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## **Negation in Èkìtì: A critique**

**Abstract.** The dialects of Yorùbá spoken in Èkìtì state exhibit specific tonal characteristics which involve the system of negative markers. The negative markers in the Èkìtì dialects are *kè, ì, rì* and *móò / mọ̀ọ̀*. Our study of the Èkìtì dialects shows that (a) the High Tone Syllable (HTS) regularly occurs there before the negation markers (**k**)è and **i**, and (b) the putative negator **éi** is actually a combination of the HTS and the negation marker **i**. The third true negator in the dialects, namely **rì**, requires the so-called negativising prefix **àì** in Standard Yorùbá to be re-analyzed as the prefix **à-** followed by the negation marker (**r**)ì.

### **0 Introduction**

The name **Èkìtì** was etymologically derived from **Òkìtì** ‘Mound’ (Oguntuyi 1979). Today Èkìtì is one of the thirty-six states that make up the nation, Nigeria. Its headquarters’ is at Ado-Èkìtì. Èkìtì State shares boundaries with Kwara State in the North, Àkókó in the East, Àkúrè-Òwò in the South and Ìjèddà in the West. Èkìtì has an area of about 2,100 square miles and a population of about 3,000,000 according to the Nigeria 2006 census statistics. There is considerable linguistic diversity in Èkìtì States, as the state is the home to the speakers of Èkìtì and Mọ̀bà dialects. Èkìtì people are peaceful and progressive. The staple food in Èkìtì is Pounded Yam.

### **The Èkìtì Linguistic Area**

Èkìtì dialects belong to the Central Yorùbá (CY) dialect group comprising the Ìjèsà, Ifè, Èkìtì and Mọ̀bà speech forms, (Awóbùlúyì 1998: 2). They are spoken mainly in Èkìtì State as well as in some parts of Ondó State, both of them in South Western Nigeria. Like the other

dialects in the CY group, Èkìtì dialects are not completely homogeneous. They are spoken in fourteen out of the eighteen local government areas in Èkìtì State. The local governments in question are, Adó, Ìdó/Òsì, Gbónyìn, Ìjèrò, Oyé, Ìkòlè, Ìsẹ̀Òruń, Èfòn-alààyè, Emùré, Ìkéré, Ìrẹ̀pòdùn/ Ìfẹ̀dòré, Èkìtì west, Èkìtì East, and Èkìtì South-West. Each town or village in the various local governments speaks its own local variant. In Òndó State, the following towns speak their own local variants as well: Àkùré, Ijù, Ìta-Ògbólú, Ìjàré, Òbà-ilé, Ayédé-Ògbèsè, Ìlára, Àfìn- Àkókó and Ìrùn- Ògbàgì-Àkókó.

All the towns and villages in Mọ̀bà local government area and most of those in the Ìlẹ̀jeméje local government area of Èkìtì State speak Mọ̀bà dialects, which are recognizably different from those spoken in the towns and villages indicated directly above. The towns Ìyemọ̀rò, Ìpaò, Ìrèle, Òkè- Àkò in Ìkòlè local government area and some parts of Òmùò local government area speak Yàgbà dialects.

## 1 Literature on Negation in Ekiti

Earlier works which focus on negation in Ekiti dialects include Adétùgbó (1982) and Sàláwù (1998, 2001). Adétùgbó (1982:218) claims that the dialects polarize positiveness and negativeness in their short pronouns, back vowels expressing positiveness while front vowels express negativeness, as in

1. i. **wọ lọ** 'you went'
- ii. **wẹ̀ lọ** 'you did not go'

Sàláwù (1998, 2001), more narrowly focused than (Adétùgbó 1982), looks in some detail at the function and structural distribution of negation markers in the syntax of the dialects. He recognizes the following as negation markers there: **kè; mó/mọ́; éi, i** and **àrì**. Regrettably, however, there are some inadequacies in this work. In the first place, it is based on Ìkòlè and is therefore of limited territorial coverage; Sàláwù himself indirectly acknowledges this (2001:102).

Secondly, some of the data used in the work, as well as the conclusions drawn from them, are questionable. The present paper will demonstrate this as it revisits the whole issue of negation in the dialects with a view to showing the various actual forms and distributions of the elements that indicate it.

## 2 The Negation Markers

The following are the true negation markers in Èkìtì dialects : **kè; i; rì; móò/mòò**.

**2.1 The Negative Marker *Kè* ‘not’.** Èkìtì dialects make use of this negator as correctly indicated by Sàláwù (1998, 2001). The dialects obligatorily delete the consonant in the negator, thereby enabling its stranded vowel to assimilate to the last vowel of any preceding item as shown in (2a-c) below.

2.	I		II		III								
a.	<b>Sànyà</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>Sànyà</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>Sànyá</b>	<b>à</b>	<b>sùn</b>		
	Sànyà	NEG	sleep		Deletion				‘Sànyà did not sleep’				
b.	<b>A</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>A</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>Á</b>	<b>à</b>	<b>sùn</b>		
	We	NEG	sleep		Deletion				‘We did not sleep’				
c.	[NP Ø]	<b>ó</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>lọ</b>	→	<b>Ó</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>lọ</b>	→	[NP ø	<b>é</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>lọ</b> ]
		HTS	NEG	go		Deletion				‘He	did	not	go’

Sàláwù (1998, 2001) states that the tonal change in the last syllable of the subject NP in step III of (2a) above occurs because a verb phrase immediately follows it. In fact, however, the tone in question constitutes the high tone syllable (HTS) which regularly occurs before the negator **kè** in Èkìtì dialects. This is shown more clearly in (3) below.

(3)(a)	<b>A</b>	<b>ó</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>gbe</b>	→	<b>Á</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>gbe</b>	→	<b>Á</b>	<b>à</b>	<b>gbe</b>
	We	HTS	NEG	carry						‘We did not carry it.’		
(b)	<b>Sànyà</b>	<b>ó</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>Sànyà</b>	<b>è</b>	<b>sùn</b>	→	<b>Sànyá</b>	<b>à</b>	<b>sùn</b>
	Sànyà	HTS	NEG	sleep						‘Sànyà did not sleep’		

The derivation involved is shown still more clearly in (4) below.

(4)	I		II						
	<b>A</b>	<b>ó</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>gbe</b>	Base form	<b>Sànyà</b>	<b>ó</b>	<b>kè</b>	<b>sùn</b>
	We	HTS	NEG	carry		Sànyà	HTS	NEG	sleep

<b>A</b> ' <b>è gbe</b> We HTS NEG carry	Deletion	<b>Sànyà</b> ' <b>è sùn</b> Sànyà HTS NEG sleep
<b>Á</b> <b>è gbe</b> We NEG carry	HTS & Tone transfer	<b>Sànyá</b> <b>è sùn</b> Sànyà NEG sleep
<b>Á</b> <b>à gbe</b> We NEG carry 'We did not carry it'.	Vowel assimilation	<b>Sànyá</b> <b>à sùn</b> Sànyà NEG sleep 'Sànyà did not sleep'.

As shown in (3) and (4) above, the underlying form of the HTS is **ó** (Awóbùlúyì 1992:32; Bámgbósé 1990:180). The deletion of the vowel of the HTS causes its stranded high tone to attach to the vowel of the last syllable of the subject NP. Thus, the HTS **ó** which regularly occurs between the subject NP and the negation **kè** is what actually accounts for the tonal change in the last syllable of the subject NP in (2a-b) above. The change has nothing at all to do with the NP being followed by a verb phrase, as suggested by Salawu (1998, 2001).

In (2c)  $\emptyset$  indicates a null third person singular subject pronoun, which shows that subject pronoun's position is vacant. Because the pronoun never shows up in its position in this utterance type in Èkìtì dialects (cf Olúmúyìwá 2006), Sàláwu (2001:107), like most other Yoruba scholars, took the HTS, always the first overt element there, as the third person singular subject pronoun in Èkìtì. But that view is not consistent with the facts of the language seen from the standpoint of the form/derivation of the third person singular in Yorùbá (Awóbùlúyì 2008: 234-235). In Èkìtì, the third person singular pronoun is phonetically null in subject position, just as happens in Standard Yorùbá. Because the third person singular subject pronoun is phonetically null in (2c), the HTS necessarily retains its vowel there. Only the consonant of the negator gets deleted, and that deletion paves the way for the vowel of the HTS to assimilate to the vowel of the negator, as in the derivation directly below.

(5)	$\emptyset$	<b>ó kè gbe</b> HTS NEG carry	Base form
	$\emptyset$	<b>ó è gbe</b> HTS NEG carry	Deletion

Ø      **é è gbe**      Assimilation  
 HTS NEG carry  
 ‘He did not carry it’

The assimilation in this case is regressive and not progressive, as we saw in (2a-b). This would appear to be explained by the homonymy avoidance principle that is known to operate extensively in Yorùbá (Awóbùlúyì 1992:9). This can be seen by comparing (5) with (6iii) below.

All the examples in (6) show that other pronouns in Èkiti have high tone in negative constructions.

(6)	<b>Ìjerò</b>				
	Base	Deletion (1)	Deletion (2)	Surface	
i.	<b>mi ó kè gbe</b> I HTS NEG carry	<b>mí kè gbe</b>	<b>mí è gbe</b>	<b>mí ì gbe</b>	‘I did not carry it.’
ii.	<b>mi ó kè lọ</b> I HTS NEG go	<b>mí kè lọ</b>	<b>mí è lọ</b>	<b>mí ì lọ</b>	‘I did not carry it.’
iii.	<b>o ó kè gbe</b> You HTS carry	<b>ó kè gbe</b>	<b>ó è gbe</b>	<b>ó ò gbe</b>	‘You did not carry it.’
iv.	<b>ọ ó kè lọ</b> You HTS NEG go	<b>ó kè lọ</b>	<b>ó è lọ</b>	<b>ó ò lọ</b>	‘You did not go.’
v.	<b>a ó kè gbe</b> we HTS NEG carry	<b>á kè gbe</b>	<b>á è gbe</b>	<b>á à gbe</b>	‘We did not carry it.’
vi.	<b>a ó kè lọ</b> we HTS NEG go	<b>á kè lọ</b>	<b>á è lọ</b>	<b>á à lọ</b>	‘We did not go.’
vii.	<b>in ó kè gbe</b> You HTS NEG carry (PL)	<b>ín kè gbe</b>	<b>ín è gbe</b>	<b>ín ìn gbe</b>	‘You (pl.) did not carry it.’
viii.	<b>in ó kè lọ</b> You HTS NEG go (PL)	<b>ín kè lọ</b>	<b>ín è lọ</b>	<b>ín ìn lọ</b>	‘You (pl.) did not go.’
ix.	<b>ọn ó kè gbe</b> They HTS NEG carry	<b>ọ́n kè gbe</b>	<b>ọ́n è gbe</b>	<b>ọ́n òn gbe</b>	‘They did not carry it.’

**2.2 The Negative Marker i ‘not’.** Sàláwù (1998:45-46, 50; 2001:110-111) claims that **éi** and **i** are two different negators in Èkiti dialects. He believes that **éi** has a dual purpose in

syntactic relationship between focusing and negation. In his words, “It is used to negate NPs as in (7i) or to negate sentences” as in (7ii):

- 7i. **Éi se Olú**  
NEG be Olú ‘It is not **Olú**’
- ii. **Ée se iwé kì mọ rà**  
NEG be book foc I buy ‘It is not a book that I bought’

There is no difference between (7i) and (7ii), however. For that reason, the issue of **éi** having a dual purpose in the syntax of Èkiti dialects does not arise. As a matter of fact, **éi** is per se not a negation marker in Èkiti. Our findings reveal that **éi** is a combination of the HTS and the negator **i**. Witness its occurrence in (8):

(8) **Adó**

- i. **Olè ó i sùn** → **Olè´ i sùn** → **Olé i sùn**  
thief HTS NEG sleep ‘Thieves do not sleep’.
- ii. **sògo ó i sùn** → **sogo´ i sùn** → **sògó i sùn**  
Sògo HTS NEG sleep ‘Sogo does not sleep’.
- iii. **[NP Ø] ó i sùn** → **[NP Ø] ó i sùn** → **[NP Ø] é i sùn**  
HTS NEG Sleep HTS NEG sleep ‘He does not sleep’.
- iv. **[NP Ø] ó i se Olú** → **[NP Ø] ó i se olu** → **[NP Ø] é i se olú**  
HTS NEG be Olú HTS NEG be olú ‘It is not olú’.

In (8i-ii) above, the vowel of the HTS gets deleted, with its tone subsequently, transferred to the last syllable of the subject. However, in (8iii-iv), where the subject NP in the form of the third person singular subject pronoun fails to show up, the HTS retains its form. Partial assimilation occurs between the HTS and **i**, the negator in (8iii-iv), as shown more clearly in

- (9) **ó + i** → **é + i** → **é i** → **(é e)**

This type of assimilation is known to operate extensively in Yorùbá dialects, especially the Ọ̀yọ́ dialect, (Abímbọ́lá and Oyèláràn 1975:44-45).

(10) **Ọ̀yọ́**

- i. **òyìnbó** → **òìnbó** → **èèbó** ‘white man’
- ii. **Mo fi gé e** → **mo i gé e** → **me e gé e** ‘I used it to cut something’

As the foregoing discussion has shown in 2.1 and 2.2, the occurrence of the HTS with negators in Èkìtì dialects strengthens Dechaine's (1993:488) claim that that same element (HTS) co-occurs with negators in Ọ̀wọ̀rọ̀ and correspondingly weakens the popular belief that it does not occur in any shape or form with negators in Standard Yorùbá. (Awóbùlúyì (personal communication) postulates a zero form for it before negators in Standard Yoruba in his forthcoming work on Yorùbá grammar).

**2.3 The Negative Marker *rì/ì* 'not'.** Sàláwù (2001:112) believes that this negation marker has the form **àrì** in Èkìtì dialects. According to him, **àrì** is a prefix morpheme used to negate verbs. Our findings show, however, that the actual form of this negation marker in Èkìtì dialects is **rì/ì**, and it is used to negate verb phrase(s) in some of those dialects- in 'Ìkòlé and Ọ̀yé. For example,

- (11) **Ká se é kọ ọ rì jẹ tń?**  
Why is it that you neg eat finish 'Why is it that you did not finish eating it.'
- ii. **Ká sè é kì Ibùnmi rì gbe?**  
Why is it that Bunmi neg carry 'Why is it that Bùnmi did not carry it?'
- iii. **Ká sè é kì Itópé rì á?**  
Why is it that itope neg come 'Why is it that Tópé did not turn up?'

In the vast majority of such dialects, **rì** is only used to negate VPs in nominalizations,

- (12) **Ayégúnlẹ̀**
- i. **À jẹ rì jẹ tń**  
Prefix eat neg eat finish 'Eating without finishing'
- ii. **À rì lọ**  
Prefix neg go 'Failure to go'
- iii. **À bù rì bù tń**  
prefix cut neg cut finish 'Cutting without finishing'

The negation marker **rì** as used in (11) and (12) above shows that (a) **àrì** is not a single morpheme in Èkìtì dialects; and (b) the so-called negativizing prefix **àì**, which some Yorùbá scholars believe to be a single morpheme in Standard Yorùbá (Bámgbósé 1990:106; Owólabí

1995:92, 108; Sàláwù 1998, 2001 and Táíwò 2004, 2006) is actually the nominalizing prefix **à-**, followed by the negator **ì**, as shown in (13) below.

(13) **Yorùbá**

- |      |                           |                             |
|------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| i.   | <b>à jẹ̀ ì jẹ̀ tán</b>    | ‘eating without finishing’  |
|      | prefix eat neg eat finish |                             |
| ii.  | <b>à ì lọ</b>             | ‘failure to go’             |
|      | prefix neg go             |                             |
| iii. | <b>à ì gbẹ</b>            | ‘failure to carry it’       |
|      | prefix neg carry          |                             |
| iv.  | <b>à bù ì bù tán</b>      | ‘cutting without finishing’ |
|      | prefix cut neg cut finish |                             |

This position agrees with Oyèbádé and Ìlòrí (2004) and Awóbùlúyì (2005) who believe that **àì** consists of two separate morphemes.

**2.4 The Negative Marker Mòò/mọ̀ ‘not’.** Sàláwù (1998:43, 2001:108) claims that the form of this negator in Èkìtì dialects is **mó/mọ̀**, and that it is used in clauses, as in (14i), and in phrases, as in (14ii).

- |         |                 |   |  |
|---------|-----------------|---|--|
| (14) i. | <b>mó gbẹ e</b> |   | ‘Don’t carry it.’                                    |
|         | NEG carry it    |   |  |
| ii.     | <b>gùn líyè</b> | → | <b>gùn mọ líyè</b>                                   |
|         | long have life  |   | long NEG have life                                   |
|         |                 |   | ‘A person of towering stature<br>but not much sense’ |

Our findings however, show that the actual form of this negator is **móò/mọ̀̀**, and it is used mostly to negate imperatives in Èkìtì dialects. The choice between the two variants **móò/mọ̀̀** depends on the tongue height of the vowel of the verb that follows. When the vowel of the verb that follows is half-close or close, **móò** is used. The alternant **mọ̀̀** is used when the vowel of the verb that follows it is open or half-open. Examples of their usage taken from the Ìsẹ̀ speech form include the following:

- |         |                |                    |
|---------|----------------|--------------------|
| (15) i. | <b>móò gbẹ</b> | ‘Don’t carry it.’  |
|         | neg carry      |                    |
| ii.     | <b>móò ki</b>  | ‘Don’t greet him.’ |
|         | neg great      |                    |



- iii. **móò kè é mọ́**            ‘Stop crying.’  
neg cry stop
- iv. **mọ̀ jà**                    ‘Don’t fight.’  
Neg fight
- v. **Ọ́ yọ̀ọ́ mọ̀ọ́ lọ**            ‘He can fail to go.’  
He can neg go

### 3. Conclusion

This re-examination of the issue of negation in Èkìtì dialects has shown that the HTS regularly occurs before the negation markers (**k**)è and **i** in the dialects, a fact which Sàláwù (1998, 2001) appears not to have realized. What he calls the negator **éi** in the dialects is here reanalyzed as a combination of the HTS and the negation marker **i**. The co-occurrence of the HTS with negators is not completely unknown in Standard Yorùbá and some of its dialects. The data cited to show that **rì** still occurs in some areas as a VP negator should, one hopes, now permanently lay to rest the issue of whether or not **àrì** or **àì** is a single morpheme. On the evidence cited, it is certainly a combination of two morphemes.

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