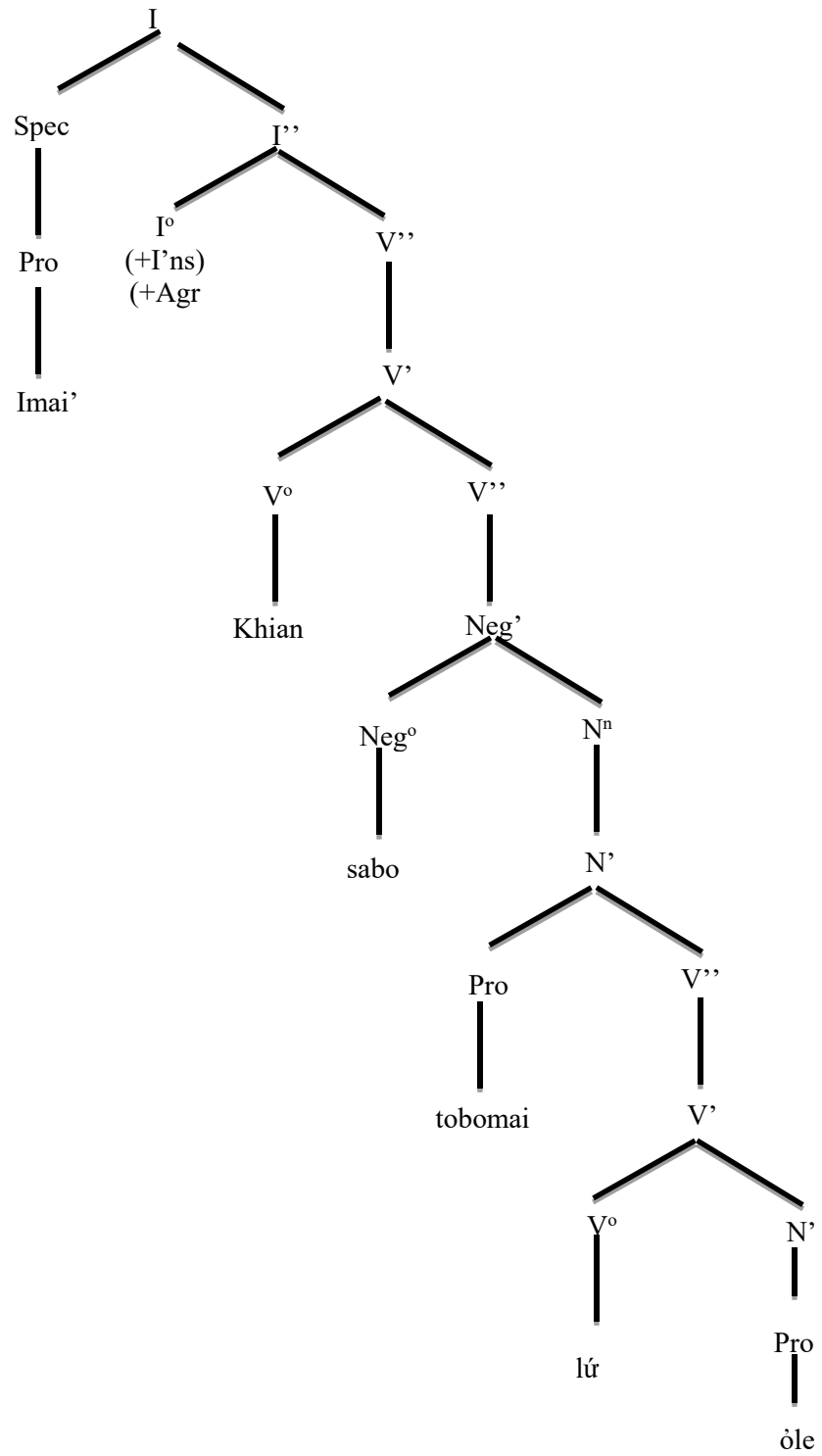
hí negator



yí negator



sabo negator



## 4.6 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of negation markers in the Irrua variety of Èsàn revealed a rich and systematic pattern of how negation operates across tense, voice, and syntactic structures. The study identifies four main negators — **bhá**, **hí**, **yí**, and **sàbó** — each performing specific grammatical roles depending on context. The **bhá** marker is strictly used for past tense negation, appearing before the verb to indicate an action that did not occur, as in “òlè bhá gbòṇò òtò” (“S/he did not sweep the floor”). This shows that **bhá** functions as a pre-verbal negator in kernel sentences and maintains a fixed syntactic position. The **hí** negator is used for future tense negation, expressing denial of an event expected to happen later, and like **bhá**, it also occurs before the verb. The **yí** negator serve more complex syntactic functions, it converts active sentences into negative sentences. In these cases, the negator may precede a pronoun or auxiliary verb introduced in the negative form, showing flexibility in syntactic placement depending on sentence transformation. The **sàbó** marker is used mainly in reflexive and future constructions, often appearing next to reflexive pronouns or following the future tense marker “khían,” as in “Ímái khían sàbó tóbòmái lú òlè” (“We will not do it ourselves”). Across all examples, negators in Irrua are generally pre-verbal, reinforcing a consistent syntactic pattern where negation precedes the verb phrase. The interaction between negation and passivization shows that negators not only negate but also trigger

structural changes such as the introduction of a pronoun and auxiliary verbs like “è” (“it is”) to form passives. Similarly, negation and reflexivization demonstrate that reflexive pronouns remain bound within their local domains even in negative contexts, with negators like “yì” and “sàbó” maintaining their pre-verbal positions. The findings show that negation in Irrua is a morphosyntactically organized system, sensitive to tense, sentence type, and grammatical relations, and that it plays an essential role in shaping meaning and structure. The four negators differ in both distribution and function, illustrating how negation interacts with other grammatical processes to maintain clarity, emphasis, and logical coherence in Irrua syntax.



The fourth chapter has as its main concern the data presentation and analysis. The analysis was drawn from the presented data. The theoretical framework was used to organize and analyze the data.

## **5.2 Findings**

The findings of this research work align with the stated research objectives as follows:

1. The study identified four negation markers in the Irrua dialect: *bhá*, *hí*, *yí*, and *sàbó*. Each marker is tense-sensitive—*bhá* for past, *hí* for future, *yí* is used when an active negative utterance is changed to a passive negative utterance, while *sàbó* appears in reflexive future contexts.
2. Negation markers in Irrua consistently appear before the verb across all sentence types. This pre-verbal positioning is fixed, even in complex structures.
3. Negation in Irrua works smoothly with passivization, relativization, and reflexivization. Negation markers retain their pre-verbal position in all these constructions. They do not interfere with relative markers or reflexive pronouns, showing that negation integrates easily into various sentence types without disrupting sentence structure.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study reveals that negation in the Irrua Variety of É̀s̀n employs lexical strategies, with four distinct negative markers used based on tense and context. These markers consistently appear before the verb, maintaining a fixed NEG–V structure. Furthermore, negation integrates seamlessly with complex syntactic processes such as passivization, relativization, and reflexivization, without altering sentence structure. This highlights the systematic and flexible nature of negation strategies in the dialect.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

The researcher recommend further study on this research work and areas not touched in this research work or any aspect of negation strategies in Irrua Variety of É̀s̀n language or É̀s̀n language in general be carried out by scholars, linguists and any other person interested in the syntax of irrua and É̀s̀n language.

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