Negation: Contrasts and Similarities in Edoid's Degema and Emai

Negation as a topic of contrastive study in West Africa has a brief history, especially regarding the use of tonal morphemes (Welmers 1973). Although cross-linguistic comparison has identified a propensity for bipartite segmental marking and a constrained interaction of negation with mood, tense-aspect, and focus (Cyffer et al. 2009), few contrastive studies of languages within a single clade exist. To address this neglect, we examine negation in two Edoid languages, Degema and Emai (D&E), which are separated by some 400 kilometers of rainforest, riverways, and savanna in southern Nigeria.

Overall, D&E differ in their utilization of the Amayo Principle (Amayo 1975), which holds that subject pronouns and verbs in the lexicon are toneless. Their tone in a clause is provided by a predicative cluster (PC), as in Creissels (2005), where polar tonal values associate leftward to subject pronoun or rightward to verb. Across D&E, cluster tonal values are similar, but they distribute asymmetrically to segmental morphemes that express negation of indicative and imperative mood. For narrow and broad focus, negative marker position varies as does reliance on clausal negation.

We first consider negative indicative. Degema expresses it exclusively via tonal values in its predicative cluster: high $'^{H}$ assigned to subject index and low $\grave{}^{L}$ to verb (1). Emai assigns left tone to a subject pronoun and right tone to a negative clitic, one of the three *ya*, *i*, *kha* (2). Each expresses distance from deictic center, e.g. proximal (PRX). Verb tone in Emai results from the floating low tone of the imperfective (IPFV) suffix. It associates to the verb and spreads leftward.

For the negative imperative (NI), Degema shows bipartite coding, where left PC tone is assigned to subject and right PC tone to verb plus post-predicate NI clitic *tu* (3). In contrast, Emai assigns left PC tone to subject pronoun and right PC tone to its NI clitic *e*, which is preverbal. Verb tone is assigned by high tone suffix *-í* of the perfective, whose underlying segmental form does not surface before a verb argument (4).

For D&E, narrow negative focus employs distinct markers in positions that contrast. Degema *kó* precedes a fronted in-focus constituent, while subordinator *nó* marks not-in-focus elements and their negative morpheme (5). Emai *kí* follows a fronted in-focus element and precedes out-of-focus elements with no subordination marker and no clause level negation (6).

Broad focus negation in D&E varies as to morphosyntactic marking. Degema shows negated BE verb *yi* followed by a negative clause marked as subordinate by *nó* (7). Emai relies on clause initial particle *kí*; its following in-focus affirmative clause is most often limited to interrogative mood (8).

We conclude by considering how anchoring key clause-level tones to an underlying predicative cluster, rather than to individual lexical items, restricts tonal contrasts to certain positions. From there tones spread syntagmatically, thereby shifting the broader tonal system away from its largely paradigmatic origins toward tono-exodus (Ratcliff 2015, Hyman 2018).

EXAMPLE CONSTRUCTIONS

1 *òhòsò ó = kòtù ɔ́yì.*
òhòsò o {ˊH ˋL} kotu ɔ́yì
Ohoso SI NEG call 3SG
‘Ohoso did not call her.’

2 *ɔ́ ì = ànmɛ̀ ɔ́kà.*
ɔ {ˊH ˋL} *i* anmɛ-ˋL ɔ́kà
3SG NEG PRX roast-IPFV maize
‘She is roasting / has not roasted the maize.’

3 *ɛ́ = ɓòm ɓàw = tù.*
ɛ {ˊH ˋL} ɓom ɓàw tu
2SG NEG beat 3PL NI
‘Don’t beat them.’

4 *é è = káwó ɔ́lì òkpòsò.*
e {ˊH ˋL} e kawo-í ɔ́lì òkpòsò.
2SG NEG NI look-PFV ART woman
‘Don’t look at the woman.’

5 *kɔ́ òhòsò nɔ́ mɔ́ = dì ɔ́yì.*
kɔ́ òhòsò COMP mɔ {ˊH ˋL} dì 3SG
NF Ohoso COMP 3SG NEG eat 3SG
‘It is not Ohoso who is eating it.’

6 *émà kí ójé ɔ́ ɔ̀ = shɛ̀n ɛ́dɛ̌dɛ̀.*
émà kí òjè ɔ {ˊH ˋL} ɔ shɛn-ˋL daily
yam NF Oje SI :DST PRS sell-IPFV daily
‘It isn't yam that Oje sells every day.’

7 *ó = yì nɔ́ òhòsò mɔ́ = dì ɔ́yì.*
o {ˊH ˋL} yi nɔ́ òhòsò mɔ {ˊH ˋL} dì ɔ́yì
3SG NEG be COMP Ohoso SI NEG eat it
‘It is not that Ohoso ate it.’

8 *kí ójé ɔ́ ɔ̀ = shɛ̀n émà?*
kí òjè ɔ {ˊH ˋL} ɔ shɛn-ˋL émà
NA Oje SI :DST PRS sell-IPFV yam
‘Isn't it the case that Oje sells yams?

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