A grammar of Nchane: A Bantoid (Beboid) language of Cameroon
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Cover Page

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Chapter 15

Negation

Negative constructions in Nchane display a fair amount of variety, which presents a challenge for description. This chapter attempts to capture the generalities that have been observed, as well as point out some of the finer details which appear to be related to motivating different negation construction strategies.

Negative clauses utilize one or more negation words, which are summarized in Table 15.1. The negative marker **gɛ̄** 'NEG2' appears in all negative clause constructions, usually in clause-final position. Note that the tense and aspect "contexts" for the negation markers **bá̰** 'still' and **á** 'NEG1' as provided in the table are approximations and not absolute, since the actual situation is more complicated. More details are provided in §15.2.

Marker	Gloss	Context
gɛ̄	NEG2	multiple
bá̰	still	preverbal (+PAST, -PROG)
á	NEG1	clause initial (-PAST)
kéfɛ̄	VET	clause initial (+IMP)

Table 15.1 Summary of Nchane negation markers.

Negation constructions may be divided into two types, depending on the target or scope of the negation. Constituent negation is described in §15.1 and clausal negation in §15.2. Triply marked negative constructions are presented in §15.3. The final section (15.4) deals with negative commands, which are designated as "vetitive" constructions.

15.1 Constituent negation

Negative constructions, in which the target of the negation is a clausal constituent, utilize a discontinuous marker consisting of two instances of **gɛ̄** 'NEG2'. The first **gɛ̄** immediately precedes the negated constituent; the second **gɛ̄** occurs at the end of the clause. The NEG2 marker is usually realized in clause-final position with a L tone. Note that it has the alternative pronunciation of [**kɛ̄**], particularly in non-clause final position. The framing construction is summarized in Figure 15.1.

<center>

gɛ̄ x...**gɛ̀**

</center>

<center>Figure 15.1 Formula for Nchane constituent negation constructions.</center>

The ellipsis in the formula represents any elements which canonically follow the negated constituent "x". This includes the verb complex, in the case of subject negation. Presumably, any clausal constituent may be negated utilizing this strategy. Examples (15.1)-(15.3) demonstrate subject, object and comitative oblique negation respectively.

(15.1) | **gɛ́** | fy-ɛ̄: | fī-mī̃ | ɲùmɛ̀ | yú |
        |---------|--------|--------|-------|-----|
        | NEG2 | c19-thing | c19-some | COP(N) | on.it |

fí	yàg-é	bvù-gù	fɛ̄nē	fɛ̀-kū	**gɛ̀**
c19REL	surpass-PROG	c14-marriage	here	c16-down	NEG2

        *'...no other thing exists that is greater than (*lit. *surpassing) marriage here on earth.'*   Marriage.3.1

(15.2) | mū-ɲĩ̋ | gɛ̀ | ɲá-á | **gɛ̄** | bà-ŋkɛ̀ | **gɛ̀** |
        |--------|-----|------|---------|---------|---------|
        | c18a-bird | P3 | give-PROG | NEG2 | c2-song | NEG2 |

        *'Birds were not singing.' (*lit. *giving no songs)*   Lake.6.1

(15.3) | nɔ̀ | wù | gɛ̀ | bé | **gɛ̄** | bɛ́ | bvù-ŋgà | **gɛ̀,** |
        |-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|-----|----------|----------|
        | like.that | 3SG | P3 | ᴾCOP | NEG2 | with | c14-power | NEG2 |

        *'Although he was very weak...' (*lit. *as he was not with power)* Lake.6.5

The text data also provide examples of negation of complement clauses, as in (15.4).

(15.4) kī-fē   shégé,   wù   gɛ̄   jā   wé,   wù   ɲū   **gɛ̄**
        c7-time   small   3SG   P3   stand   up   3SG   COP(N)   NEG2

        nɔ̀   wú   yɛ́nɛ́   **gɛ̄**
        like.that   3SG   breathe   NEG2

*'Sometime later, he awoke, unable to breathe.' (*lit. *he being not like that he breathe)*   Lake.4.3

15.2 Clausal negation

As with constituent negation, the negation of clauses also involves discontinuous negative marking. However, unlike with constituent negation, clausal negation is sensitive to TAM expression, resulting in two distinct negation strategies, which are summarized in Figure 15.2. For the sake of convenience, I refer to the first strategy as the "**bá̰**-strategy" and the second strategy as the "**á**-strategy".[100]

S **bá̰** V[core]...**gɛ̀**   (clauses with [+PAST], [-PROG] verbs)
á S V[complex]...**gɛ̀**   (elsewhere)

Figure 15.2 Formulas for Nchane clausal negation constructions.

The **bá̰**-strategy involves the auxiliary **bá̰** or **bá̰:** 'still', which immediately precedes the verb core and does not allow subject agreement to intervene between it and the main verb, although it is itself marked with subject agreement when the subject is 1SG. Tense markers, when present, precede the negative marker. For these reasons, I consider **bá̰** as belonging to the verb complex. Data is lacking that would establish the ordering of **bá̰** and preverbal TAM markers other than tense.

In the **á**-strategy, the negative marker **á** 'NEG1' occurs in the clause-initial position. A suitable candidate for the source of NEG1 has not yet been identified. As Figure 15.2 indicates, the **bá̰**-strategy is used only with past, non-progressive constructions and the **á**-strategy elsewhere. The NEG2 marker **gɛ̄** occurs in the clause-final position in both strategies.

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[100] The neighboring Beboid language Noni makes the same distinction, with +PAST, -PROG clauses utilizing the negative marker **bá ~ bá:** in the preverbal position, and +PROG clauses utilizing the negative marker **kɛ́** in clause initial position (Hyman 1981: 57, 60). The nearby Yemne-Kimbi language Mungbam also makes a distinction between two categories of clauses in negative clause formation. However, in this language, the distinction is Realis vs. Irrealis, and differentiates the two by utilizing different negative markers for each distinct type, with comparable syntax in each (Lovegren 2013: 417).

The association of 'still' in negative constructions aligns with the notion of "phasal polarity expressions", where the negative counterpart of the "still" expression is the "no longer" expression or the "not yet" expression.[101] Löfgren (2019) shows that it is not uncommon for Bantu languages to utilize such phasal polarity expression systems, where at least one positive term appears with and without negation markers to establish such a contrastive set of expressions.

The two strategies for clausal negation constructions are illustrated through an elicited TAM paradigm presented in Table 15.2, with the phrase "Nji catches (**kɔ́**) termites (**ŋgɔ́**)" serving as the base. It can be seen that the object in the **bá**-strategy obligatorily occurs in the immediately-before-verb position, although not in triple negative constructions (see §15.3). Presumably, this allows NEG2 to occur in the immediately after verb position associated with canonical focus. Meanwhile, the object appears *in situ* in the **á**-strategy.[102]

Tense	Example	Gloss
P0	ɲ̀jì **bá** ŋgɔ̄ kɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji didn't catch termites.'*
P1	ɲ̀jì bé **bá** ŋgɔ̄ kɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji didn't catch termites.'*
P2	ɲ̀jì chí **bá** ŋgɔ̄ kɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji didn't catch termites.'*
P3	ɲ̀jì gɛ̄ **bá** ŋgɔ̄ kɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji didn't catch termites.'*
PROG	**á** ɲ́jì kɔ̄d-è ŋgɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji isn't catching termites.'*
FUT	**á** ɲ̄jī kɔ̄ ŋgɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji will not catch termites.'*
HAB	**á** ɲ̀jì tɔ́ wù kɔ̄ ŋgɔ̄ **gɛ̀**	*'Nji doesn't catch termites.'*

Table 15.2 Clausal negation strategies illustrated through a TAM paradigm.

Note that the position of the object in negative clauses is slightly different from object defocalization observed in affirmative clauses. In negative constructions, the object occurs between the negative marker **bá** and the main verb, while in affirmative clauses the defocalized object precedes the entire verb complex. See §16.3.1 for more details.

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[101] Nchane uses the same term "still" for both, "not yet" and "no longer" expressions, a phenomenon observed by Kramer (2017: 6) for some languages.
[102] It appears that future tense marking in the future example in Table 15.2 is neutralized. Regardless, this clause may not be confused with an immediate past reading, since the corresponding P0 clause utilizes the negative marking associated with the **bá**-strategy.

Example (15.5) is a text example illustrating a preverbal object in a non-progressive negative construction.

(15.5) Ø-lá   chí-mī, bā gὲ **bá:** fy-ὲ̄:   fɔ́ búsē̄ **gē̄**
       c5-compound c5-some they P3 still c19-thing there remove NEG2

       'In the other compound, they did not remove anything.'   Fire.22

As mentioned above, clauses with progressive verbs utilize the **á**-strategy, as in (15.6).

(15.6) **á**   ɲjì chí kūŋ-è   Ø-nà   **gὲ̀**
       NEG1   N.   P2 drive.away-PROG c1-cow NEG2

       'Nji was not driving the cow away (yesterday).'

The Progressive suffix is realized with a low tone, just as in constructions with a preverbal grammatical high-toned element, such as Hortative and Durative, which was discussed in §§9.1.2 and 9.2.

Although it is typical for non-progressive past clauses to utilize **bá** rather than **á**, there is at least one exception worth noting. Examples (15.7) and (15.8) both show the **á**-strategy being utilized with non-progressive past clauses. However, both clauses are focus constructions. Example (15.7) is a postverbal agent focus clause with the pronoun **wù** in focus and example (15.8) shows focus on the applied object **shī lē** through the use of the focusing copula **ɲū**.

(15.7) (ŋ́gáŋ), **á**   bvū-lɛ̄̃: bé ɲá   wù shī   lē   **gὲ̀**
       no   NEG1 c14-fufu P1 give 3SG c9.chicken APPL NEG2

       '(No), HE did not give the chicken fufu (someone else did).'

(15.8) **á**   wù bé ɲá   bvū-lɛ̄̃: ɲū   shī   lē   **gὲ̀**
       NEG1   3SG P1 give c14-fufu COP(N) c9.chicken APPL NEG2

       'He did not give THE CHICKEN fufu.' (he gave it to THE DOG, for example)

Therefore, to the elements characterizing clauses which utilize the **bá-**strategy, we should add that any kind of formal focus marking is absent. Note that no examples of a clause with a Progressive main verb utilizing the **bá-**strategy appear in the data.

Sometimes, the initial negation marker is omitted, as in (15.9) and (15.10). However, the high tone associated with the negation marker usually remains and is realized on the subject element preceding the verb.

(15.9)   bá-mí   gɛ̀   jèm-é   **gɛ̀**
         c2-person.NEG   P3   talk-PROG   NEG2

         'No people were talking.'   Lake.6.11

(15.10) ń-tɛ̄m-è   **gɛ̀**
         1SG.NEG-strong-PROG   NEG2

         'I am not well.'

This phenomenon suggests that the language may be in the early stages of losing the initial negative marker, as predicted by the Jespersen cycle (see Jespersen (1917), and Devos and van der Auwera (2013) more specifically for this phenomenon among African languages), which is also relevant to the following section on triple negation constructions.

15.3 Triple negation constructions

Clauses with three negative markers are neither common nor rare in the text data. They always consist of the non-progressive negative marker **bá̰**, a NEG2 marker preceding a negated constituent and a clause-final NEG2. Examples (15.11) and (15.12) are given to illustrate.

(15.11) ñsá   y-é   chɛ̄-ɛ̄   gɛ̀   **bá̰:**   yɛ̄yɛ̀   **gɛ̄**
         c10.friend c10-3SG.POSS c10-ANA1   P3   still   learn   NEG2

         fy-ɛ̂:   fī-mī   **gɛ̀**
         c19-thing c19-some   NEG2

         'Those his friends did not learn anything (from the man's death).'
                                                               Greedy Friends.1.7

(15.12) wù   gɛ̀   **bá̰:**   yɛ̄ŋ   **gɛ̄**   bī-bāgɛ̄   lé   **gɛ̀,**
         3SG   P3   still   see   NEG2   c8-wound   APPL   NEG2

         'He saw no injuries…'   Lake.6.3

Note that the Object in these triple negation constructions remains *in situ*.

15.4 Vetitive

Prohibitions or negative commands utilize the clause-initial vetitive marker **kéfɛ̄**, as in (15.13)-(15.15).[103] In addition to the clause-final NEG2 marker, a second-person pronoun is always present and realized with a high tone. As with the **á**-strategy clausal negation constructions, the progressive suffix in Vetitive constructions is realized as low.

(15.13)

Ø-jwā̰:,	**kéfɛ̄**	wɔ́	fàn-è	fy-ɛ̄:	**gɛ̄,**
c1-husband.1SG.POSS	VET	2SG	fear-PROG	c19-thing	NEG2

m̄-bà:	lé	yú
c6a-soup	COP	on.it

'My husband, don't fear anything, there is soup.' (lit. soup is with it (fufu).)   Jealous Husband.2.2

(15.14)

wɔ̄	wű	Ø-mwā	wú	Ø-kwɛ̄sé,	wɔ̄	nɛ́	lɛ̋
2SG	c1REL	c1-child	c1REL	c1-woman	2SG	if	COP.COND

wɔ̄	lɛ̃̄:	fɛ̄	Ø-lá	chī	Ø-jwɛ̃sɛ́	lɛ̄,
2SG	enter	at	c5-compound	c5AM	c1-man	APPL

kéfɛ̄	wɔ́	lās-è	bā-mī	bā-ā	**gɛ̄,**
VET	2SG	lose[104]-PROG	c2-person	c2-ANA1	NEG2

kéfɛ̄	wɔ́	wā:d-è	bɛ́	Ø-chíjī	Ø-jwɔ̰̄:
VET	2SG	quarrel-PROG	with	c1-father	c1-husband.2SG.POSS

mɔ̀	Ø-bwē	Ø-jwɔ̰̄:	**gɛ̀**
RES	c1-mother	c1-husband.2SG.POSS	NEG2

'You the girl child, if you enter into your husband's compound don't look down on those people, don't quarrel with your father-in-law or mother-in-law.'   Marriage.6.6

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[103] The term "vetitive" is derived from the word "veto", and follows its use in the nearby language Mungbam (Lovegren 2013).

[104] This verb can also mean "minimize" or "make small".

(15.15) **kéfɛ̄**   bɛ́ŋ   jɛ̄ɲ-ì   bɛ̄ŋ   ság-è   wù   ā-lā
         VET   2PL   walk-PROG   2PL   judge-PROG   3SG   c6-compound

         ā   bā-mī   lé   **gɛ̀**
         c6AM   c2-person   APPL   NEG2

*'Do not go around, gossiping about her (*lit. *judging her) in people's
compounds, ...'*   Marriage.6.4

The vetitive marker is likely a grammaticalized contraction of some sort. The
ké portion of the word is possibly a form of **gɛ̄** NEG2, which is sometimes pronounced
as [**kɛ̄**] as pointed out in §15.1. The high tone could represent a negative grammatical
high tone associated with the other preverbal negative markers **bá̰** and **á**; or perhaps
it is the high tone associated with Imperative or Hortative constructions.

Two possibilities are noted for the source of the **fɛ̄** element. The first is that
it comes from the verb **fɛ̄** 'make, do'. A more likely possibility is that it is derived
from the locative class 16 prefix **fɛ̄-**. Indeed, the same form is seen in some rare cases
acting like a conditional introducer. Further, the development of the class 16 locative
affix into a negative marker is observed in other African languages (see Devos & Van
der Auwera 2013: 237).