

Preverbal negative markers in Buli

Anne Schwarz

Humboldt University, Berlin

1. Introduction

This article¹ deals with some aspects of negation in Buli, a Gur language spoken by the Balsa people in Northern Ghana. Their language belongs to the Oti-Volta-branch of Northern Central Gur languages (MANESSY 1975, 1979, NADEN 1989) in which it forms one subgroup together with Kɔnni.

Among the few linguistic publications on Buli the most comprehensive grammatical description (by MELANÇON, COUTU, and PROST, published 1974) touches many subjects only. It contains some scattered remarks on negation that are definitely too punctual for the rather complex system. Though the negative markers available in Buli are limited, their distribution deserves more attention. Characteristic features of the system are a double sentential negation and a special preverbal negative marker that is restrained to the indicative. It occurs predominantly in the perfective and contrasts with a group of negative markers which probably share a common verbal origin.

2. Negative sentences

The following examples² give an impression of

the characteristic double marking of negative sentences. The simple affirmative and negative sentences are presented as polar couples for easy comparison.

<i>affirmative</i>	<i>negative</i>
(1) <i>ká lām.</i> cop / meat It is meat.	dāā <i>lām^uā[?].</i> neg cop / meat+'neg2' It isn't meat.
(2) <i>wà kùrì(yā)³.</i> cl1 / pound She has pounded.	wàŋ <i>kùrìyà[?].</i> cl1+ neg1 / pound+'neg2' She hasn't pounded.
(3) <i>wàà kūr(ī)⁴.</i> cl1+à / pound She pounds.	wà <i>kàŋ kūrī[?].</i> cl1 / neg1 / pound+'neg2' She doesn't pound.

Each of these negative sentence differs twice (in bold) from the affirmative to the left: a negative marker (neg1) appears at the beginning of the predicate, and its end changes as well ('neg2').

/dʒ/ and /tʃ/ are represented by /j/, and /ch/ respectively according to orthographic conventions.

The following abbreviations are used: cl – noun class, cop – copula, def – definite, dup – reduplication, fut – future, ipf – imperfective, neg – negative marker, pl – plural, sg – singular

¹ A former version was presented at the Afrikanistentag at Bayreuth, 8-10th October 1998.

² The examples are presented in a broad phonetic transcription concerning tone. Deviating from IPA, the palatal glide /j/ is transcribed as /y/ and the affricates

³ This perfective suffix is confined to verbs in sentence-final position where its choice seems to involve some pragmatic value. Its frequent expression of surprise, implicite counter-expectation etc. indicates an assertive function. It is not necessary as indicator for the perfective and can be replaced by an affirmation marker.

⁴ The final vowel is often omitted in sentence-final position. Not given here is the characteristic post-verbal affirmation of intransitively used verbs.

The following examples shall demonstrate that these double deviations from the affirmative sentence cannot simply be considered as constituents of one discontinuous negative morpheme.

Though there is a tendency to complete all negative sentences with a glottal stop, its actual realization by Buli speakers varies considerably. It is most prominent after sentence-final negative extensions.

These extensions ('neg2') co-occur with different initial negative markers (neg1) including negative verbs, depend on the type of lexeme they appear with, and add a low tone to the end of the negative sentence⁵.

The nominal negative extension -à⁶ (allomorphs with initial glide) is generally absent in the affirmative (ex. 4a/4b).

(4a) *bà yààlìn yìsík.*

cl2 / hunt / antelope

They have hunted an antelope.

(4b) *bàn yààlín yísígàʔ.*

cl2+neg1 / hunt / antelope+'neg2'

They haven't hunted an antelope.

This nominal extension is not bound to a special type of negative marker, and may even combine with an inherently negative verb (ex. 5, cf. also ex. 1).

(5) *wà zē jìgǐgīyàʔ.*

cl1 / not know / dup+place+'neg2'

He doesn't know any place.

Excluded are however nominals with definite suffixes which resist any negative extension (ex. 6). Plural nouns and pronouns⁷ escape it also.

(6) *wà zē jìgníʔ.*

cl1 / not know / place+def+'neg2'

He doesn't know the place.

If the negative predicate ends with a verb, its extension consists either of the perfective suffix with low tone -yà or the glottal stop is simply added to the verb stem (with epenthetic vowel in case of stemfinal consonant) (ex. 7a/7b).

(7a) *bàn yààlín yàʔ.*

cl2+neg1 / hunt+'neg2'

They haven't hunted.

(7b) *bà kàn yāālimūʔ.*

cl2 / neg1 / hunt+'neg2'

They don't hunt.

Only some verbs add a consonant (in most cases a liquid) to their stem (cf. ex. 8a) which is absent whenever a complement follows, as in ex. (8b).

(8a) *wà kàn yāāliʔ.*

cl1 / neg1 / like+'neg2'

She doesn't like [it].

(8b) *wà kàn yāā bà kūrīʔ.*

cl1 / neg1 / want / cl2 / pound+'neg2'

She doesn't want them to pound.

The perfective extension is likewise bound to the final position of the negative assertion and not to the verb preceded by neg1 (ex. 9a/9b).

(9a) *wàŋ kùlíyàʔ.*

cl1+neg1 / go home+'neg2'

She hasn't gone home.

(9b) *wàŋ kùlí wà dīgīʔ.*

cl1+neg1 / go home / cl1 / cook+'neg2'

She hasn't gone home to cook.

While the verbal extensions must appear with a sentence-final verb within the negative scope, they may be absent in the affirmative (cf. footnotes 3 and 4) and are generally elided before verb complements.

⁵ realized as mid after some lexemes with steady mid pattern

⁶ There are some exceptions not treated here.

⁷ If pronominal objects are part of the negative predicate, the general word order SVO is not changed as it is the case in some other Gur languages.

Indispensable are the predicate-initial negative markers (neg1) which carry the decisive functional load.

3. Preverbal negative markers

The comparison of affirmative and negative verb phrases yields the following different negative markers placed between subject and negated verb, preliminarily summarized in (10).

(10) Preverbal negative markers:

	<i>Buli</i>	<i>Kɔnni</i>
(a) Imperative I (ipf)	kàá kūrìʔ	
(b) Imperative II	kàñ kūrìʔ	dá
(c) Future	kàñ kūrìʔ	káán
(d) Indicative I (ipf)	kàn kūrìʔ (...)	ká
(e) Indicative II	àn kūrìyàʔ (...)	

The most obvious contrast exists between (a-d) on the one hand and (e) on the other hand. According to pairs like ex. (2/3) and (7a/7b) negative marker àñ is associated with a verb in the perfective aspect, kàñ with the imperfective. There is however not much evidence in related languages for a systematic correlation between aspectual categories and negation⁸. Buli's closest relative Kɔnni shows a more typical distribution for Oti-Volta languages⁹ (table 10) with a triple contrast between imperative, future, and indicative.

Indicated by brackets in the indicative (d/e) is a language-internal problem. There is no fixed relation between preverbal negative markers and aspectual categories. Contrary to the aspectual boundary suggested in (10), àñ is neither totally excluded from the imperfective, nor kàñ from the perfective.

The major aspectual differentiation between imperfective and perfective is in Buli not expressed on the verb forms alone but frequently needs the help of preverbal particles, possibly counterbalancing the heavy restrictions verbal suffixes undergo¹⁰. Grammatical tone differentiates among imperative and indicative imperfective which both use a preverbal vowel. The absence of this vowel and a subject-dependent tone pattern on the verb is associated with the perfective aspect. Excluded from this opposition is only a comparatively small group of verbs due to their semantic incompatibility with one of the aspects. Future is also marked by a preverbal auxiliary, but is not differentiated for aspect. A few stative verbs need a suppletive form in the future.

The importance of preverbal morphemes is reflected in negation. The way polarity is expressed in the indicative reveals a relationship between affirmative preverbal vowel and the preverbal negative marker's type.

3.1 Imperative I (kà)

There are two imperative forms (directly as well as indirectly used) of which the one operating with a preverbal particle seems to be aspectually specified as imperfective. A command in which the verb is introduced by á refers to an already started action (ex. 11a). The vowel of a preceding pronominal subject assimilates totally (cf. 11b versus 11c). Negation is expressed by a particle kà placed before the vowel-verb phrase (ex. 11c/d).

(11a) á kūr(ī)

á / pound

Keep pounding!

⁸ Cf. MANESSY 1975: 166 for an Oti-Volta overview.

⁹ As for example in Gurune (DAKUBU 1996: 72) and Moore (KABORE 1990: 112).

¹⁰ Cf. the verbal extensions mentioned in section 2. which are limited to part of the verbs and elided as soon as a complement is following.

(11b) **nàá** kūr(ī)

2pl+á / pound

Keep pounding!

(11c) **nì kàá** kūrī[?]2pl / **neg**+á / pound+‘neg2’

Don’t keep pounding!

(11d) **wà kàá** kūrī[?]cl1 / **neg**+á / pound+‘neg2’

She shouldn’t keep pounding!

3.2 Imperative II (kàń)

The other imperative form is less marked. The verb phrase may consist simply of a verb with mid tone pattern (ex. 12a), a plural addressee is added in ex. (12c). For negation (ex. 12b/d), **kàń** directly precedes the verb which changes its tone pattern into low. Without addressee the underlying tone sequence low-high of the negative marker is usually simplified to a single high.

(12a) kūr(ī)

pound

Pound!

12b) **káj** kūrī[?]**neg** / pound+‘neg2’

Don’t pound!

(12c) **nì** kūr(ī)

2pl / pound

Pound!

12d) **nì kàj** kūrī[?]2pl / **neg** / pound+‘neg2’

Don’t pound!

3.3 Future (káń)

Future actions are expressed with the help of particle **lì** (with speaker variation **lè**¹¹) placed directly before the verb (ex. 13a). In the negative, **káń** appears in this position (ex. 13b). Very commonly however, its falling contour is replaced by a simple low tone.

(13a) **nì** **lì** kūr(ī)

2pl / fut / pound

You will pound

(13b) **nì káj** kūrī[?] or **nì kàj** kūrī[?]2pl / **neg** / pound+‘neg2’

You won’t pound

3.4 Indicative I (kàn)

Like in the imperative, there is a preverbally marked form in the indicative associated with the imperfective aspect. It is indicated by a verb with mid tone pattern that follows vowel **a** which carries low tone (ex. 14a)¹². This construction is frequently used for actions taking place at present tense. In the appropriate context, it also applies to habitual actions, and a prospectival reading might put the action into immediate future. Negative marker **kàn** replaces the preverbal vowel of the affirmative construction (ex. 14b, cf. also ex. 13b).

(14a) **nàà** kūr(ī)

2pl+à / pound

You pound

(14b) **nì kàj** kūrī[?]2pl / **neg** / pound+‘neg2’

You don’t pound

3.5 Indicative II (àn)

Most verbs dispose of a second form in the indicative that is associated with the perfective aspect. It is represented by a preverbally unmarked verb form, i.e. no obligatory particle precedes it in the pragmatically unmarked affir-

¹¹ The full form starts with initial **à**. There is also a nasalised form with nasal consonant and/or vowel.

¹² The special pronominal paradigm in the affirmative imperfective is result of the obligatory total regressive assimilation affecting the pronoun’s vowel whenever it comes into direct contact with this vowel.

mative (ex. 15a). Characteristic for these verbs is the influence their subjects exert on the verb tones. Participating subjects (1st and 2nd personal pronouns) are followed by a verb stem with rising contour pattern¹³. With referential class pronouns, the verb-final high tone is absent¹⁴.

The subject-dependent tonal opposition of the verb is generally neutralized to a rising low-high pattern on the negative verb stem (ex. 15b, cf. also footnote 13). It follows the preverbal negative marker *àn* (or its reduced syllabic form) and requires the negative perfective suffix *-yà* in sentence-final position.

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Class pronouns</i>
(15a) <i>nì kùrí(yā)</i>	<i>wà kùrí(yā)</i>
2pl / pound	cl1 / pound
You've pounded	She has pounded
(15b) <i>nàŋ kùríyà[?]</i>	<i>wàŋ kùríyà[?]</i>
2pl+ neg / pound+'neg2'	cl1+ neg / pound+'neg2'
You haven't pounded	She hasn't pounded

As indicated above, preverbal negative marker *àn* is however not exclusive for these preverbally unmarked verbs with perfective reading.

3.6 Totally stative verbs (*àn*)

Among the verbs in Buli there is a special lexical class of totally stative verbs which can't be read other than imperfective. They are distinguished from inchoative stative verbs by their verb-final *-a*.

This fossilized suffix¹⁵ correlates with the absence of a preverbal vowel as used with other

verbs in the imperfective (ex. 16a). For negation (ex. 16b) negative marker *àn* is placed before the verb.

(16a) <i>kù nālā</i>	(16b) <i>k^uàn nālā[?]</i>
cl7 / be good	cl7+ neg / be good+'neg2'
It is good	It isn't good

If totally stative verbs are preceded by *kàn* (or *kàn̄*, cf. 3.3), a not yet existing future state or quality is negated (ex. 16c).

(16c) <i>kù kàn nālā[?]</i>
cl7 / neg / be good+'neg2'
It won't be good

With totally stative verbs, negative marker *kan* is thus restrained to predicates with preverbal future particle in their respective affirmative construction.

3.7 Serial verb constructions (*àn*)

Serial verb constructions are frequently used devices in Buli. Other than in overtly co- or subordinated clauses, the common subject shared by the serialized verbs is not repeated by an anaphoric pronoun. Following is a characteristic example for the benefactive (ex. 17a/17b). The main verb appears in the preverbally unmarked indicative form. The imperfective aspect is tonally marked at the second verb. While the perfective view with final low-toned verb doesn't require any surface conjunction (ex. 17a)¹⁶, an additional linking vowel *á* obligatorily intervenes in the imperfective aspect (ex. 17b).

¹³ The change into high occurs always on the last syllable of the verb. If there is only one tone-bearing unit, the underlying sequence of low-high tones is simplified to single high.

¹⁴ This low tone pattern even spreads onto nominal objects (cf. ex. 4a versus 4b).

¹⁵ There is no synchronic reason to assume an underlying perfective category for this verb class, since – unlike

inchoative stative verbs – they have no ingressive meaning. In *Konni* an imperfective suffix *-a* is productively used.

¹⁶ The vowel put into brackets in ex. (17a) occurs only, if there is separation of the sequence by a pause and is called a “pronom neutre” by MELANÇON ET AL. (1974: 393). Its use in the given example puts a special emphasis on the speaker as the beneficiary.

(17a) wà dà lām (à) tè mū.

cl1 / buy / meat / give / 1sg

She has bought meat for me.

(17b) wà dà lām á té mù.

cl1 / buy / meat / á / give / 1sg

She (usually) buys meat for me.

Though negation uses of the same marker in both sentences, the aspectual opposition is maintained in the negative (ex. 17c/17d). Negative particle àn is placed before the first verb and shows no relation to the later aspectual indication. The tonal change of the initial verb is due to the regular negative pattern of the preverbally unmarked verb in the indicative (cf. footnote 13).

(17c) wàn dá lām (à) tè mū[?].

cl1+neg / buy / meat / give / 1sg+‘neg2’

She hasn’t bought meat for me.

(17d) wàn dá lām á té mù[?].

cl1+neg / buy / meat / á / give / 1sg+‘neg2’

She doesn’t (usually) buy meat for me.

Like with totally stative verbs, predicate-initial negative marker kàn refers to negative future.

Obviously, only those verbs without preverbal particle in the affirmative indicative take negative marker àn – and this affects only first of all the verb form of the perfective. The particle itself cannot be attributed with an inherent aspectual value, since it is also used with predicates in the imperfective. This concerns even the progressive construction.

4. Verbal origin of ka(n)

Buli provides of some suppletive negative verbs that substitute their respective positive counterparts in negation. The following polar couples contain verbs of locational and existential being (ex. 18) and possession (ex. 19). Both use a verb stem ka in the negative. Irrespective of polarity,

the locative verb of ex. (18) is completed by a suffix -ró in all cases of missing local specification.

affirmative *negative*

(18) tī bòró. tì kāró[?].

1pl / be

1pl / **not be**+‘neg2’

We are (there).

We aren’t (there).

(19) wà tà lām. wà kā lām^{uā}?

cl1 / have / meat

cl1 / **not have** / meat+‘neg2’

She has meat.

She doesn’t have meat.

Since the high frequency of periphrastic constructions brings several predicates into contact with each other, negative verbs may as well be involved in this process. Already grammaticalized is the serial construction used for the progressive aspect. It expresses that the action referred to is explicitly ongoing at the moment of reference and is thus more specific than the simple imperfective.

The progressive construction (ex. 20a) is composed of a verb of locative existence linked to a verb¹⁷ of action by preverbal vowel. The suffix of the locative verb undergoes some changes¹⁸. Ex. (20b) illustrates the underlying structure. The second noun of the locative verb’s complement functions as a postposition (“back” > “behind”). The additional verb needs the linking vowel á.

(20a) nì bòrá kūrī sūmā.

2pl / be+á / pound / round beans

You are pounding round beans.

¹⁷ The verbal status of the main verb is proved by the fact that any object like the patients “round beans” remains in its post-verbal position. In a nominal construction, the object of the nominalized verb would precede it according to the rectum-regens order.

¹⁸ Its vowel is affected by regressive assimilation after which the vowel sequence is often shortened, and its consonant shows the tendency for erosion and happens to be elided in fast speech [bòráá ~ bòrá ~ bòáá].

(20b) wà bò tìimú nààṅ á kūrī.

c11 / be / tree+def / behind / á / pound

She is behind the tree, pounding.

The available negative counterpart of the locative verb (cf. ex. 18) is not used in the negative progressive. Instead, negation follows the usual model for serial constructions, i.e. negative marker àn is placed between subject and initial verb (ex. 21a).

(21a) nàn bòrá kūrī sūmā[?].

2pl+neg / be+á / pound / round beans+'neg[?]

You aren't pounding round beans.

MELANÇON ET AL. (1974: 381) mention however an alternative way for the progressive's negation that makes use of the suppletive verb. It would look like ex. (21b)¹⁹.

(21b) ? nì kàrá kūrī

2pl / not be+á / pound

You aren't pounding

Unlike the common negation of (21a), this negative form is regarded as odd by Balsa people. The unaccepted form demonstrates however the way a negative verb may have started its development into a grammatical negative marker. It seems quite possible that such process involving a verb stem *ka* resulted into negative morpheme *ka*.

For the indicative negative marker *ka* of the Oti-Volta languages Kɔnni and Gurune a final nasal consonant is reported as phonetic variation²⁰. In Buli this nasal uses to complete the negative marker except if followed by á. The following examples of negative conditional clauses (ex. 22a/22b) both involve the assumed negative verb, however appearing in different shapes. In the negative clause (22a) its short form *ka*

merges with the linking vowel and refers explicitly to an ongoing situation in which the child is not crying. Clause (22b) contains negative marker *kàn* before the preverbally unmarked verb. In sentence-final position, the expressed aspectual opposition would be accompanied by the respective verb extensions in parenthesis²¹.

(22a) bííká dàn kàá kūm(ū[?]) ...

child+def / if / neg+á / cry

If the child isn't crying

(22b) bííká dàn kàṅ kúm(yà[?]) ...

child+def / if / neg / cry

If the child doesn't cry

Despite of its perfective reading and negative extension, ex. (22b) is 'perfectly' negated by preverbal *kàn* which applies elsewhere to the imperfective and future.

5. Conclusion

KABORE who has also postulated a verbal origin for negative marker *ká* in Moore supposes that "ká est à l'origine un verbe de non existence et marque l'absence de relation entre le terme de départ et l'ensemble de la relation prédicative." (1990: 112). If the inherited stock²² of negative vocabular included a negative verb *ka*, the different ways this negative item developed into a negative marker might be due to conflicts that

¹⁹ elicited tones were added by me

²⁰ cf. CAHILL (1992: 13) for Kɔnni, and DAKUBU for Gurune where the marker for indicative negatives "is sometimes followed by n (or ng)" (1996: 72).

²¹ Commonly however, such topicalized clauses precede the new asserted information.

²² In his comparative study of Oti-Volta languages treating preverbal particles including negative markers MANESSY comes to the result that "L'étude de la distribution, dans les différents parlers, des représentants des morphèmes imputés à la langue ancestrale ne révèle aucun groupement significatif, ce qui semble confirmer qu'il s'agit bien là des vestiges épars d'un lexique commun plutôt que de ceux d'un système dont les éléments eussent été liés par des relations d'interdépendance." (1975: 166)

arose with competitive negative elements as well as with the language specific development of the affirmative paradigm. The parallel existence of competing negative markers in the indicative like **àn** and **kà(n)** in Buli is not unique within Gur languages. A similar case is reported by WINKELMANN (pers. comm.) for Cefɔ and Viemo which have - besides the common negative morpheme **ki** - a special form for negation in the indicative at their disposal. The fact that the negative markers' choice is neither in Buli nor in the related languages referred to primarily governed by aspectual categories reduces the distance of their negation systems. Whether the suggested verbal source **ka** started from a pragmatically marked subject negation and came into contact with another negative morpheme in the indicative remains like other questions a matter for further investigation.

6. Bibliography

- BLASS, R. 1983. A note on double negation marking in Sissala; in: *Studies in African Linguistics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 329-330.
- CAHILL, Mike. 1992. A preliminary phonology of the Kɔnni language. (Collected Language Notes, No. 20). Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.
- DAKUBU, M. E. Kropp. 1996. *A Grammar of Gurune (Corrected Trial Edition)*. Language Centre, Legon.
- KABORÉ, Raphaël. 1990. La Negation en Moore; in: *Linguistique Africaine*, No. 4, pp. 79-114.
- MANESSY, Gabriel. 1975. *Les langues Oti-Volta. Classification généalogique d'un groupe des langues voltaïques*. Paris: SELAF.
- 1979. *Contribution à la classification généalogique des langues voltaïques*. Paris.
- MELANÇON, RR. PP. Lucien; Eugène Coutu, André Prost. 1974. *Les langues de l'Atakora, VII. Le Buli*; in: *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.* 36 (B). 2: 323-413.
- NADEN, Tony. 1989. Gur; in Bendor-Samuel, J. (Hg.). *The Niger-Congo Languages*. Lanham – New York – London, pp. 140-168.