Squibs

Babanki negation patterns

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Abstract

There are languages in the world in which the normal negation (NEG) construction includes a discontinuous morpheme or a double negative. In many of such languages with SVO structure, the first NEG morpheme precedes the verb while the second follows it, preferably occupying the end of the clause. Dryer's (2009) survey reports a number of such languages in Central Africa with different characteristics. One of the languages, Hausa, employs double NEG only some of the time. Babanki, a central Ring Grassfields Bantu language of Northwest Cameroon presents a case close to Hausa but different in that the second part of the standard negation construction is optional and can always occur except in negative questions where the question particle occupies the end of the clause preventing it from occurring. In central Ring, Babanki shows a unique pattern using the same discontinuous morpheme *kó`…bwen* for standard negation in all tenses/aspects.

Keywords: Babanki, Grassfields, negation, patterns

1   Introduction

This study describes particles that are used to negate a clause in Babanki, a central Ring Grassfields Bantu language of Northwest Cameroon.[1]

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[1] Native speakers prefer to use Kejom when referring both to the language and the two villages where it is spoken but I have chosen to use Babanki, the administrative name by which the language and the people are widely known.

Negation patterns have been described in five of the seven central Ring languages, namely, Kom (Shultz 1997), Mmen (Möller 2012), Oku (Nforbi & Ngum 2009), Bum (Akumbu & Mbong 2007) and Kuk (Kießling 2016), leaving out only Babanki and Kung. The discussion of Babanki negation particles in this paper is therefore meant to contribute to the current typological studies of negation in Grassfields Bantu.

Negation is the act of reversing the truth value of a proposition. According to Payne (1997: 282) the function of negation is to negate the clause which asserts an affirmation of an event, situation, or state of affairs. While many of the world's languages use a single negation marker for this purpose, there are some in which the normal negation construction includes a discontinuous morpheme or a double negative, e.g. Bafut (Chumbow & Tamanji 1994; Tamanji 2002). In many of such languages with SVO structure, the first negation morpheme (NEG1) precedes the verb while the second follows the verb, preferably occupying the end of the clause. Dryer's (2009) extensive survey of negation in some languages of Central Africa identifies many with double negators with some of them, such as Hausa, employing double negation only some of the time. Babanki, not mentioned in Dryer's work, singles out itself in that the second negation morpheme (NEG2) is generally optional unless the question particle *à* or the emphatic marker *lɔ́* occupy the end of a clause, preventing the (optional) negation morpheme from occurring. It appears that the only function of NEG2 is to reinforce negation. In Section 2 of this paper, I present some of the languages of Central Africa with double negators as well as discuss how negation works in other central Ring languages. In Section 3, I describe negation in Babanki and then mention briefly the relationship between negation and the question particle in Section 4. An attempt is made in Section 5 to examine Babanki negation in relation to Jespersen's Cycle and this is followed by a conclusion to the study in Section 6.

2   Negation in neighboring languages

It has been demonstrated that in Central Africa, there are "languages in which the normal construction for negation is a double negative, with one morpheme preceding the verb (possibly prefixed) and one following the verb (possibly suffixed)" (Dryer 2009: 315). This is the case, for example, in Kanakuru, Hausa, Mupun (West Chadic; Nigeria); Ma, Pambia (Adamawa-Ubangi, Niger-Congo; DR Congo); Bongo (Bongo-Bagirmi, Nilo-Saharan; Sudan); Ewe (Kwa, Niger-Congo; Ghana, Togo); Babungo

(Bantu; Cameroon); Amo (Kainji, Niger-Congo; Nigeria) which can be described as SNegVONeg. The following examples from Dryer (2009: 315–316) show the occurrence of double negatives in some of these languages.

(1) Babungo
ŋwə́ kèe gə̀ táa yìwìŋ mə̄
he NEG go.PFV to market NEG
'He did not go to the market.'

(2) Hausa
a. *bàn san sūna-n-sà ba*
NEG.1SG know name-LINK-3SG NEG
'I don't know his name.'

b. *ba nà uwà dà kai*
NEG CONT come with 2SG
'I am not going with you.'

(3) Bongo
a. *ma nja ami a'ji wa*
1SG NEG make thing NEG
'I am not doing anything.'

b. *m-u-yɛ le'ji wa*
1SG-PST-drink beer NEG
'I did not drink beer.'

The data also illustrate that double negation is sometimes obligatory in Hausa (2a) but not always required (2b). In Bongo, double negation is possible (3a) but the first negation morpheme can be left out (3b).

Among central Ring Grassfields Bantu languages of Northwest Cameroon, Babanki appears to be the one with the most reduced system of negation, particularly because tense, aspect and mood (TAM) do not interact with negation. In the other languages of this sub-group, negation is generally influenced by TAM, as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

In Kom, Shultz (1997) identifies four particles that can be used alone or in combination with other negators. One negator, *wi*, is used in present tense (imperfective) constructions, another, *bu*, is used with the past tense (perfect), while a different one, *tì*, is used with the past tense (perfective). In addition, *ka* is used with the future tense to negate imperative

constructions. The negators *bu* and *tɨ* can be used in combination in a past tense construction with present implications conveying the idea of unrealized expectations. Finally, the negators *bu* and *wi* can be used with the morpheme *fi* (which indicates repetition or "do again") and a future tense morpheme to describe a negative finality or certainty.

Mmen has "several different morphemes marking negation", the usage of which "is conditioned by tense, aspect and mood" (Möller 2012: 43). One of the morphemes, *pá'à*, is used with perfective aspect while *và* combines with imperfective aspect. On the other hand, *vàyn* occurs mainly together with the auxiliary *kà'á* 'can' and is used with any tense marker in perfective constructions. *Tà'á* is used to negate optative and conditional sentences while imperatives and hortatives are negated by *kə̀*.

According to Nforbi & Ngum (2009), there are at least eight negation morphemes in Oku. While *bàa* is used in the present and past tenses, covering both perfective and imperfective forms, the interrogative and necessity moods, *jia* is used essentially with the future tenses as well as with possibility and certainty moods. The rest of the negation morphemes in Oku make further subtle distinctions within tense and aspect.

At least three negation morphemes have been found in Bum (Akumbu & Mbong 2007), namely, a discontinuous morpheme *tá…(jè)* which combines only with the past tenses to mark negation and *wí(jè)* which combines with the present and future tenses. In both cases *jè* is optional because it may occur with *ta* and *wi* or it may be left out completely without changing the meaning of the negative sentence. The third morpheme is *bú* which can combine with present and past tenses to form negative constructions. In other words, negation in the present tense can be achieved by the use of either *wí(jè)* or *bú*, in the past tenses by *tá…(jè)* or *bú*, and finally, in the future tenses by *wí(jè)*.

Kießling (2016) illustrates that negation in Kuk is accomplished by a three-way contrast of negators depending on aspect and mood. The verbal proclitic *káʔà ~ kâa* negates the perfective declarative, while the verbal enclitic *wǎ* negates the imperfective declarative, and the clause initial proclitic *kə̂* marks the prohibitive which is used for the negation of the imperative. Finally, the hortative is negated by *là*.

A common feature of the above central Ring languages is the interaction between negation and TAM. Crosslinguistically, negation is known to interact with TAM and in some languages, e.g. Lamnso (Baertsch 2001) and Mokpe (Tanda & Neba 2006), the use of the negative marker

can even prevent certain tense markers from occurring. The way negation is achieved in Babanki is discussed in the next section.

3   Negation in Babanki

In Babanki, standard negation is expressed by means of a pre-verbal and an optional post-verbal morpheme irrespective of tense and aspect. Babanki can be described as an STVO language because in the verb phrase, the subject marker (S) occurs first, followed by the tense and/or aspect marker (T), the verb root (V), followed by an aspect marker, and then the object (O) as exemplified in (4). It should be noted that Babanki distinguishes eight tenses, namely, an unmarked present tense, four pasts (immediate (P1), hodiernal (P2), distant (P3), and remote (P4)), and three futures (immediate (F1), hodiernal (F2), and distant (F3)).[2]

(4) a. *nyàm tð̄ kùm byí*
     nyàm   tð̄ kùm   byí
     C4.animal P3 touch   C9.goat
     'An animal touched a goat.'

   b. *fð̄nyì fyìfð̄ né ꜜfáŋ á ŋgð̀ŋ*
     fð̄-nyì   fyìfð̄ né` fáŋ   á   ŋgð̀ŋ
     C19-knife   DEM   F2   remain   PREP   C9.house
     'That knife will remain in the house.'

Word order in Babanki negative constructions is SNegTVO(Neg). NEG1 comes after the subject marker, is followed by a tense or aspect marker, if present, or by the verb while NEG2 occupies the final position of the clause:

(5) a. *fð̄ɲín fð̄ kó ꜜfð́ð́ (bwèn)[3]*
     fð̄-ɲín   fð̄   kó`   fð́ŋ-ə   bwen
     C19-bird   SM   NEG   fall-PROG   NEG
     'The bird is not falling.'

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[2] As a native speaker of Babanki, I have provided the data used in this study.

[3] *Bwen* is shown to be underlyingly toneless and occurs with a polar tone, taking the opposite of the preceding tone-bearing unit. In addition, the underlying /e/ is realized as [ɛ] because in Babanki, /e/ and /o/ are realized as [ɛ] and [ɔ] respectively in closed syllables (Mutaka & Chie 2006: 75).

b. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kô fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ̀n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*   *fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   fall   NEG
   'The bird hasn't fallen.'

c. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kó jì fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ̀n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*   *jì*   *fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   P2   fall   NEG
   'The bird didn't fall.'

d. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kó tà fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ̀n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*   *tà*   *fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   P3   fall   NEG
   'The bird didn't fall.'

e. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kô mfə́ŋ* (*bwɛ̀n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*   *N-fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   P4-fall   NEG
   'The bird didn't fall.'

f. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ ꜜkɔ́ fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ́n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*   *á fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   F1 fall   NEG
   'The bird won't fall.'

g. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kó ꜜné fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ́n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*    *né`*   *fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   F2   fall   NEG
   'The bird won't fall.'

h. *fə̀ɲín fə̌ kó ꜜlú fə́ŋ* (*bwɛ́n*)
   fə̀-ɲín   *fə̌*   *kó`*    *lú`*   *fə́ŋ*   *bwen*
   C19-bird   SM   NEG   F3   fall   NEG
   'The bird won't fall.'

As seen, the second negation marker is optional. Apparently, it is only used to reinforce negation because even when left out, the sentences still have negative semantics. This is similar to Bum where the negation morpheme *jè* is optional both in the discontinous marker *tá…*(*jè*) and in *wí*(*jè*). The data in (5) also show that unlike in other central Ring languages where the markers change depending on tense or aspect, the same discontinuous morpheme is used to mark standard negation in all Babanki tenses/aspects.

Apart from *kó`...bwen* (6b), *bwén* (6c) and *kèn* (7c–e) can be used as negative predicative markers (Storch 1999) to express non-existence/unavailability.

(6)   a. *fəɲín fə́ díʔ á shə̀*

        fə-ɲín   fə́   dìʔ   á   shə̀

        C19-bird   SM   COP   PREP here

        'There is a bird here.'

    b. *fəɲín fə́ kó díʔ á shə̀ (bwén)*

        fə-ɲín   fə́   kó`   dìʔ   á   shə̀   bwen

        C19-bird   SM   NEG   COP   PREP here NEG

        'There is no bird here.'

    c. *fəɲín fə́ bwén á shə̀*

        fə-ɲín   fə́   bwén á   shə̀

        C19-bird   SM   NEG   PREP here

        'There is no bird here.'

It is unclear whether *bwén* (6c) is the same optional NEG2 morpheme that occurs in previous examples. This is so because it does not occupy clause final position and has a high tone irrespective of the preceding tone (see footnote 3 above). However, the fact that it is not repeated as NEG2 suggests that it is the same morpheme that moves to ensure that negation is marked morphologically in the locality of the verb since *kó`* is absent. The data also show that *bwén* is used only with the present tense and that there is no verb involved.

    On the other hand, the morpheme *kèn* combines with *bwen* (7c–e) irrespective of tense/aspect.

(7)   a. *tsə̀ŋ tə̀ vì wù bʉ́nə̀*

        tsòŋ   tə̀ vì   wù   bʉ́n-ə

        C1.thief   P3 come 2SG sleep-PROG

        'The thief came when you were sleeping.'

b. *tsɔ̀ŋ jì vì kô ndíʔ lá wù búnə̀* (*bwɛ́n*)

tsòŋ	*jì vì*	*kó`*	*ǹ-dìʔ*	*lá*	*wù*	*bún-ə*	*bwen*
C1.thief	P2 come NEG	N[4]-COP		COMP	2SG	sleep-PROG	NEG

'The thief came when you were not sleeping.'

c. *tsɔ̀ŋə́ vìə̀ kèn lá wù búnə̀* (*bwɛ́n*)

tsòŋ	*ə́*	*vì-ə*	*kèn*	*lá*	*wù*	*bún-ə*	*bwen*
C1.thief	SM	come-PROG	NEG	COMP	2SG	sleep-PROG	NEG

'The thief is coming whereas you are not sleeping.'

d. *tsɔ̀ŋ tə̀ vì kèn lá wù búnə̀* (*bwɛ́n*)

tsòŋ	*tə̀ vì*	*kèn*	*lá*	*wù*	*bún-ə*	*bwen*
C1.thief	P3 come	NEG	COMP	2SG	sleep-PROG	NEG

'The thief came when you were not sleeping.'

e. *tsɔ̀ŋə́ né vì kèn lá wù búnə̀* (*bwɛ́n*)

tsòŋ	*ə́*	*né*	*vì*	*kèn*	*lá*	*wù*	*bún-ə*	*bwen*
C1.thief	SM	F2	come	NEG	COMP	2SG	sleep-PROG	NEG

'The thief will come when you are not sleeping.'

It is worth noting that it is the subordinate clause that is negated and again the negation marker occurs before the verb but this time also before the complementizer and the subject, that is, at the initial position of the subordinate clause. This suggests that Babanki has only sentence negation, not constituent negation. The data also illustrate that to negate the subject, the negative marker leaves the pre-verbal position and the copula structure is introduced with pre-clausal negation (7b). As also seen (7c–e), the copula verb can be omitted, though the complementizer remains.

Negation of the imperative is achieved by the use of an identical clause initial prohibitive proclitic in most of Central Ring: *kə̂* in Mmen and Kuk, and *ká* in Kom while Babanki uses *kə́...*(*bwen*):

(8)   a. *ká kùm* (*bwɛ́n*)

kə́	*kùm*	*bwen*
NEG	touch	NEG

'Don't touch!'

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[4] The nasal has simply been glossed 'N' because its origin and function remain unclear not only in Babanki (Akumbu & Chibaka 2012) but also in Kom (Shultz 1997) where it has been analyzed as induced by the verb.

b. *kə́ ɣə̀ŋ kúm (bwèn)*
   kə́   ɣə̀ŋ   kùm bwen
   NEG 2PL   touch NEG
   'You shouldn't touch!'

Kə́ occupies the initial position of the clause and is followed by the subject, if present, then the verb and finally *bwen*.

4   Negation and question formation

Questions are formed in Babanki by adding a question marker at the end of a statement:

(9)   a. *wùə́ kúmə̀ lí à*
      wù   ə́   kùm-ə̀   lí   à
      2SG SM   touch-FV   PFV Q
      'Have you touched?'

   b. *wùə́ né kùm à*
      wù   ə́   né`   kùm à
      2SG SM   F2   touch Q
      'Will you touch?'

So far it has been shown that *bwen* occupies the final position of negative clauses. However, it loses that position to the question particle in negative questions:

(10) a. *fəɲín fə́ kó ꜜtsɨ́fə̀ à*
      fə-ɲín   fə́   kó`   tsɨ́f-ə   à
      C19-bird SM   NEG peck-PROG Q
      'Is the bird not pecking?'

   b. *fəɲín fə́ kô jì tsɨ̀f áꜜsáŋ à*
      fə-ɲín   fə́   kó` jì tsɨ̀f à-sáŋ   à
      C19-bird SM   NEG P2 peck C6-corn   Q
      'Did the bird not peck?'

   c. *fəɲín fə́ kó ꜜné ꜜtsɨ̀f à*
      fə-ɲín   fə́   kó`  né`   tsɨ̀f à
      C19-bird SM   NEG F2   peck Q
      'Will the bird not peck?'

The occurrence of the Babanki question particle in (10) confirms the previous finding that it is crosslinguistically common for question markers to occur in sentence-final position, and that "final question particles are especially common in Africa" (Dryer 2009). It is further observed that in this construction type, NEG2 is not allowed in Babanki. Since both the question and negation markers prefer the final position but that slot is available only for one, the negation morpheme can drop because *kó`* is already used and the absence of *bwen,* which is needed only for emphasis, will not affect the semantics.

      The incompatibility of negation and the question marker is also seen in embedded questions where only *kó`* is allowed:

(11) a. *mà bèm lá wùə́ kó tə̀ vì byìghɔ̀ lɔ́*
          mà   bèm   lá   wù   ə́   kó`   tə̀ vì   byìghɔ̀   lɔ́
          1SG   ask   COMP   2SG   SM   NEG   P3 come   why   EMPH
          'I asked why you didn't come.'

      b. *mà kɨ́ lá wùə́ kó tə̀ vì byìghɔ̀ lɔ́*
          mà   kɨ́   lá   wù   ə́   kó`   tə̀ vì   byìghɔ̀   lɔ́
          1SG   know   COMP   2SG   SM   NEG   P3 come   why   EMPH
          'I knew why you didn't come.'

An additional observation to be made from (11) is that the emphasis marker functions similarly to the question marker, replacing NEG2 as well.

5   Babanki negation and Jespersen's Cycle

There has been a historical development of the expression of negation in a variety of languages, from a simple pre-verbal marker of negation, through a discontinuous marker and in some cases through subsequent loss of the original pre-verbal marker. This cyclic process of morpho-phonological weakening and strengthening known as Jespersen's Cycle (Jespersen 1917; Dahl 1979) is stated as follows:

> the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in the course of time be subject to the same development as the original word (Jespersen 1917: 4).

The cyclical process of weakening, strengthening, and replacement has been widely exemplified in the literature with data from French and many

other languages. To illustrate the diachrony of the change, a general schema of four basic structural stages for the French negative cycle has been offered (Schwenter 2006):

Stage 1. NEG + VERB   *Je ne sais*. 'I don't know.'
Stage 2. NEG + VERB + EMPHATIC NEG   *Je ne sais* (*pas*).
Stage 3. NEG + VERB + OBLIGATORY NEG   *Je ne sais pas*.
Stage 4. VERB + NEG   *Je sais pas*.

At Stage 1, negation is expressed by a pre-verbal negative marker while at Stage 2, a post-verbal emphatic negative element is introduced which may or may not be required. At Stage 3, the post-verbal element becomes obligatory and negation is expressed by a bipartite negative marker. At this stage, the grammaticalization process of the reinforcing element has begun. At Stage 4, the original pre-verbal marker is dropped and the post-verbal negative marker is completely grammaticalized, and functions as the sole negative marker.

In Babanki, the post-verbal negative element which adds emphasis to the pre-verbal sentential negative is gradually being lost because, due to its optional status, many speakers tend to drop it altogether leaving only pre-verbal *kó`* as the marker of negation. In other words, the post-verbal element is undergoing weakening while the pre-verbal marker is undergoing strengthening. Without diachronic evidence, it is not possible to tell if Babanki is indeed on Jespersen's Cycle nor to determine the stage of development at which it is. The hypothetical claim made in this paper, based entirely on introspective data, is that the grammaticalization process is towards the pre-verbal element becoming the sole marker of negation. This might suggest that at some point in the history of Babanki, negation was marked solely by the post-verbal *bwen* which does not have any other known meaning in the language today. As the language developed, the post-verbal marker began to weaken and there was need to introduce a pre-verbal marker to reinforce negative semantics. Today, this pre-verbal element has been strengthened and can be used as the only marker of negation while the weaker post-verbal *bwen* is there only for emphasis.

6   Conclusion

A language with a double negative, the second being optional, has not previously been identified or described in Central Africa (Dryer 2009). It has been shown in this paper that Babanki makes use of *kó`...*(*bwen*) in standard negation. Contrary to what obtains in other Grassfields Bantu languages, Babanki uses this discontinuous morpheme to negate sentences in all tenses/aspects. It has also been hypothesized in this paper that at some point in the history of the language, negation was marked by the post-verbal marker *bwen* which is now undergoing weakening and gradually giving way to the pre-verbal marker *kó`* to be the sole marker of negation.

The only other language in the central Ring sub-group with a discontinuous negation morpheme is Bum. However, the two languages differ slightly in that unlike Babanki, Bum selects the tenses with which to use specific morphemes in standard negation. This study has been meant to add to the descriptive knowledge of negation patterns in Grassfields Bantu and, hopefully, it will increase the drive to further linguistic work on these languages.

Symbols and abbreviations

↓   Downstep
C1…19 Noun Class
CONT   Continuous
EMPH   Emphatic
F1   Immediate Future Tense
F2   Hodiernal Future Tense
F3   Remote Future Tense
FV   Final Vowel
N   Nasal
P1   Immediate Past Tense
P2   Hodiernal Past Tense
P3   Distant Past Tense
P4   Remote Past Tense
PREP   Preposition
SM   Subject Marker

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