

THE STRUCTURE OF NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN NFAW

Vincent Tanda and Emmanuel Tabah
Linguistics Programme, Department of English,
University of Buea, Cameroun
vtanda@yahoo.com

This paper investigates the structure of the negative construction in Nfaw, a coastal Bantu language spoken in Cameroon. It submits that although Nfaw makes use of many negative morphemes, all which translate to the single English negative morpheme 'not' these morphemes are not free variants. The use of the negative morphemes in Nfaw is shown to be predicated on the tense and sentence type. The distribution of the negative morphemes is, further, shown not to be symmetrical in the sense that while some of them may only occur at the preverbal position, some others are restricted to the post verbal position .

La présente étude analyse la structure de la construction de la négation en nfaw, langue Bantu de la région côtière parlée au Cameroun. Elle part du postulat que bien que la langue nfaw utilise plusieurs morphèmes de la négation qui se traduisent tous en anglais par 'not', ces morphèmes ne sont pas des variantes libres. L'usage de chacun de ces morphèmes négatifs en nfaw dépend du temps verbal et du type de phrase. En outre, la distribution des morphèmes de la négation n'est pas symétrique, en ce que certains ne s'emploient qu'en position préverbale tandis que d'autres ne sont employés qu'en position post-verbale.

0. INTRODUCTION

Negation is a process whereby a negative particle is added to a sentence or constituent expressing a proposition with the intention of reversing the truth condition of that proposition. Over the years, negation has constituted a major domain of research within descriptive, typological, and theoretical linguistics. According to Trask (1993), the expression of negation has been observed to vary widely among languages in the sense that while some languages will ubiquitously employ a single morpheme invariably to mark negation, some others employ more than one morpheme. For instance, while the English language uses 'not' to mark negation, other languages such as Mokpe (Lyonga 2002), Nfaw, etc employ not less than three. Bafut uses the discontinuous morpheme **kaa...sî** (Chumbow and Tamanji 1994). The question to answer here is why some languages like English and French make use of the morphemes 'not' and 'ne pas' respectively invariably, while some others like Nfaw use three or more to achieve the same purpose.

Furthermore, in some of the world's languages the negation marker is preverbal and in others it occurs at the end of the sentence (see Mendandi 2003 and others). Interestingly as well, although the negation marker is a free morpheme in a language like English, in Efik (Mensah 2001) it is a bound morpheme attached to the verb. This work seeks to investigate the structure of negation in Nfaw, a coastal Bantu language of Cameroon spoken by some 8400 people (Grimes 2000). Nfaw employs the following negative morphemes:

ʃɛ, áwə, òsì, áʔ, sǎ, sî, káká and **ká, ʃɛ, òsì, sǎ, sî, káká** and **ká**, usually precede the verb in a sentence while **áwə** and **áʔ** occur at the postverbal position. Consider the following sentences in Nfaw:

- (1) a. **à nùŋ mákání**
 he say prayer
 He is praying
- b. **à ʃě nùŋ mákání**
 he NEG say prayer
 He is not praying
-
- (2) a. **mì mè náli?**
 I P1 sleep
 I have slept
- b. **mì náli? áwə**
 I sleep NEG
 I have not slept

Note that in (1b) the negation morpheme **ʃě** precedes the verb, but in (2b) the morpheme **áwə** comes after the verb. Our objective in this work is to present a description of the phenomenon of negation in Nfaw. The results attained here will add to the literature on negation in the World's languages. This work is divided into two main parts. The first part handles the relationship between negation and tense, while the second section examines negation in relation to sentence structure.

1. TENSE AND NEGATION

In Nfaw, like related Coastal Bantu languages, negation is intricately linked to tense such that the negative particle used varies with respect to the tense of the verb. This treatment therefore links negation with tense. Tense relates the time of occurrence of an action, event or state to the time when it is described. It could be marked morphologically by inflections on the verb or by an auxiliary as in English, or syntactically by free tense morphemes in a sentence. Often, as is the case in declarative sentences in Nfaw, on introduction of the aspectual marker **ə**, tense is realized as a tonal morpheme on the negative particle. In the following section, we examine the syntax of negation in Nfaw.

1.1 THE PRESENT TENSE

The present tense is generally used to describe events occurring at the time of description, but could also be used for habitual events. In Nfaw, this tense is unmarked morphologically. We want to note however, that unlike in many Bantu languages where this tense is marked by a tonal morpheme, the Nfaw data does not seem to bear this out. Consider the following examples:

(3) a. **mì dí á ndáp**
 I be in house
 I am in the house

b. **mì ʃě á ndáp**
 I NEG in house
 I am not in the house

(4) a. **à nùŋ mákání**
 he say prayer
 He is praying

b. **à ʃě nùŋ mákání**
 he NEG say prayer
 He is not praying

The corresponding negative particle for the present tense is **ʃě**. The sentences in (3a) and (4a) are negated as in (3b) and (4b). The negative form of (3b) shows that with the addition of the negative particle **ʃě**, the verb **dí** ‘be’ as in (3a) is omitted. If the meaning of the sentence can be deduced in the absence of the verb, then one can stipulate that the negative particle has qualities which facilitate this interpretation. Tanda and Neba (2006) observe that in Mokpe, a neighbouring coastal Bantu language of Cameroon, negation relates to tense such that the negative marker completely replaces the tense morpheme. For such omission to be possible, the condition of recoverability must be met. In this case, since negative morphemes are tagged to tenses, the tense of a sentence could be deduced from the negative morpheme used. Thus, in these languages, functional categories can be replaced by the negative particle. In fact, Mokpe displays a similar correlation between tense and negation though it employs fewer morphemes. The following Mokpe examples would illustrate this.

(5) a. **á má ʃándzà**
 he PAST jump
 He jumped

b. **à zrí ʃándzà**
 he NEG jump
 He did not jump

(6) a. **à wélilí ʃándzà**
 he PROG jump
 He is jumping

b. **à zrá ʃàndzà**
 he NEG jump
 He is not jumping

Both examples above show that the tense morpheme is dropped in the negative sentence. Returning to the Nfaw example, the omission of ‘to be’ is possible because it lacks semantic content. This explains why verbs with semantic content cannot be omitted in this way.

1.2 THE PAST TENSE

This tense is used to describe events / actions that took place prior to the time of description. Like most Bantu languages, Nfaw has various past tenses which describe the degree of remoteness (in time) of an event from the time of description. Three of these tenses are discussed here: the immediate past, the non-too-distant past, and the remote past.

1.2.1 The immediate past

The immediate past focuses on “just completed” actions. To negate sentences in the immediate past, the particles **áwə** and **á?** are employed as in 7 -9 below.

- (7) a. **mì m̀è náǎ?**
 I P1 sleep
 I have slept
- b. **mì m̀è náǎ? áwə**
 I P1 sleep NEG
 I have not slept
- (8) a. **à m̀è kú b̀èdzì**
 he P1 stop crying
 He has stopped crying
- b. **à m̀è kú áwə b̀èdzì**
 he P1 stop NEG cry
 He has not stopped crying
- (9) a. **ekoko à m̀è kúndí**
 Ekoko SM P1 fail
 Ekoko has failed
- b. **ekoko à m̀è kúndí á?**
 Ekoko SM P1 fail NEG
 Ekoko has not failed
- (10) * **mì m̀è náǎ? ǰě**
 I P1 sleep NEG
 I have not slept.

The (b) sentences are the corresponding negative forms of those in (a). It should be observed here that **áwə** and **á?** occur in free variation. Where one appears, it is

possible to replace it with the other without any alteration in meaning. However, in this tense **ʃɛ** is unacceptable as shown by the ungrammaticality of (10).

The lowering of the second high tone on the verb stems **kúndí** and **náíí?** in (5b) and (7b) on addition of the negative particle is probably a reflex of Stevick's rule which delinks the second branch of a high tone when it is followed by another at word boundary. According to Mutaka and Tamanji (2000) the low tone on these vowels is ultimately assigned by default.

1.2.2 The non-too-distant past (P2)

This tense is distinguished from the immediate past by adverbials such as **wújə** 'this morning' and **mbù me ntúmbi** 'last month'. The negative marker for this tense is **á?** as in (11) and (12).

- (11) a. **sí bí sǎ? mǎsákì wú jə**
 we were dance dance morning this
 We were dancing this morning
- b. **sí bílí á? ɛsǎ? mǎsákì wu jə**
 we were NEG dance dance morning this
 We were not dancing this morning
- (12) a. **à dzì a mbú me ntúmbi**
 she cry PREP month which passed
 She cried last month
- b. **à bílí á? dzì mbú me ntúmbi**
 she was NEG cry month which passed
 She did not cry last month.

Apparently, there is no P2 marker. However, given that low melody verb roots like **dzì** 'cry' take a rising tone in this tense, it is logical to posit that this tense is marked by a floating high tone. This tonal morpheme links to low melody roots yielding the attested LH. The high tone linking applies vacuously to high melody roots like **diá?** 'eat' so that the phonetic form does not change. When the negative morpheme is introduced as in (11b) and (12b) above, the full forms of **bí** and **sǎ** are used. However, though the positive forms are truncated, the tones are not affected. Thus **bí** and **sǎ** have HL (falling) and LH (rising) tones respectively which are the same melodies in the full forms **bílí** (HL) and **ɛsǎ?** (LH).

1.2.3 The Remote Past (P3)

The remote past tense as the name implies describes events which occurred in the distant past. It bears similarity to the non-too-distant past, the two being set apart by the time adverbials used such as 'a long time ago', etc. Like in the non-distant past, the negative morpheme is **á?** as in (13) and (14).

- (13) a. **mi bì á wə á púnde nì**
 I was LOC there at time that
 I was there at that time
- b. **mi bìli á? á wə á púnde nì**
 I was NEG LOC there at time that
 I was not there at that time
- (14) a. **mì ndíli garri púnde nì**
 I eat garri time that
 I ate garri at that time
- b. **mì ndíli á? garri púnde nì**
 I eat NEG garri time that
 I did not eat garri at that time

1.3 THE FUTURE TENSE

The future tense in Nfaw is marked by a rising tone on the subject marker. The negative particle for this tense is **ʃě** (the same as for the present). The third person plural however behaves peculiarly, taking its tonal tense morpheme on the verb rather than the subject marker. It equally has a separate negative particle **sí**, such as in (16).

- (15) a. **hanna á kwə bwé**
 Hannah SM cut trees
 Hannah will cut down the trees
- b. **hanna á ʃě kwə bwé**
 Hannah SM NEG cut trees
 Hannah will not cut down trees
- (16) a. **bá dʒí nkwi**
 they cry night
 They will cry at night
- b. **bá sí dʒì nkwi**
 they NEG cry night
 They will not cry at night

Note that in this tense the use of **áwə** or **á?** is unacceptable as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of (17)

- (17) * **bá áwə dʒì nkwi**
 they NEG cry night
 They will not cry at night

It is worth noting that the negative marker can be elided on the introduction of the aspectual marker ə. In such cases, the aspectual marker bears a rising tone as shown in (18c) below.

- (18) a. **bá bí nà̀n mámwòn**
 they be chase birds
 They chased away the birds
- b. **bá bí á? ə nà̀n mámwòn**
 they be NEG ASP chase birds
 They did not chase away the birds
- c. **bá bí ǎ nà̀n mámwòn**
 they be ASP chase birds
 They did not chase away the birds

In this section, the link between negative markers and tense has been discussed. It has been established that the choice of negative particle is greatly influenced by tense. **ǎ** applies to actions in the present and future tenses while **áwə** and **á?** apply to the past tense.

2. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

The form of the negative particle in Nfaw may also depend on the sentence type. In this section we examine the nature of negation in various sentence types.

2.1 NEGATION IN IMPERATIVE SENTENCES.

Imperative sentences present commands or directions. Such sentences are characteristically short, often consisting of the verb only, or the verb and its complement. Imperative sentences are negated in Nfaw by the morpheme **òsì** ‘not’, as in (19).

- (19) a. **jǎn** Buy!
kə Go!
búngú Run!
- b. **òsì ján** Don’t buy!
òsì kə Don’t go!
òsì búngú Don’t run!

When the negation of a constituent is intended to serve the semantic function of discontinuing an action which was initiated, or refuting a previously stated proposition, the postverbal morpheme **pə** ‘any longer’ is introduced, as in (20b).

- (20) a. **jǎn radio** Buy a radio!
- b. **òsì ján pə radio** Don’t buy a radio any longer!

The examples above show that the rising tone on verbs like **jǎn** simplifies to a high in the negative. This is probably for emphasis, as a high pitch is emphatic.

2.2 NEGATION IN RELATIVE CLAUSES

The relative clause in Nfaw is introduced by two markers **jə** and **àwə**. Relative clauses are negated by the morphemes **sǎ** and **á?**. Thus for sentences with a relative clause, there are two possibilities of negation:

- (i) Where the scope of the negative particle is the relative clause, (in which case **sǎ** is used); and
- (ii) Where the entire proposition is rendered negative, (where **á?** is used).

Consider the following sentences:

- (21) a. **mɔ?** **àwə** **à** **dí** **fá** **à** **wílí**
 man REL SM is here SM died
 The man who was here is dead
- b. **mɔ?** **àwə** **ǐ** **sǎ** **fá** **à** **wílí**
 man REL SM NEG here SM died
 The man who is not here is dead
- c. **mɔ?** **àwə** **à** **dí** **fá** **à** **wílí** **á?**
 man REL SM is here SM dead NEG
 The man who is here is not dead

In (21b), the subject marker changes from **à** to **ǐ**. We assume that this still functions as SM because of its syntactic position. This change is accompanied by the omission of the verb 'be'. Following our earlier postulation, this is certainly another manifestation of the cliticization of the copula in this language. It is obvious that while (21c) negates the proposition (the man is not dead), (21b) negates only the relative clause (the man who is not here). The interesting observation here is that Nfaw uses separate negative particles for each.

2.3 CLAUSES STATING PURPOSE

Such clauses state purpose of a situation contained in a matrix clause. The linking phrase **líbwènà**, 'so that', 'in order that', etc) introduces such clauses in Nfaw. Clauses stating results are negated by the morpheme **sì**, as in (22a) and (23b).

- (22) a. **mbone** **à** **kó á** **wə** **á** **líbwènà** **ekoko** **à** **kwî**
 Mbone SM go PREP there in order Ekoko SM annoy
 Mbone has gone there in order to make Ekoko angry
- b. **mbone** **à** **kó á** **wə** **á** **líbwènà** **ekoko** **sì** **kwî**
 Mbone SM go PREP there in order Ekoko NEG annoy
 Mbone has gone there in order not to annoy Ekoko.

- (23) a. **pǎ à líbwènà mì kwì**
 come so that I annoy
 Come so that I may be angry
- b. **pǎ à líbwènà mì sì kwì**
 come so that me NEG annoy
 Come so that I may not be angry

2.4 CONSTITUENT NEGATION AND CONTRASTIVE EMPHASIS

The particle **sà káká** ‘it is not’ is employed in the negation of constituent structures like the NP. This particle precedes the constituent, as in (24) and (25).

- (24) **sà káká john** It is not John

- (25) **sà káká biyì** It is not yams

The negation of constituents as in (24) above, has the semantic implication of contrastive emphasis. In addition to denying the fact that it is John, (24) suggests that it is someone else.

2.5 CONSTITUENT NEGATION AND THE FOCUS MARKER

The focus marker serves to focalize constituents in a sentence. The use of both the focus marker and constituent negation as in (25), brings about contrastive focus.

- (26) a. **sà káká biyì bə mi nìjíní**
 it NEG yams FOC I like
 It is not yams I like
- b. **sà káká nə à kè á ɲkí**
 it NEG FOC SM go PREP home
 It was not him who went home

(26a) above is to be interpreted as meaning that the speaker does not like yams but likes something else. In Nfaw, it is possible to use more than one focus marker in a construction. The resultant construction gets an emphatic interpretation. When used in this way, it also has the semantic effect of contrastive focus as in (27).

- (27) a. **sarah mó miə mó à míní jə**
 Sarah FOC herself FOC SM look it
 Sarah looked for it (herself)

The examples in (26) and (27) also show slight differences in the form of the focus marker, specifically in terms of the initial consonant. Given that Nfaw is a noun class language, these differences can readily be attributed to the difference in noun class of the focused constituents. In fact, in most noun class languages, particles tend to take the class prefix of the noun they modify.

When more than one focus marker is used in a sentence the negative marker is **séna** as exemplified in (26b).

- (27) b. **se séna sarah mó miə mó à míní jə**
 it NEG Sarah FOC herself FOC SM look it
 It is not Sarah herself who looked for it

Semantically, the denial in (26a) above is not of the proposition (X looked for it), but the focus of attention that Sarah herself “looked for it”. The tacit implication of this denial is that someone else looked for it. A similar situation obtains in (27) where only the focus is denied.

- (28) a. **bəŋǎ bǎn bə bó búngú bǎn mùlkə?**
 Mothers children FOC SM take children care
 It is only mothers who take care of children
- b. **sè ká bəŋǎ bǎn bə bó búngú bǎn mùlkə?**
 it NEG mothers children FOC SM take children care
 It is not only mothers that take care of children

In (28b) **ká** (which is the shortened form of **káká**) is employed. The full form **káká** is certainly a reduplication of this morpheme and both are used as free variants.

2.6 DOUBLE NEGATIVES IN NFAW.

We refer here to the use of more than one negative particle in a construction. In complex sentences like (29), the use of more than one negative particle can be explained on semantic grounds.

- (29) **mə? àwə sə fa à wíli á?**
 man who NEG here SM die NEG
 The man who is not here is not dead

In this construction, the first negative morpheme **śǎ** negates the embedded relative clause while the second **á?** negates the matrix clause. The resultant semantic implication is given in (30) and (31).

(30) the man who is not here

(31) the man is not dead

Example (29) in effect subsumes the negative constructions in (19) and (20). However, in simple sentences like (32), there is no semantic motivation for using more than one negative particle.

(32) **sé ʃi píli á?**
 we NEG come NEG
 We have not come

(33) **mi ʃi kwòṅ á?**
 I NEG sing NEG
 I will not sing

The kind of double negation in (32) and (33) is for very emphatic pragmatic situations. (32) and (33) therefore exemplify double negation while (29) is only apparently an example of double negation.

Double negation is rarely elicited from Nfaw speakers as translation for negative sentences. It is however a possibility and speakers employ such utterances depending on the amount of emphasis they seek to convey. When transitive verbs are used, the negative morpheme **á?** is positioned before the complement of the verb as in (34) and (35). This shows that the position of the negative particle is immediate post verbal and not absolute sentence final.

(34) **bá sí kwòṅ á? mikonè**
 they NEG sing NEG song
 They will not sing a song

(35) **mì ndilì á? garri púnde nì**
 I eat NEG garri time that
 I did not eat garri at that time

In this section, we have described the various negative morphemes in Nfaw and their contexts of use. Apart from **áwə** and **á?**, which are used as free variants, the other morphemes have been found to be tagged to tenses and sentence types. This distribution is summarized in the Table below.

Table

Negative Marker	Context Of Use
ʃě	Present / future tense
áwə	P1
á?	P1, P2, P3
sí	Future (3 rd person)
òsì	Imperative
sǎ	Relative clause
sì	Purpose clause
káká / ká	Constituent
séna	Focused construction

3. CONCLUSION

We set out in this paper to examine the structure of negative constructions in Nfaw. Some of the negative morphemes in this language **áwə** and **áʔ** have been found to be used in free variation while the rest are determined by tense or sentence type. The distribution of negation morphemes is intriguing in the sense that while some of the morphemes occur in preverbal position, others occur postverbally. Finally, it is possible in this language to use double negatives depending on the amount of emphasis the speaker seeks to convey.

ABBREVIATIONS

FOC	=	Focus word	SM	=	Subject marker
HL	=	Falling tone	LOC	=	Locative particle
LH	=	Rising tone	ASP	=	Aspectual marker
NEG	=	Negation	REL	=	Relative pronoun
P1	=	Immediate past	PREP	=	Preposition
P2	=	Non-too-distant past	PROG	=	Progressive
P3	=	Remote past			

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