

Object movement in negative constructions in standard Yorùbá

Abstract

*The object of the negative verb **sí** ‘to be’ in standard Yorùbá can optionally move to the specifier of the IP in the same clause. This feature is however, peculiar to this verb. The movement of the object of **sí** can only take place where **sí** occurs with the negative morpheme **kò** or **kì**. This paper also establishes the fact that the verb **sí** cannot occur in an affirmative sentence. It has an affirmative counterpart in **wà** that occurs in that environment. **Wà** can only occur in a negative sentence with **kò** if it is preceded by the pre-verb **lè**. The syntactic process where the object of **sí** moves to the empty subject position is called object movement in negative constructions.*

Keywords – negative verb, object, **sí** ‘to be’, **kò/kì**, **movement**

Introduction

This paper discusses object movement in negative constructions in standard Yorùbá within the Principles and Parameters (PPT) framework of generative syntax. NP movement is a substitution rule whereby one constituent is substituted for another (empty) one (Radford 1988). Therefore, a category must be moved to a landing site which has the same property of the moved category. Movement is upward only; the moved category is moved to a higher position. Another characteristic of NP movement is that it always moves an NP from a position where an NP receives a θ -role to a position to which no θ -role is assigned.

Based on these characteristics, we shall discuss object (NP) movement in negative constructions in standard Yorùbá. The object of a particular verb, **sí** ‘be’, moves to a hitherto empty subject position in the same sentence. The movement is, however, not obligatory as the object **sí** can remain in situ and the utterance is still well formed. **Sí** ‘be’, occurs only in negative constructions and is therefore tagged a negative verb in the language most importantly when it has **wà** ‘be’ as its positive counterpart. The syntactic process where the object of **sí** moves to the empty subject position is called object movement in negative constructions.

Negative sentences in Yorùbá

In Yorùbá, negative constructions are marked by the following negative morphemes: ‘kò’, ‘kì’ and ‘màá’ (Bámgbóṣé 1967: 20). ‘kò’ can be realized as ‘kò’ or ‘ò’ in different environments. It is ‘ò’ when it refers to the first person singular or plural as in (1a), while it is ‘kò’ in other environments. These negative morphemes occur in the sentences below.

- 1a. Èmi ò ní lọ sí oko.
 I neg fut.neg. go to farm
 ‘I will not go to the farm’.
- b. Kò sí owó ní ọwọ Adé.
 Neg be money in hand Adé
 ‘Money is not in Ade’s hand’/ ‘Ade does not have money’.
- c. Kì yóò sí ójó ní osù kẹwàá.
 neg fut. be rain in month ten
 ‘There will be no rain in the tenth month’.
- d. Òjó kò lọ sí Èkó.
 Ojo neg go to Lagos
 ‘Ojo did not go to Lagos’.
- e. Ayọ kì yóò rí wa nínú ilé
 Ojo neg fut. see us inside house
 ‘Ojo will not see us in the house’.
- f. Bàbá kò wá sí ìpàdé òní.
 Father neg come to meeting today
 ‘The father did not attend today’s meeting’.
- g. Mára jẹ iyán yẹn.
 Neg. eat pounded-yam that
 ‘Don’t that pounded-yam’.

From (1a-g), it is observed that ‘màá’ can only occur in an imperative sentence where the speaker is issuing a directive, as in (1g), while ‘kì’, ‘kò’ and ‘ò’ can be used in any other sentence-type, like the declarative, interrogative and exclamatory, but not the imperative.

A careful examination of the negative sentences above reveals that (1b), (1c) and (1g) have no subjects while others have. The subjects in (1d) - (1f) could be dropped and yet the sentences would be grammatical as in (2a)–(2c) below.

- 2a. Kò lọ sí Èkó.
Neg go to Lagos
'S/he/It did not go to Lagos'.
- b kì yóò rí wa nínú ilé
neg fut. see us inside house
'S/he/It will not see us in the house'.
- c kò wá sí ìpàdé òní.
neg come to meeting today
'S/he did not attend today's meeting'.
- d kò ní rí wa nínú ilé
neg fut.neg see us inside house
'S/he/It will not see us in the house'.

The sentences in (2a – c) are those in (1c –e) without subjects, while (2d) is a variant of (2c). Another observation is that the verb in (1b) and (1c) has objects. The verb is *sí* 'be' and the objects are *owó* 'money' in (1a) and *òjò* 'rain' in (1c). We shall discuss the object of the verb in negative construction in this article.

Object movement in Negative Constructions

The sentences in (1b) and (1c) have the D – structures in (3).

- 3 a [e] kò sí owó ní ọwọ Adé.
neg be money in hand Ade
'Money is not in Ade's hand'/'Ade does not have money'.
- b [e] kǐ yóò sí ójọ ní osù kẹwàá.
neg fut. be rain in month ten
'There will be no rain in the tenth month'.

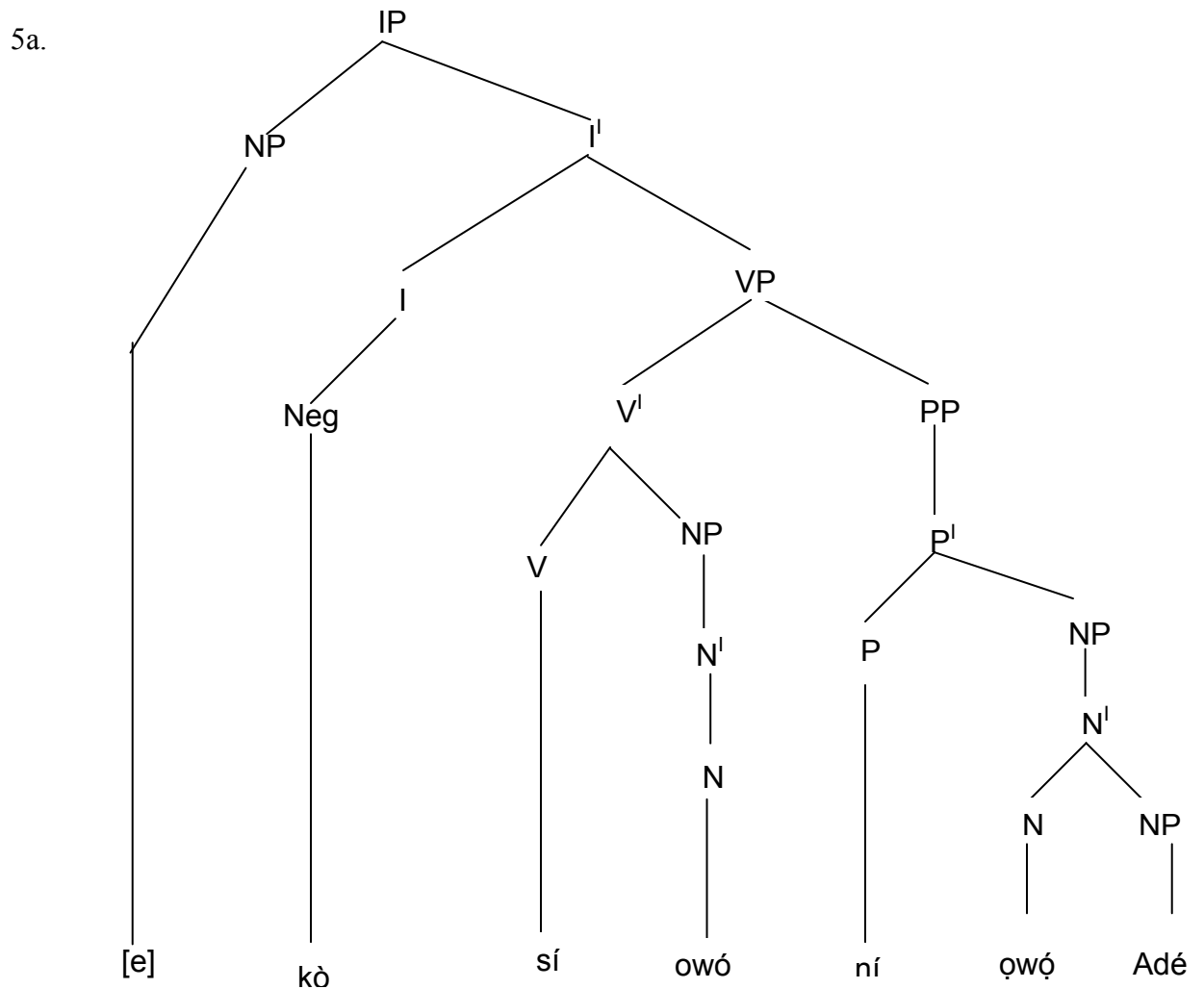
The objects of the verb *sí* 'be' can be moved to the empty positions in (3) thereby leaving behind their traces in accordance with one of the characteristics of NP movement. Consider the examples in (4) below.

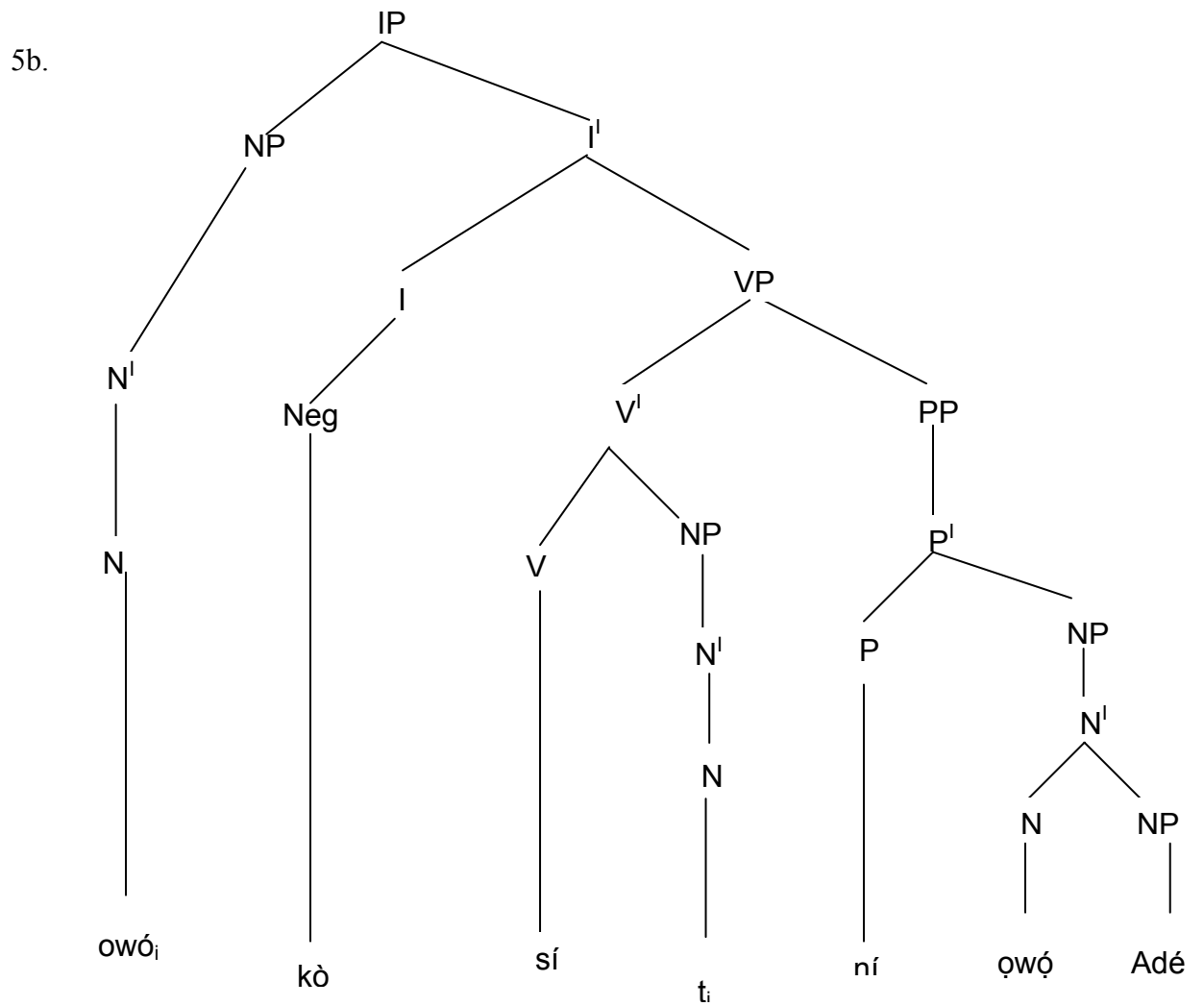
- 4 a Owó_i kò sí t_i ní ọwọ Adé.
Money neg be in hand Ade

‘Ade does not have money’.

- b. Òjò_i kǐ yóo sí t_i ní osù kẹwàá.
 rain neg. fut. be in month ten
 ‘There will be no rain in the tenth month’.

The objects in (3) are moved to the same syntactic positions in (4); i.e. they are moved to the same NP positions. This movement is upward to a higher position in the clause as is explicated in the tree-diagram in (5b). These objects were moved from a theta position where they were theta-marked by the verb *sí* to a non-theta position where they cannot receive any θ -role. The examples in (3a) and (4a) are represented in the tree diagrams in (5a) and (5b) respectively.





It is not possible to have an expletive in the empty subject positions of (3) hence; the sentences in (6) below are ill-formed.

- 6 a. *Ó kò sí owó ní ọwọ́ Adé
 It neg. be money in hand Ade
- b. *Ó kò ní sí ójó ní osù kẹwàá
 It neg. fut.neg be rain in month ten

Motivation for movement

In Yorùbá, the subject of the negative sentence is not morphologically marked if the said subject is the third person singular short pronoun (Awobuluyi 1992, 2001a & b). The sentences in (7) have short pronouns as subjects except (7e) which does not have a subject.

- 7 a. Mi ò fẹ́ gbọ́ ọ̀rò yín.
I neg want hear word you (pl)
'I don't want to hear your word'.
- b. A ò ní sọ́ fún wọn.
we neg fut.neg say give them
'We will not inform them'.
- c. O ò rí Adé.
you (sg) neg. see Adé
'You (sg) did not see Adé'.
- d. E ò kọ́ lẹ́tà náà.
you (pl) neg. write letter the
'You (pl) did not write the letter'.
- e. Kò rí mi.
neg. see me
'He/She/It did not see me'.
- f. Wọn kò rí mi.
they neg. see me
'They did not see me'.

In (7e), the subject is not realized because it is the third person singular short pronoun.

The D- structure of the sentence in (7e) is given below resembles those in (3).

8. [e] kò rí mi.
neg. see me
'He/She did not see me'.

Despite the resemblance, the object of the verb *rí* 'see' cannot be moved to the empty subject position in (8) unlike what we have in (4). However, the movement in (4) is optional because either of the sentences in (3) or (4) below is grammatical.

Though the movement as explained above is optional, there is a slight difference between the negative sentences where the objects are in-situ and the ones where these objects are moved to the subject positions. When a mild emphasis or communicative

prominence is placed on the object of the verb *sí*, then the object is moved to the subject position of the sentence to that effect. This is the situation in the sentences in (4) and similar ones. However, when no such emphasis or communicative prominence is intended, then the object of *sí* remains in-situ while the subject position is empty as in the sentences in (3) and similar ones.

The Verb *sí* ‘be’

The verb *sí* ‘be’ is referred to as a negative verb. This is because it occurs only in negative and not affirmative constructions. Consider the sentences below.

- 9a. Owó kò sí ní ọwọ Adé
 Money neg. be in hand Ade
 ‘Ade has no money’.
- b. *Owó sí ní ọwọ Adé
 Money be in hand Ade
- c. Owó wà ní ọwọ Adé
 Money be in hand Ade
 ‘Ade has money’.
- 10a. Ojò kǐ yóò sí ní ọsù kẹwáá
 rain neg. fut. be in month ten
 ‘There will be no rain in the tenth month’.
- b. *Ójó yòó sí ní ọsù kẹwáá
 rain fut. be in month ten
- c. Ójó yòó wà ní ọsù kẹwáá
 rain fut. be in month ten
 ‘There will be rain the tenth month’.

The sentences in (9c) and (10c) are the affirmative counterparts of the negative sentences in (9a) and (10a). Note however, that those in (9b) and (10b) are not grammatical; their ungrammaticality is due to the fact that the negative verb *sí* ‘be’ tries to function in affirmative constructions. The affirmative counterpart of the verb *sí* is *wà*, this is why (9c) and (10c) are grammatical. In the same vein, the affirmative verb *wà* ‘be’ may not function in a negative construction. If it does, such will be unacceptable. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (11) that contains *wà* ‘be’ and the negative morphemes.

- 11a. *Owó kò wà ní ọwọ Adé
 Money neg. be in hand Ade

- b. *Ojò kǐ yóò wà ní óṣù kẹwàá
rain neg. fut. be in month ten

However, the verb *wà* occurs in the negative sentences below.

- 12a. Owó kò lè wà ní ọwọ mi ní ìparí oṣù.
Money neg. preverb be in hand me at month end
'Money cannot be in my hand at the end of the month' / 'I cannot have money at the end of the month'.

- b. Adé kò lè wà ní ilé ní aago méjọ.
Adé neg. preverb be in house at clock eight
'Ade cannot be at home by eight o'clock'.

Two observations could be made from the two sentences in (12). First, the verb *wà* does not occur immediately after the negative morpheme *kò*; there is the preverb, *lè* which is between it and the negative morpheme. If the preverb does not occur between the two, the sentences will be ill-formed as we the examples in (11a & b). The other observation is the fact that the subjects of the sentences in (12) were not moved from the object position of *wà*; rather, they are base-generated as subjects. Hence, sentences like the ones below are not acceptable in standard Yorùbá.

- 13a. *kò lè wà Owó ní ọwọ mi ní ìparí oṣù.
neg. preverb be money in hand me at month end
- b. *kò lè wà Adé ní ilé ní aago méjọ.
neg. preverb be Adé in house at clock eight

The above analysis points to the fact that *wà* behaves differently from *sí* in standard Yorùbá. Following the above assertion, we establish that the verb 'be' has two forms in Yorùbá. They are *sí* and *wà*, which function in negative and affirmative constructions respectively. But other verbs like *lọ* 'to go', *wá* 'to come', *jẹ* 'to eat', *mọ* 'to know' etc, can occur in both negative and affirmative constructions. This occurrence is what we have in the sentences in (14) – (17) below.

- 14a. Adé kò lọ sí oko
Ade neg go to farm
'Ade did not go to the farm'.
- b. Adé lọ sí oko
Ade go to farm
'Ade went to the farm'.

- 15a. Ójọ̀ kò wá sí ilé
Ojo neg come to house
'Ojo did not come to the house'.
- b. Ójọ̀ wá sí ilé
Ojo come to house
'Ojo came to the house'.
- 16a. Táyọ̀ kò jẹ ịṣu
Táyọ̀ neg. eat yam
'Tayo did not eat yam'.
- b. Táyọ̀ jẹ ịṣu
Táyọ̀ eat yam
'Tayo eat yam'.
- 17a. Olú kò mọ̀ Dúgbẹ̀ ní Ìbàdàn
Olú neg. know Dúgbẹ̀ at Ìbàdàn
'Olu does/did not know Dugbe in Ìbàdàn'.
- b. Olú mọ̀ Dúgbẹ̀ ní Ìbàdàn
Olú know Dúgbẹ̀ at Ìbàdàn
'Olu knows/knew Dugbe in Ìbàdàn'.

All the discussions above can be summed up in the table in (18) below.

18. Negative and Affirmative forms of Verbs

	Verb	Neg. forms	Affirmative forms
a.	be	kò sí	Ó wà
b.	go	kò lọ	Ó lọ
c.	come	kò wá	Ó wá
d.	eat	kò jẹ	Ó jẹ
e.	know	kò mọ̀	Ó mọ̀

As we have in (18), while the affirmative forms of other verbs in (18b-e) take the expletive 'ó' and maintain their negative forms; that of 'kò sí' in (18a) takes the expletive and changes the verb 'sí to wà'.

Conclusion

The object movement discussed above optionally moves an NP from the object of the verb to the subject of the sentence. The motivation for this movement is the intended slight emphasis or communicative prominence placed on the object of the negative verb

sí 'be' in a negative construction in Yorùbá. When no such emphasis or communicative prominence is intended, movement does not take place. This movement can only occur in a negative sentence that has the verb *sí*. The verb itself will occur in negative sentences; it has an affirmative counterpart in *wà*.

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