

## An analysis of semantic and syntactic negation in Oshiwambo and English

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### Abstract

Negation in languages has been documented since the 1970s and 1980s. This paper attempts to explain the negation structures in semantic and syntactic structures of Oshiwambo and English languages. These two languages have two complete negation structures and how they function to achieve negation is far from being similar. The focus of the paper was on the analysis of the sentential negation and how negative particles are used in English and Oshiwambo, a Bantu language. It analyzes and compares the use of full negatives, affixes and quasi negative words to achieve negation in English and Oshiwambo language. The Oshiwambo and English texts/contents were purposely sampled and content analysis was performed accordingly. The analysis shows that Bantu languages share a common rule of negation which is the use of a pre-initial prefix while the rules to changing negative imperative to interrogative or declarative are different between English and Oshiwambo.

**Keywords:** pre-initial, negation, marker, imperative, declarative, integrative, syntactic, semantic, Bantu

### Introduction

A number of studies on negation of English and Bantu languages have been conducted by linguists. Studies by Kim and Sag (1995); Neba and Tanda (2005) and Weir (2013) show that negation differs from language to language. They further state highlighted that since every language has its own morphological and semantic components to express negation, one rule fits all simply does not work. The present study analysis negation in English and Oshiwambo, a Bantu language, in general, as well as the syntactic and semantic features of negation in both languages.

This linguistic study explores language structures, their natures, their facts, how they are acquired and their functions. It explores the structures and functions of language and how these structures contribute to negation in particular. According to Gleason (2001), negation data give many important interpretations of structural negation in many languages. It is common that Bantu languages have the same way of negating, which include Oshiwambo, the language presently under study. Although there are many types of negation in English, they are not all explored in this article. However, all the types of negations in Oshiwambo are discussed.

Negation is the opposite of affirmation; a statement or sentence can be negative of the other. Therefore, negation has to do with making an affirmative statement or sentence into negative by inserting a negative particle or negative marker in its structure. Each language has its own way

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of negating. This is what allows speakers to discuss what is not happening or what they do not want (Gleason, 2001). This study explores negation in declarative, imperatives and interrogatives in English and Oshiwambo. It pays special attention to the languages' structures of negation, negative markers, changes involved when changing from affirmative to negative in both languages.

## Literature review

### Negation in English

Ding's (2013) study on a quantitative analysis of words with implied negation in semantic referred to the following words as full negative in English; *neither, never, nobody, not, nothing, nowhere, nor, and none*. Oshiwambo full negative words are and morphemes: *hasho* (not), *ka- na* (none), *ka- na sha* (nothing), *nandenande* (never/not at all). What gets to be attached to *ka-* is a subject marker depending on the noun class the subject is. In this article, the full negative words in both languages are compared. Furthermore, Oshiwambo also makes use of other partly negative words such as: *haalushe* (rarely), *kashona* (little), *noudjuu* (barely), *ha naana* (barely/rarely), which Ding (2013) refers to as quasi negatives in English: *scarcely, seldom, little, rarely*, etc. All the quasi negatives in Oshiwambo are discussed in this paper, but due to time, only some quasi negatives in English are discussed.

Another form of negation in English is the use of affixes such as *dis-, il-, im-, ir-, mis-, non-, -less, ab-, in-* etc. These negative markers can grammatically negate sentences in English (Ding, 2013). On a contrary, Oshiwambo uses only one prefix '*i-*' as part of the pre-verb to achieve negation. Whereas, English' affixes are not only added to verbs but also to nouns to form negative meaning. The use of the negative marker '*i-*' in Oshiwambo is the most used one. When negating in Oshiwambo, it is the only morpheme (auxiliary's prefix *o-*) that changes to *i-* to make an affirmative negative. For example;

#### Affirmative:

- |    |                               |             |          |          |
|----|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|
| 1. | Kuku                          | <b>o-ta</b> | kotha    | pondje.  |
|    | Grandma                       | AFF-AUX     | sleeping | outside. |
|    | 'Grandma is sleeping outside' |             |          |          |

Vs

#### Negative:

- |    |                                   |             |          |          |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|
| 2. | Kuku                              | <b>i-ta</b> | kotha    | pondje.  |
|    | Grandma                           | NEG-AUX     | sleeping | outside. |
|    | 'Grandma is not sleeping outside' |             |          |          |

Negative imperatives in English have received various analyses in the generative literature. Wier (2013) emphasizes that the use of *don't* in negative imperatives is crucial and by grammar rules, it appears before the subject. Similarly, Oshiwambo's negating word (*ino*) *don't* can also appear either before or after the subject in imperative because the subject is optional as in English. For example:

- |    |                                 |             |       |          |
|----|---------------------------------|-------------|-------|----------|
| 3. | Kuku                            | <b>i-no</b> | kotha | pondje.  |
|    | Grandma                         | NEG – AUX   | sleep | outside. |
|    | 'Don't sleep outside, grandma.' |             |       |          |

And

4. **I-no**                      kotha                      pondje                      kuku  
NEG – AUX                  sleep                      outside,                  grandma.  
'Don't sleep outside, grandma'

According to Garcia Fuentes (2008, p. 317), there are three stages to acquiring negation in English as a first language (L1). "Stage 1: the negative principle is sentence-external; Stage 2: the negative is placed within the sentence and *don't* and *can't* appear; stage 3: the full realization of auxiliary." Based on the author's knowledge, there seems not to be any study done on negation in Oshiwambo as a first language. This is what motivated the author of this paper to carry out this study.

### Negation in Bantu languages

The Bantu languages share many language features syntactically. Bestowing to Gibson and Wilhelmsen (2015), Rangi, a language spoken in central Tanzania, achieves its negation through the use of a negative marker *si* and *tuku*. The negative marker *si* appears before the verb whilst *tuku* can appear either after the verb or clause-finally. Additionally, in Mbongwe, a language spoken in Botswana, negation is achieved by the use of a prefix *te-*, which should precede the verbal complex and the other negative marker *tokÓ* which also appears clause-finally. The position of this marker intends to emphasize the negative polarity of the sentence (Gibson & Wilhelmsen, 2015).

Contrary to English language, Oshiwambo and some other Bantu languages' negation is mainly achieved in two different approaches. One is to use peripheral construction and the other is grammatical affixes, clitics or particles (Löfgren, 2018). In Oshiwambo, the common way of negation is using pre-initial slot with the use of *i-* prefix (Mbenzi, n.d). Also, Oshiwambo uses the negative marker *ha-* as a preinitial slot attached to the subject and it can be also attached to a pronoun as a suffix (Mbenzi, nd). Similarly, the Standard Swahili also employs the pre-initial negation. According to Löfgren (2018), Swahili's pre-initial contains "the negative marker *ha-* followed by the subject marker, the verbal stem and lastly the final vowel marking the present tense." (p. 9, 2018). He further states that the post-initial and the post-final slots are less used in Bantu languages compared to the pre-initial slot which is unmarked negation in Bantu languages.

Example of preinitial negation *ha* in standard Swahili (Guldeman 1999, p. 551):

5. Ha-tu-ka-i  
NEG-1PL—want-PRS  
'Wir wollen nicht' [we don't want]
6. Hu-taondoka  
NEG-SING will leave  
She/he will not leave
7. Ha-tutaondoka  
NEG-1PL-will leave  
We will not leave

Ngonyani (2001) asserts that all plural forms are marked by the negative maker *ha-* as illustrated in (6) and (7), whereas the singular negative forms are marked by *h-* followed by subject and

tense marker. There are chances that this negative marker **h-** in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular negative markers were **ha-** where the vowel of this marker (prefix) has been deleted (Ngonyani, 2001).

In Standard Swahili, the preinitial contains the negative marker **ha-** which is followed by the subject marker. However, in Oshiwambo, the negative marker **ha** is used in two different cases: in one case, **ha-** is attached to the subject of the sentence as a prefix, while in the other case **-ha** is attached to a pronoun as a suffix (Mbezi, n.d). The second case applies only to Oshikwanyama, one of the Oshiwambo dialects. For example:

8. Hakanona taka popi mu  
NEG-SING should talk in here  
No child should talk in here.
9. Haanona taya popi mu  
NEG-PL should talk in here  
No children should talk in here
10. Onda hala vaha ye kokule  
I want them NEG to go far  
I don't want them to go far
11. Otava ka kala vehe na oumbada  
They will NEG have wealth  
They will not have wealth

In Oshiwambo, from 8-9, it is clear that the negative marker **ha-** is not affected by the subject number as seen with Swahili; it simply remains **ha-** in both plural and singular forms. On the other hand, 10-11 show a different case from Swahili; the negative marker **-ha** is attached to the pronoun making the sentence negative.

The reviewed literature above shows that each language has one common goal as far as morphosyntax and semantic negation is concerned which is to express an idea or thought in a negative way. It is common to have most Bantu languages share similar rules of negation. Although Kiswahili achieves negation in four ways; negation tensed clauses, prefix **-si-**, negative copula **si** and **kuto-** which is used in gerundive and infinitival clauses (Ngonyani, 2001), the same rule about prefix is used in Oshiwambo. The Oshiwambo rules of negating is compared to English in the present study.

Oshiwambo language, which is the focus in the current pivotal study, achieves its negation in similar approaches as other Bantu languages. According to Mbenzi (n.d), Oshiwambo accomplishes negation by using pre-initial slot with the use of **i-** prefix which gets to replace **o** in an affirmative sentence/statement. It also uses full negative words such as *hasho(not)*, *ka-na(none)*, *ka-nasha(nothing)*, *nande nande(never)* of which some of these are used as nouns in other words to name people.

## Method

This study is based on data extracted from a non-published Oshiwambo manuscript: *Ofonology nomofology yOshiwambo* by Dr Mbenzi (University of Namibia) and from various English texts. With regards to English, the most used negative markers **don't** and the quasi negative markers

were purposely sampled from daily texts and utterances. From Oshiwambo, the common negative marker *i-* was also sampled from the manuscript.

The data comprised in the present study were analyzed through content analysis. Elo and Kyngas (2008) define inductive content analysis as “an analysis used when there are not previous studies dealing with the phenomenon or when it is fragmented” (p. 108). From the sampled contents, a close analysis of data was required to classify the examples into different negation types and establish the difference between the two languages respectively. The data were analyzed from a qualitative perspective (manually, selecting the data of interest from a range of Oshiwambo and English contents/text and compare them).

## Results and discussion

The pre-initial prefix *i-* in Oshiwambo and how it is used in declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives precedes this section. The moved negation analysis for both languages is then presented in syntactic trees followed by negative words and negative meanings respectively.

### Pre-initial prefix *i-* in Oshiwambo

As mentioned earlier, Oshiwambo, like other Bantu languages, achieves negation by the use of a pre-initial *i-* prefix. This prefix begins the pre-verb (auxiliary) and it is always attached to the tense marker, before the main verb. For example:

13. Maria	<i>ī</i> ha	nu	omalovu.
Maria	NEG-AUX	drink	alcohol.
'Maria does not drink alcohol.'			

14. Maria	<i>ī</i> na	nwa	omalovu.
Maria	NEG-AUX	drink	alcohol.
'Maria did not drink alcohol.'			

15. Maria	<i>ī</i> ta	nu	omalovu.
Maria	NEG-AUX	drink	alcohol.
'Maria is not drinking alcohol.'			

The negative marker *i-* as a prefix here, is used to negate the sentences in different tenses. In Oshiwambo the pre-initial *i-* prefix is written together with the tense marker to show both negative and tense of the sentence. Additionally, this is the auxiliary of negation. Generally, as far as Oshiwambo negation is concerned, the negative markers *īha* (doesn't), *īta* (is not) and *īna* (did not) do not only show negation and mark the tense, but also show the agreement (all noun class) between the verb and the subject; the type of noun determines the auxiliary in the sentence, except the negative prefix *i-* that remains the same. Also, the auxiliary depends on the number of the subject. This is the same case in English.

### The negative pre-initial prefix *i-* in declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives.

#### a) Declarative

16. Thomas	<i>ī</i> ta	nu	omeya.
Thomas	NEG-AUX	drinking	water.
'Thomas is not drinking water.'			

17. Aantu	<i>ī</i> taya	kambadhala	tuu.
People	NEG-AUX	trying	really.

'People are not really trying.'

- |                            |       |             |               |
|----------------------------|-------|-------------|---------------|
| 18. Omusamene              | nguka | <i>ī</i> ha | hili omakaya. |
| Man                        | this  | NEG-AUX     | smoke         |
| 'This man does not smoke.' |       |             |               |

**b) Interrogative**

- |                                 |             |       |        |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| 19. Thomas                      | <i>ī</i> ta | nu    | omeya? |
| Thomas                          | NEG-AUX     | drink | water. |
| 'Is Thomas not drinking water?' |             |       |        |

- |                         |               |             |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 20. Aantu               | <i>ī</i> taya | kambadhala? |
| People                  | NEG-AUX       | trying      |
| 'Aren't people trying?' |               |             |

- |                           |       |             |               |
|---------------------------|-------|-------------|---------------|
| 21. Omusamene             | nguka | <i>ī</i> ha | hili omakaya? |
| Man                       | this  | NEG-AUX     | smoke.        |
| 'Doesn't this man smoke?' |       |             |               |

**c) Imperative**

- |                              |             |       |        |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------|--------|
| 22. Thomas                   | <i>ī</i> no | nwa   | omeya. |
| Thomas                       | NEG -AUX    | drink | water. |
| 'Don't drink water, Thomas.' |             |       |        |

- |                              |       |        |         |
|------------------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| 23. <i>ī</i> no              | nwa   | omeya, | Tomas.  |
| NEG-AUX                      | drink | water  | Thomas. |
| 'Don't drink water, Thomas.' |       |        |         |

- |  |         |            |
|--|---------|------------|
| 24. Yantu ne,                            | inamu   | kambadhala |
| People                                   | NEG-AUX | trying.    |
| 'People, don't try!/'Don't try, people.' |         |            |

- |                                   |       |             |               |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------------|---------------|
| 25. Omusamene                     | nguka | <i>ī</i> na | hila omakaya. |
| Man                               | this  | NEG- AUX    | smoke.        |
| 'This man should/must not smoke.' |       |             |               |

In declarative, the negative markers in Oshiwambo and English do come after the subject (16-18). Also, the pre-verb (auxiliary) takes the prefix *i-* which is responsible for negation. These negative auxiliaries also show subject verb agreement in both languages. In (19-21), when changing from declarative to interrogative, English requires the auxiliary to shift to the initial position which is before the subject. Interestingly, in (19) the negative marker could move before the subject; 'Isn't Thomas drinking water?' which is simply a stylistic choice and has nothing to do with the tense used.

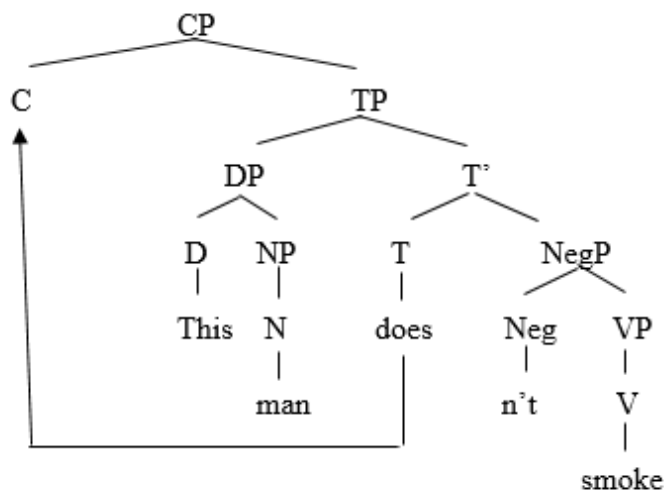
In (20-21), in the simple present tense, the negative auxiliary moves together with the negative marker (not) in front of the subject. However, in Oshiwambo, the auxiliary negative marker retains its position, and the intonation changes in talking while a question mark added in writing (19-21). In English imperatives (22), the negative imperative markers take the initial position. Contrary, in Oshiwambo, the negative imperative can take an initial position, before or after the subject (23-25). According to Weir (2013), with regard to the imperatives in English, *don't* is inserted when

the subject is expressed. Generally, the *don't* appears before the subject in English. Another negative imperative marker in Oshiwambo *ina*, can be used in declarative (25) and imperative (18).

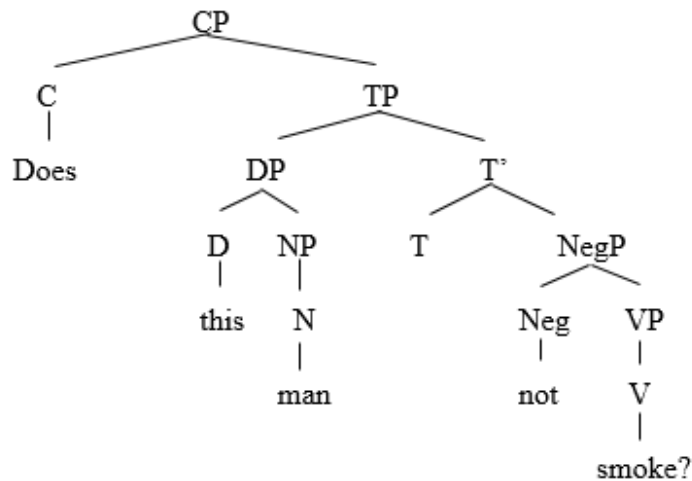
### The moved negation analysis

The syntax tree in (26) illustrates how the negative marker *doesn't* moves up the subject to form an interrogative in English. Sometimes *don't* or *not* move to the left side of the subject which becomes parallel to a process called subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) (Weir, 2013). The auxiliary verb *-n't* complex is also inverted though this process as seen in (26) below. Barbiers, Beukema and Wurff (2002) referred to this kind of negation (*n't*) as a sentential scope.

26. 'This man doesn't smoke.'



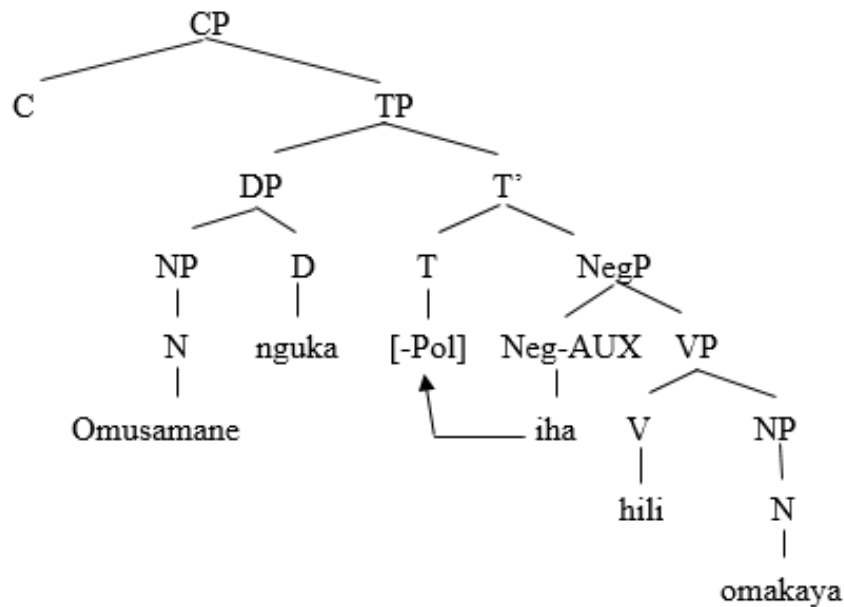
Does this man not smoke?



The negative marker *doesn't* in (18) has moved above the subject to make the declarative statement interrogative (21) which we can argue that it is a T-to-C movement. The English suffix *-n't* retains its position, but it would be written in full in (21) because it can only be contracted when it is hosted with *Does*. It would then read as: Does this man not smoke? Additionally, *-n't* can join *Does* in C since *Does* can provide a host for *-n't* to license Case on the subject (Case licensing is not of focus in the present study)<sup>2</sup> to read as: Doesn't this man smoke?

In Oshiwambo, changing from declarative to negative, there is only an intonation change. This is totally different from how English moves its negative marker in front of the subject. (Oshiwambo translation)<sup>3</sup>.

Omusamene nguka iha hili omakaya  
 Man this NEG-AUX smoke.  
 'This man doesn't smoke.'

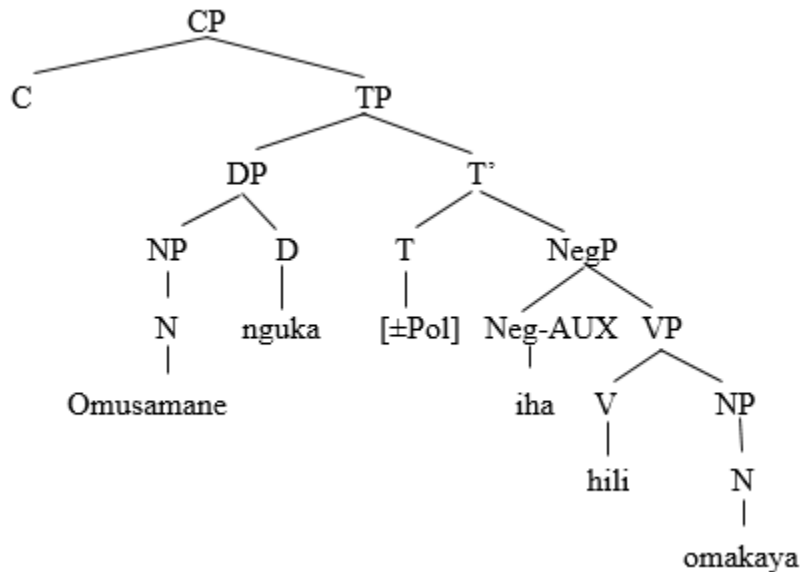


<sup>2</sup> See Beukema and Coopmans' theory of licensing in imperatives.

<sup>3</sup> CP-Ofrase yocomplimentiser. C-ocomplimentiser. TP- ofrase yethimbo. DP-ofrase yehololo. NP-ofrase yoshityadhina N-oshityadhina D-oshitopolwa shoshityahololi T'-oshitopolwa shethimbo T-ethimbo. NegP-ofrase yetindo. NegAUX-okatungithi ketindo. VP-ofrase yoshityalonga. V- oshityalonga. Pol- eyooloko pokati kekoleko netindo.



27. Omusamane nguka iha hili omakaya?  
 Man this NEG-AUX smoke.  
 'Doesn't this man smoke?' or 'This man doesn't smoke?'



Holmberg (2015) asserts that the yes/no questions have the Pol value  $\pm\text{Pol}$  as seen in (28). In Oshiwambo, when changing a negative declarative (18) to interrogative (21), the negative auxiliary *iha* doesn't change its position, but rather the intonation changes. In (28) *i-* starts out in Neg, but raises to another head, (in this case polarity head) in order to 'value' the polarity feature as negative. According to Holmberg (2015), in negative declaratives, Pol is assign a negative value when the question has middle negation. As seen in English, *does* and *-n't* may be written separately which allows the two (*does* and *-n't*) to have separate heads. The Oshiwambo *-i* cannot stand alone; it has to cliticise into the version *iha*. (*i-* is negative prefix while *-ha* shows the tense of the sentence although the two should always be written together).

### Negative words in oshiwambo

#### a) Negative sentence

There are few instances where full negative words are used in Oshiwambo. A few of those are listed below:

*Hasho* -not  
*Ka- na* -none  
*Ka- na sha* -nothing  
*Nande nande* - never

What gets to be attached to *ka-* is a subject marker depending on what the noun classes the subjects are. Ding (2013) referred to English negatives (*neither, nor, not, never, nobody, no one, nothing, nowhere*) as full negatives, the same can be applied to these Oshiwambo words. Interestingly, Oshiwambo language can turn negative sentences into single negative words. Simply put, the name<sup>4</sup> of a person can be derived from a negative sentence. For example:

<sup>4</sup> **A short background on Oshiwambo negative names:** Long ago when the forefathers and grandparents begat children, they would want to express their emotions through their children's names. If they want to throw shades to their neighbors or family members, the name of the child would be the right way to use it.

*Nghaamwa* ‘can’t be sided’, *Nghifikepunye* ‘I am not of your age’, *Nghikongwa* ‘I can’t be hunted’, *Hanyemukwete* ‘we do not depend on you’, etc.

(Illustration 1)

Affirmative		Negative	
1. Osho ngaho	<i>It's like that</i>	4. <u>Hasho</u> ngaho	<i>It's <b>not</b> like that</i>
2. Ope na uupyakadhi	<i>There's problem</i>	5. <u>Kape</u> na uupyakadi	<i>There's <b>no</b> problem</i>
3. Omu na sha	<i>There's something</i>	6. <u>Kamu na sha</u>	<i>There is <b>nothing</b></i>
		7. Ina popya <u>nandenande</u>	<i>She <b>never</b> spoke</i>
		8. <u>Nghifikepunye</u>	<i>I am <b>not</b> of your age</i>

In this illustration, the negative auxiliaries have changed slightly to agree with the subjects (hereby implied). What is attached to **ka-** is a subject marker depending on the noun class the subject is. Sentence 2 has **kape-** while sentence 3 has **Kamu-**, these are all dictated by the subject. Although these negative words do not appear in the same positions in English and Oshiwambo, their functions within the sentences are equally the same.

### b) Negative meaning

Bestowing to Ding (2013), this form is different from a negative sentence in the sense that it can negate any situation and it may take any form. He further adds that this form of negative takes quasi negative words such as *hardy*, *barely*, *few*, *little*, *seldom*, etc. Clark (1976) refers to these words as part of implicit negation. In Oshiwambo some of the of quasi negatives are: *haaluhe-* ‘rarely’, *kashona-* ‘little’, *nuudhiguu-* ‘hardly’ and *ha naana-* ‘barely’. These words do not completely invoke negative, but rather show that there is no complete affirmation.

Example: Haalushe ha popi mokule ‘*He rarely speaks loud.*’  
 Oha popi kashona ‘*He barely speaks.*’  
Onuudhigu wu adhe a mwena ‘*You would hardly find her/him quiet.*’

Thus far, the English and Oshiwambo negative words have contributed to negative meaning and sentential negation. Also, we have seen the affirmative sentences in Oshiwambo being negated by sentential negation *hasho* -‘not’, *ka- na-*‘none’ etc. as in: *Hasho ngaho* – ‘It is not like that’ and *Kape na sha* – ‘There is nothing’. Interestingly, the negative polarity item (NPI) (adverb) *never* which translates *nande nande* in Oshiwambo is allowed in both English and Oshiwambo sentential negation. As in: *Ita zi po nande nande* -‘He will *never* leave’. We can say that the negative sentences in English and Oshiwambo allow NPIs.

### Conclusion

This article has explored negation in English and Oshiwambo where approximately all negation kinds in Oshiwambo were tackled but not all types of negation in English. It appears that Bantu languages share a common rule of negation which is the use of a pre-initial prefix. The similarity in negation among Bantu languages seems to make the negation rule fairly easy to learn by Bantu speakers when they have to learn each other’s language rules.

The name *Nghaamwa*, which translates to ‘can’t be sided’ means the parents/child does not need anyone to be great; they are better off on their own. Additionally, *Nghifikepunye* translates to ‘I am not of your age’ clearly provokes other people that the man is trying to say he is older than others and therefore should be respected.

Regarding the conclusion from the close analysis of negation in English and Oshiwambo language, the two languages seem to show a slight difference as far as negation is concerned which is the point of generative grammar. The rules to changing negative imperative to interrogative or declarative are different between the two languages; changing from imperative to interrogative in Oshiwambo, the auxiliary negative marker retains its position, and the intonation changes. However, in English, the auxiliary is moved in front of the subject if the subject is explicitly presented.

The negative sentences of Oshiwambo are achieved by a few words which, in English negation, are called full negative words. While the negative meaning is achieved by quasi negatives in both languages, and they both allow the negative polarity item (NPIs) word *never* in sentential negation. There are many areas of negation that can be explored. The future researchers can look into negation in second language learning of Oshiwambo. It would also be great to compare negation in Oshiwambo language to other Bantu languages.

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