Negativity and Aspect in Mbaise Lect of Igbo

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Abstract: This paper examines negativity and aspect in Mbaise dialect of the Igbo language. The specific objectives of this study are to examine how aspect and negation are marked/realised in Mbaise Igbo, as well as to examine their tonal patterns. Data for the study are got through elicitation method, intuition and printed materials, and are then transcribed and analysed descriptively using the X-bar theory as its framework. Findings reveal the presence of perfective, progressive and habitual aspects in Mbaise Igbo with their various markers. This study equally observes that Mbaise Igbo has two negative markers. Also, these aspect forms can be combined with negations to form negative sentences. In line with the second objective, the findings of this study reveal that aspect has various tone patterns. In the formation of negative sentences, however, these aspect markers do change their tonal patterns. This study concludes that aspect and negation as functional/verbal categories are robust and indeed exist in the Mbaise Igbo.

Keywords: aspect, negation, negativity, INFL-phrase

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Aspects and negation are both elements of inflectional phrase (hereafter referred to as INFL-phrase), alongside other categories like tense, mood, modality, number, and gender. These categories are generally known as verbal/functional categories. The term INFL was introduced by Chomsky (1981) to replace the term AUX (auxiliary), which was widely used during the PSG (Phrase Structure Grammar) era. Hence, AUX, according to Yusuf (1997), was no longer in use and the term INFL has come to replace it.

The study of functional categories, according to Obiamalu (2015), is not new. In the Igbo language, studies of functional categories (like tense, aspect, complementiser, mood etc.) have received great attention from scholars. (see Nwachukwu, 1983; Emenanjo, 1985; Uwalaka, 1988).

Certain reasons underscore scholars' interest in these functional categories. Obiamalu

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(2015:2) identified the following ones:

    a. Because functional categories provide the skeletal framework into which the lexical categories are inserted.

    b. There has being little consensus among scholars on the nature, number and property of these functional categories. In the Igbo language, it is major between tense and aspect (sic).

As such, studies on functional categories have continued to be scholar's interest.

As verbal/functional categories, both aspect and negation perform important functions in a sentence. They help in meaning appropriateness, which is in line with Nwachukwu's (1983) notion of obligatory marker. Nwachuwku (1983:64) opined that, "Obligatory markers must be present in a verb form before it can express its appropriate meaning". Aspect and negation are universal phenomena, but the ways in which they are realised differ across languages. As universal properties of natural languages, every language has a way of expressing the situation of an event (aspect), as well as reversing the truth value of any certain syntactic construction (negation). Despite being realised differently, the meaning and function of aspect and negation are the same in Universal Grammar (UG).

There are emerging needs for the grammatical structures of languages to be studied. Studies on the grammar of any language (or dialect) will help its preservation and growth. Therefore, a study on aspect and negation as verbal/functional categories in the Mbaise Igbo is significant. This study will be beneficial to language students, especially students of the Igbo language, by making available references materials. Again, this study will be useful to dialect study (dialectology). Mbaise dialect belongs to what Nwaozuzu (2008) calls the East Central group of Dialect (ECGD) of the Igbo language.

1.2 Review of literature on aspect and negation

There are many definitions by various scholars of aspect. Among these definitions is that of Greenbaum & Nelson's (2002:56), which defined aspect as "a grammatical category referring to the way that the time of a situation is viewed by the speaker or writer". On the other hand, negation is used generally to reverse the truth value of a sentence.

Research projects have been carried out on aspect and negation, as well as on other verbal categories in the Igbo language (with its various dialects).

Maduagwu & Obiamalu (2016) worked on tense, aspect and negation in Ogbahu dialect of Igbo. The objective of the study was to show how these grammatical categories operate in Ogbahu dialect. The study adopted the descriptive method in its data analysis. The study observed that tense, aspect, and negation exist as functional categories in Ogbahu dialect, contrary to earlier works claiming that aspect rather than tense was explicitly marked in Igbo. Perfective and progressive aspect markers are all identified in the dialect. While progressive aspect marker in Ogbahu differs with that of standard Igbo in that it uses *-la/na* alternation, the progressive marker is the same in both Ogbahu and standard Igbo. As

regards negation, their study observed that negation in Ogbahu is marked with suffix *-ho* which is usually accompanied by a harmonising verbal prefix *e/a*.

1.3 Methodology and its theoretical framework

X-bar theory is the theoretical framework adopted for this work, while the descriptive approach is used in data analysis. Data for the work are got through elicitation, intuition and printed materials. The theory of X-bar was first introduced into literature by Chomsky (1970) in his *Remarks on Nominalisation* and was popularised by Jackendoff (1977).

During the PSG era, there were only two types of categories, i.e., phrasal and lexical categories. Yet the proponents of X-bar argued that there seemed to be substantial evidence of the intermediate categories (Ndimele, 1992). With Abney (1987), it came to be established that just as lexical categories head syntactic constructions in PSG, intermediate categories (INFL or IP) also head a construction in the X-bar theory.

Another tenant of the X-bar theory, according to Horrock (1987:63), "is the recognition of the fact that phrasal categories have 'heads' upon which other elements of the constituents in question are dependent". This is in line with the principle of endocentricity. Endocentricity, according to Carnie (2007:161) means that "every phrase has a 'head' and must project into similar phrase". For example, a verb must project into a verb phrase, a noun into a noun phrase, etc. (for details, see Carnie, 2007; Mbah, 2011). X is an arbitrary notation for a lexical category; and be it noun, verb, adjective, adverb or preposition, it corresponds to their various phrases, that is, NP, VP, AP and PP respectively.

Therefore, X-bar theory is suitable for a study of this kind. This is because, aspect and negation as components of IP are properly accounted for under the X-bar theory. Also, as inflectional categories, they are equally represented separately on different branches in a hierarchical order.

1.4 The research goals and innovations of this paper

This research aims to achieve two major goals. Firstly, to examine how aspect and negation are realised in the Mbaise dialect, and secondly, to examine their tonal patterns.

From the research work reviewed, it is observable that research in other dialects were done descriptively, using no theory as framework. Therefore, by matching data with theory, the findings of this study are verifiable. This is one major innovation of this study. Again, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the Mbaise dialect has not been subjected to rigorous linguistic investigation in the area of syntax. However, with this study, relevant literature will be made available in the dialect.

2. Perfective aspect and negation in Mbaise Igbo

Perfective aspect is used to denote action which has been perfected and completed. Welmer (1973) used the term 'completive' to denote perfective aspect. Also, Comrie (1976)

opined that perfective aspect identified a situation as a single whole, having no distinction of the various separate phases that made up the situation. In Mbaise dialect, perfective aspect uses the marker *la* to indicate completed action.

Perfective aspect in Mbaise can be used both in the present and past reading.

2.1 Present perfective aspect

This is used to indicate action that has just been completed. For example:

(1) *Úchè*   *è-ri-é-le*   *ńri* .

    Uche   PART-eat-OVS-PERF   food

    'Uche has eaten the food.'
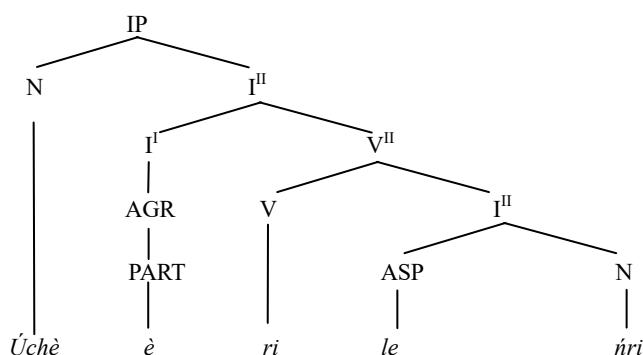
(2) *Àdá*   *à-gá-a-la*   *áhiā* .

    Ada   PART-go-OVS-PERF   market

    'Ada has gone to the market.'
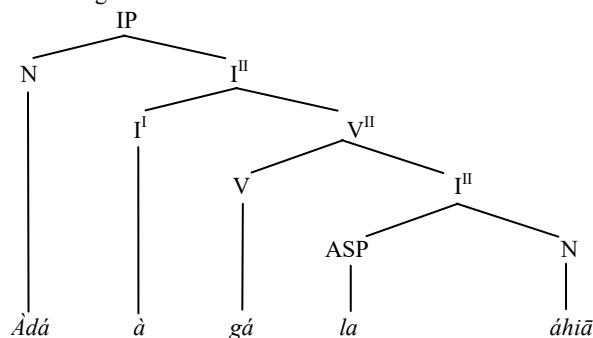
Examples (1) and (2) above show how present perfective aspect is formed in the Mbaise Igbo. The perfective marker *-la* occurs in the predicate syntactic position which is attached to the verb. A harmonising prefix *a/e*, depending on the preceding vowel sound is used, as in *le* and *la* in examples (1) and (2) respectively. On the X-bar trees, the perfective aspect marker is represented as ASP, and its presence enables the appropriateness of the structure.

2.2 The present perfective negative

Present perfective aspect can also be used with negation to form negative sentences. Here, the perfective marker *la* is used with a negative marker to form present perfective negative sentence in Mbaise Igbo. Both the negative and aspect markers are attached as suffix to the verb root. For examples:

(3) *Úchè   é-ri-be-lè   ńri .*
    Uche   Part-eat-Neg-PERF   food
    'Uche has not eaten.'
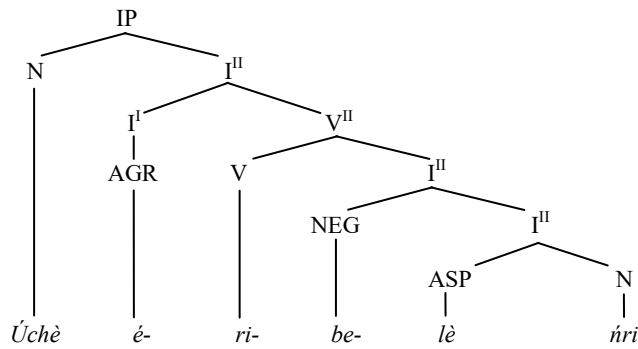
```
                    IP
              ╱          ╲
            N              Iᴵᴵ
            │          ╱        ╲
            │        Iᴵ          Vᴵᴵ
            │        │        ╱       ╲
            │      AGR       V         Iᴵᴵ
            │       │        │      ╱      ╲
            │       │        │    NEG       Iᴵᴵ
            │       │        │     │      ╱    ╲
            │       │        │     │    ASP     N
            │       │        │     │     │      │
          Úchè      é-       ri-   be-   lè      ńri
```

(4) *Àdá   á-ga-be-lè   áhia .*
    Ada   PART-go-Neg-PERF   market
    'Ada has not gone to market.'

```
                    IP
              ╱          ╲
            N              Iᴵᴵ
            │          ╱        ╲
            │        Iᴵ          Vᴵᴵ
            │        │        ╱       ╲
            │      AGR       V         Iᴵᴵ
            │       │        │      ╱      ╲
            │       │        │    NEG       Iᴵᴵ
            │       │        │     │      ╱    ╲
            │       │        │     │    ASP     N
            │       │        │     │     │      │
          Àdá       á        ga    be    lè     áhia
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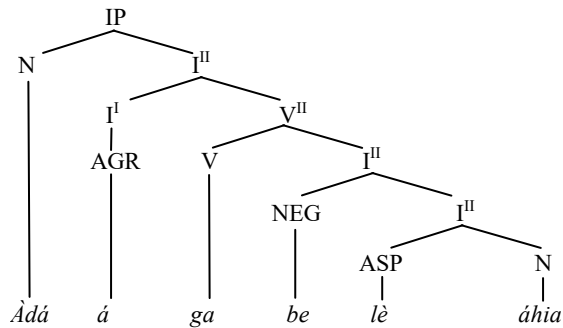
From the examples above, it can be seen that in the formation of negative perfective aspect, a negative marker *be* is used as opposed to *ghi* marker used in the standard Igbo. Both the negative and aspect markers are attached as suffixes to the verb root. The perfective aspect marker also conforms to the rule of vowel harmony. On the X-bar diagrams, negative aspect marker is represented as NEG, while the perfective marker is represented as ASP.

2.3 Past perfective aspect

In the formation of past perfective aspect, the perfective marker *la* is attached to the verb to show an action that has been perfected or completed in the past.

(5) Ùjú   á-yọ-ọ-la   kémgbè .

Uju   PART-arrive-OVS-PERF (PST)   since

'Uju has arrived since.'

```
                    IP
            _____|_____
           N                 I^II
           |            _____|_____
           |           I^I            V^II
           |           |        _____|_____
           |           |       V             I^II
           |           |       |        _____|_____
           |           |       |      ASP           Adv
           |           |       |       |             |
          Ùjú          á-      yọ-    -la          kémgbè
```
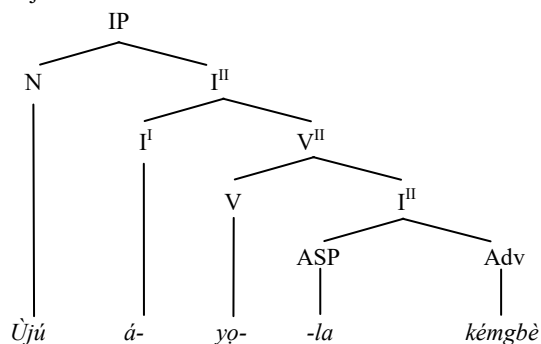
The formation of past perfective in the Mbaise Igbo is very interesting. This is because, the rV past tense marker is not realised in the construction. A closer look at the formation of both present and past perfective shows that both aspects are formed in the same way that is, by the addition of the suffix *la* to the verb. However, to indicate a past aspect, adverbials are added (kemgbe). In other words, the time of the event is what *indicates* the situation as past.

2.4 Past perfective negative aspect

Past perfective can also be used in negative sentences. In this case, it is formed by the combination of the perfective marker *la*, and the negative marker *be*. Examples:

(6) Ùjú   á-yọ̀-ọ-be-le   kémgbè .

Uju   PART-come-OVS-NEG-PERF   since

'Uju has not arrived since.'

```
                IP
          _____|_____
         N             I^II
         |        _____|_____
         |       I^I            V^II
         |       |         _____|_____
         |      AGR       V            I^II
         |       |        |       _____|_____
         |       |        |     NEG           I^II
         |       |        |      |        _____|_____
         |       |        |      |      ASP           Adv
         |       |        |      |       |             |
        Ùjú      á-      yọ̀-    be-      le          kémgbè
```
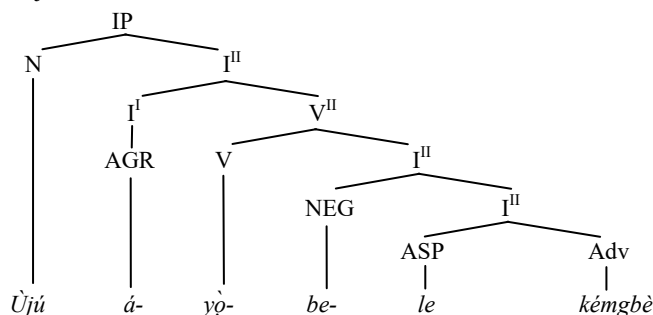
3. Progressive aspect and negation in Mbaise Igbo

Progressive aspect is used to indicate action that is ongoing or in progress. This is one of the aspects evident in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo. It is added as a suffix to the verb, thereby occupying the predicate syntactic slot of a syntactic construction. Progressive aspect can be

used in both past and present situations.
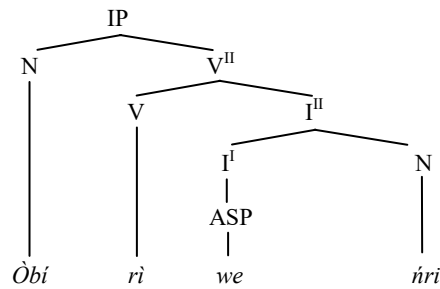
3.1 Present progressive aspect

Present progressive aspect as said above is used to indicate an action that is on going. Below are examples:

(7) *Òbí   rì-we   ńri .*
   Obi   eat-PRG   food
   'Obi is eating.'

```
                  IP
             /          \
           N             V^II
           |          /       \
           |        V          I^II
           |        |       /       \
           |        |     I^I        N
           |        |     |          |
           |        |    ASP         |
           |        |     |          |
          Òbí       rì    we        ńri
```

(8) *Ógè   tà-wa   úkworu .*
   Oge   chew-PRG   corn
   'Oge is chewing corn.'

```
                  IP
             /          \
           N             V^II
           |          /       \
           |        V          I^II
           |        |       /       \
           |        |     I^I        N
           |        |     |          |
           |        |    ASP         |
           |        |     |          |
          Ógè      tà-    wa       úkworu
```
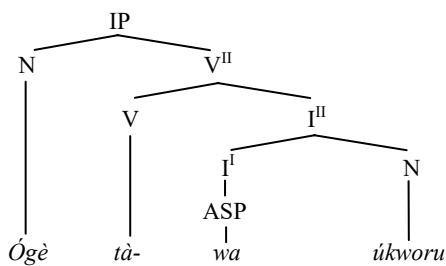
Examples above illustrate how the present progressive aspect is formed. These examples show that in the formation of progressive aspect, the aspect marker *wa* is used, which occurs in the predicate syntactic position, and is attached to the verb. Also, progressive aspect markers in Mbaise Igbo conform to the rule of vowel harmony. A harmonising vowel *a/e* is used depending on the preceding vowel of the verb.

3.2 Present progressive negation

Present progressive aspect can also be combined with negation to form negative sentences. Below are examples:

(9) *Òbí   è-rí-we-he   ńri .*
   Obi   PART-eat-PRG-NEG   food
   'Obi is not eating.'

```
                    IP
         ┌──────────┴──────────┐
         N                     Iᴵᴵ
         │              ┌───────┴───────┐
         │              Iᴵ              Vᴵᴵ
         │              │         ┌──────┴──────┐
         │             AGR        V             Iᴵᴵ
         │              │         │        ┌─────┴─────┐
         │              │         │       ASP         Iᴵᴵ
         │              │         │        │      ┌────┴────┐
         │              │         │        │     NEG        N
         │              │         │        │      │         │
        Òbí             è         rí       we     he         ńri
```
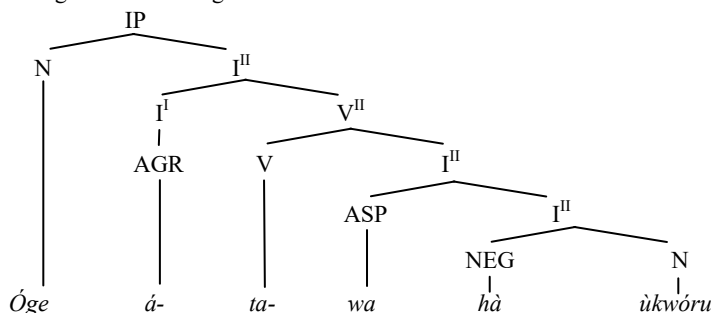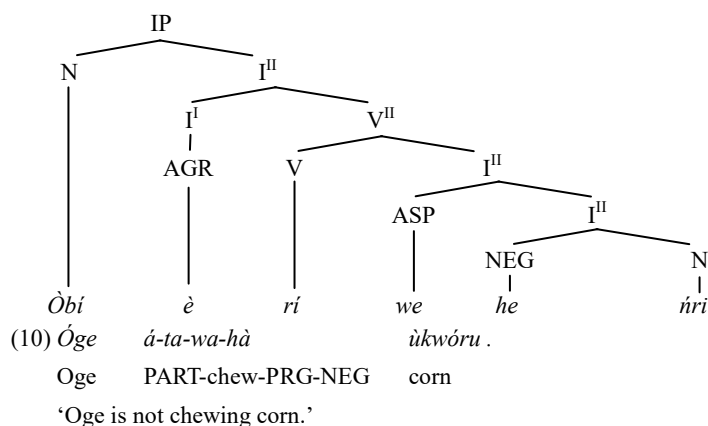
(10) *Óge   á-ta-wa-hà   ùkwóru* .

    Oge   PART-chew-PRG-NEG   corn

    'Oge is not chewing corn.'

```
                    IP
         ┌──────────┴──────────┐
         N                     Iᴵᴵ
         │              ┌───────┴───────┐
         │              Iᴵ              Vᴵᴵ
         │              │         ┌──────┴──────┐
         │             AGR        V             Iᴵᴵ
         │              │         │        ┌─────┴─────┐
         │              │         │       ASP         Iᴵᴵ
         │              │         │        │      ┌────┴────┐
         │              │         │        │     NEG        N
         │              │         │        │      │         │
        Óge             á-        ta-      wa      hà        ùkwóru
```
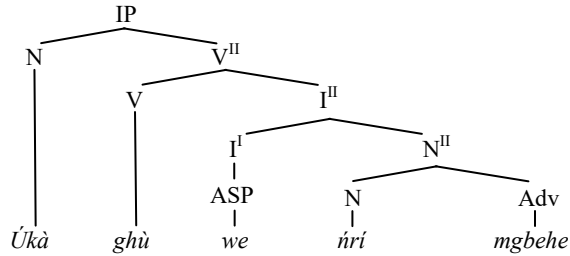
The examples above show that in the formation of present perfective negation, the present progressive marker *wa* and the negative marker *he* are attached to the verb. They obey the rule of vowel harmony and equally occur at the predicate syntactic position.

Another observation is that progressive aspect in Mbaise Igbo uses another type of negative marker different from the one used by perfective marker. While the former uses *be*, the latter uses *ha*. Also, in progressive aspect, negative marker is suffixed after the aspect marker, unlike in perfective aspect where negative marker is suffixed before the aspect marker. On the X-bar diagrams, the progressive marker is represented as AGR, while the negative marker is represented as NEG.

3.3 Past progressive aspect

As seen above, in perfective aspect, the rV marker is not realised in the formation of aspect. So is it in past progressive. Rather, the time of an action is used to indicate it as a past event. The following examples are used to show how past progressive aspect is rendered in Mbaise Igbo.

(11) *Úkà   ghù-we   ńrí   mgbehe* .

    Uka   cook-PRG   food   then

    'Uka was cooking then.'

```
                    IP
         ┌───────────┴──────────┐
         N                      VII
         │              ┌────────┴────────┐
         │              V                 III
         │              │          ┌───────┴───────┐
         │              │          II              NII
         │              │          │        ┌───────┴───────┐
         │              │         ASP       N              Adv
         │              │          │        │               │
        Úkà            ghù         we       ńrí            mgbehe
```

The example above shows how past progressive aspect is formed in Mbaise Igbo. The past tense marker is not realised. It is the time of the action that indicates the event as past. In other words, for past aspect to be properly marked, an adverbial must be added to the construction. On the X-bar diagram, the progressive aspect is represented as ASP.

3.4 Past progressive negation

The past progressive can also be used in negative constructions. In such cases, the negative marker *he* and the progressive marker *we* are attached to the verb in order to form progressive negative sentences. Below are examples:

(12) *Úkà   é-ghu-we-he   ńri   mgbehe* .
    Uka   PART-cook-PRG-NEG   food   then
    'Uka was not cooking then.'

```
                    IP
         ┌───────────┴──────────┐
         N                      III
         │              ┌─────────┴─────────┐
         │              II                  VII
         │              │           ┌────────┴────────┐
         │             AGR          V                 III
         │              │           │          ┌───────┴───────┐
         │             PART         │          II             III
         │              │           │          │        ┌──────┴──────┐
         │              │           │         ASP        II           NII
         │              │           │          │        │       ┌─────┴─────┐
         │              │           │          │        NEG      N         Adv
         │              │           │          │        │        │          │
        Úkà             é          ghu         we       he      ńri       mgbehe
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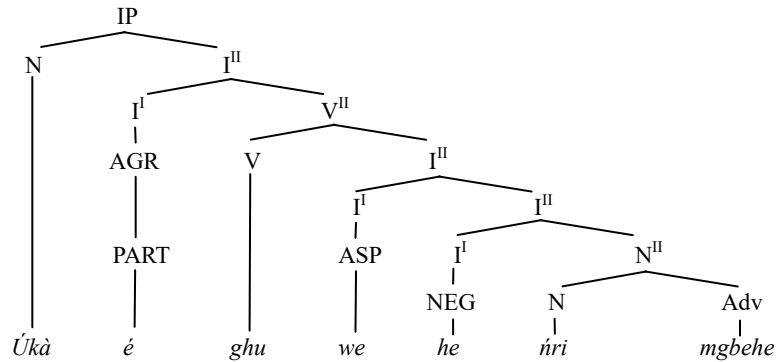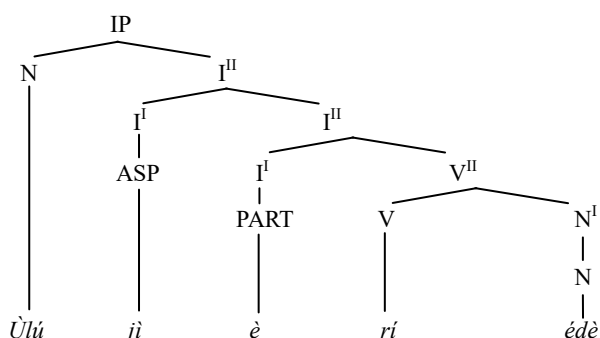
4. Habitual aspect and negation in Mbaise Igbo

This is another type of imperfective aspect. Dahl (1985) opined that habitual aspect does not see an event as single viewed or as a whole but instead, specified something about its internal temporal structure. Examples:
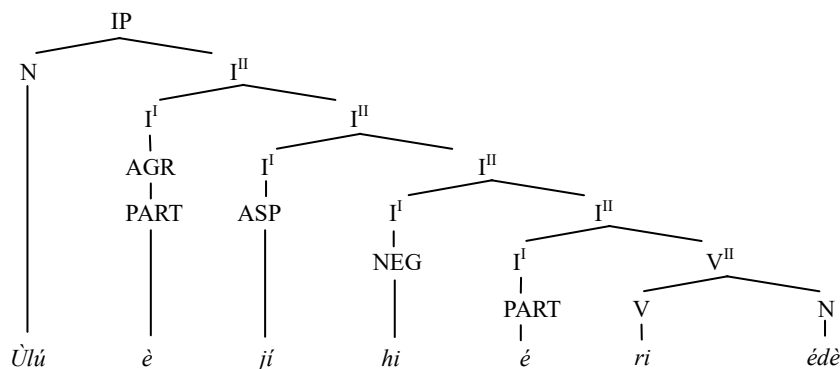
(13) *Ùlú   jì   è-rí   édè* .
    Ulu   HAB   PART-eat   cocoyam
    'Ulu do eat cocoyam.'

```
                    IP
          ┌──────────┴──────────┐
          N                     I^II
          │            ┌─────────┴─────────┐
          │            I^I                 I^II
          │            │           ┌────────┴────────┐
          │           ASP          I^I              V^II
          │            │           │          ┌──────┴──────┐
          │            │          PART         V            N^I
          │            │           │           │            │
          │            │           │           │            N
          │            │           │           │            │
          │            │           │           │            │
         Ùlú          jì           è          rí           édè
```

Habitual aspect can also be used with negation to construct negative sentences. As in:

(14) *Ùlú   è-jí-hi   é-ri   édè* .

　　　Ulu   PART-HAB-NEG   PART-eat   cocoyam

　　　'Ulu does not eat cocoyam.'

```
                    IP
          ┌──────────┴──────────┐
          N                     I^II
          │            ┌─────────┴─────────┐
          │            I^I                 I^II
          │            │           ┌────────┴────────┐
          │           AGR          I^I              I^II
          │            │           │         ┌───────┴───────┐
          │          PART         ASP        I^I            I^II
          │            │           │         │       ┌───────┴───────┐
          │            │           │        NEG       I^I           V^II
          │            │           │         │        │        ┌─────┴─────┐
          │            │           │         │       PART       V          N
          │            │           │         │        │         │          │
         Ùlú          è           jí        hi        é        ri         édè
```

5. Tonal pattern of aspect and negation in Mbaise Igbo

Tone is a very crucial and important phenomenon in the Igbo language. Its importance in Igbo syntax is evident in various grammatical analyses and this is one of the reasons why the Igbo language is regarded as a tonal language. Also, the place of tone in Igbo grammar lends credence to Mbah and Mbah's (2010) observation that tone in the Igbo language is equally a governor in the theory of government and binding. As such, tone is a distinctive feature in the Igbo language (tonemic).

Tone also performs important functions on aspect. From the various types of aspects presented and discussed so far, different tone patterns are evident. The perfective aspect marker *la* bears the high tone which is explicitly marked. Under the imperfective, the progressive aspect marker *we* and the habitual marker *ji* both bear the low tone. Below are three examples:

(15) *Àdá   à-gá-a-la   áhiā* .

　　　Ada   PART-go-OVS-PERF   Market

'Ada has gone to the market.'

(16) *Ńgozi*   *hì-we*   *úra*   *echi* .

     Ngozi   lie-PRG   sleep   yesterday

     'Ngozi was sleeping yesterday.'

(17) *Ùlú*   *jì*   *è-rí*   *édè* .

     Ulu   HAB   PART-eat   cocoyam

     'Ulu does eat cocoyam.'

However, these tones do change in the formation of negative sentences. They change to low and high tones as evident in examples below:

(18) *Àdá*   *á-ga-be-lè*   *áhia* .

     Ada   PART-go-NEG-PERF   market

     'Ada has not gone to market.'

(19) *Ńgozi*   *é-hi-we-he*   *ụ́ra*   *echi* .

     Ngozi   PART-sleep-PRG-NEG   sleep   yesterday

     'Ngozi was not sleeping yesterday.'

(20) *Ùlú*   *è-jí-hi*   *é-ri*   *édè* .

     Ulu   PART-HAB-NEG   PART-eat   cocoyam

     'Ulu does not eat cocoyam.'

From the examples above, it is therefore shown that tone indeed contrasts meaning. That is to say that in Mbaise Igbo, aspectual category co-occuring with negation changes in tone. This is so because negation universally changes the truth value of any syntactic construction, and for the sentence to appropriately express negation, the tone of the aspect marker changes. In other words, tone contrasts meaning in the Igbo language. So, considering meaning appropriateness, the tone of aspectual in any negative sentence (or co-occuring with negation), must change, thereby refuting the truth value of the sentence. Again, tone in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo does not work in isolation. Tone works together with the various aspects and contrasts meaning where necessary.

This is not only peculiar to aspectual category. It also occurs in other verbal categories occurring with negation in any sentence. The tone of the category must change when it occurs with negation. Below is an example with a tense marker:

(21) a. *Ó*   *r̀iri-(φ)*   *ńri* .

     He/she   eat-PST   food

     'He/she ate.'

   b. *Ò*   *rí-(φ)-hī*   *nri* .

     He/she   eat-PST-NEG   food

     'He/she did not eat.'

From the example above, it is observable that the tone of the verb, and the past tense

marker (realised in zero morpheme) changed in example 21b; from low tone to high tone. That is because for the sentence to appropriately express negation, the tone of the tense marker changes.

6. Conclusion

This paper has analysed negativity and aspect in Mbaise Lect of the Igbo language. Both aspect and negation are functional/verbal categories. In other words, both are elements of the INFL-phrase. The result of the analysis shows that both aspect and negation can be used to form sentences, and as verbal categories, it is the verb form that bears both the aspectual and negation markers (as suffixes). Again, the study observes that there exist different types of aspect in Mbaise Igbo; the perfective, progressive, habitual; each with their various markers: the perfective uses *la*, progressive aspect *we*, and the habitual aspect *ji*.

The study also observes that the Mbaise Igbo makes use of two different negative markers *be* and *he* respectively to form negative aspectual forms. Both markers conform to the rule of vowel harmony. Also, as seen in perfective aspect, negative markers are suffixed before the aspectual markers whereas in progressive and habitual aspects, the aspectual markers are suffixed after the aspectual markers.

Furthermore, both the aspectual and negative markers adhere to the rule of vowel harmony.

Again, as regards their various tonal patterns, this research discovers the reason why the perfective marker *la* bears the high tone, the progressive marker *we*, and the habitual marker *ji* both bear the low tone. In the formation of negative sentences, however, these aspect markers do change their tonal pattern to low and high tone especially. This is because, negation universally changes the truth value of any syntactic construction, and so the tone of the aspectual marker co-occuring with negation changes in any negative sentence for meaning appropriateness.

In the X-bar model, this study equally observes that aspect and negation are both elements of the INFL-phrase. This is in line with Hageman's (1991) view, that INFL is a node which is taken to dominate all verbal inflections as well as its agreement (AGR) properties. In conclusion, both aspect and negation in Mbaise dialect are obligatorily marked for meaning appropriateness.

Abbreviations and Symbols

´	High Tone	Adv	Adverb
`	Low Tone	AGR	Agreement
⁻	Mid Tone	ASP	Aspect
φ	Zero Morpheme	AUX	Auxiliary

HAB	Habitual	PERF	Perfective
INFL	Inflection	PRG	Progressive
IP	Inflection	PSG	Phrase Structure Grammar
N	Noun	PST	Past
NEG	Negation	UG	Universal Grammar
OVS	Open Vowel Suffix	V	Verb
PART	Particle		

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