

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY

THE EXPRESSION OF NEGATION IN NUNI

BY

KADIO ABOU CORNEILLE

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NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY

TRANSLATION DEGREE PROGRAMME

*THE EXPRESSION OF NEGATION IN NUNI*

BY

KADIO Abou Corneille.

A Linguistics Practicum submitted to the graduate school in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
the degree of Master in Translation Studies

Approved:

Supervisor:..... *George L. Kutter* .....

Second reader..... *R. Kim* .....

External reader..... *E. S. Olson* .....

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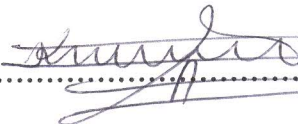
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

***EXPRESSION OF NEGATION IN NUNI***

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

(Signed).....

Mr. Abou C. KADIO

Date: December 18th, 1998

## Acknowledgments

First of all I would like to thank the Lord Jesus Christ who called me into this wonderful ministry of Bible translation. He is the invisible host who assisted me day and night until the completion of this first project in linguistics. To him be the glory.

I am grateful to my church and to the staff at ANTBA/SIL-Burkina who had confidence in me and sent my family and me to NEGST to study Bible translation for the sake of the Old Testament translation project in Nuni, my mother tongue. I would like to mention especially Lydia Krafft who has been more a mother than a boss to me, Gertrud Kurrle who and gave me more insight on the topic during her stay in Nairobi for the typesetting of the Nuni New Testament, Pastor Napon Moïse whom the Lord used to support me spiritually as well as materially when I was going through very difficult times, and to all the Nuni project members who supported me in one way or another.

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To my own family I say thanks for making me happy though the work was overwhelmingly keeping me away from them during many hours. To all those who contributed directly or indirectly to make the dream for this project a reality and are not mentioned by name, I am indebted to them all.

### *List of Abbreviations*

<b>Adv</b>	adverb
<b>AUX</b>	auxiliary
<b>Cl</b>	clause
<b>CON</b>	conditional
<b>DEM</b>	demonstrative
<b>EMPH</b>	emphatic
<b>FOC</b>	focus
<b>Loc.</b>	locative
<b>NEG</b>	negative
<b>NNT</b>	Nuni New Testament
<b>NP</b>	noun phrase
<b>O/ob</b>	object
<b>P</b>	proposition
<b>Pron.</b>	pronoun
<b>1pl</b>	first person plural pronoun
<b>2pl</b>	second person plural pronoun
<b>3pl</b>	third person plural pronoun
<b>Q</b>	question
<b>Qpron.</b>	interrogative pronoun
<b>Rcl</b>	relative clause
<b>REP</b>	repetitive
<b>REL</b>	relative
<b>S</b>	subject
<b>SQ</b>	interrogative particle functioning as subject
<b>1sg</b>	first person singular pronoun
<b>2sg</b>	second person singular pronoun
<b>3sg</b>	third person singular pronoun
<b>V</b>	verb

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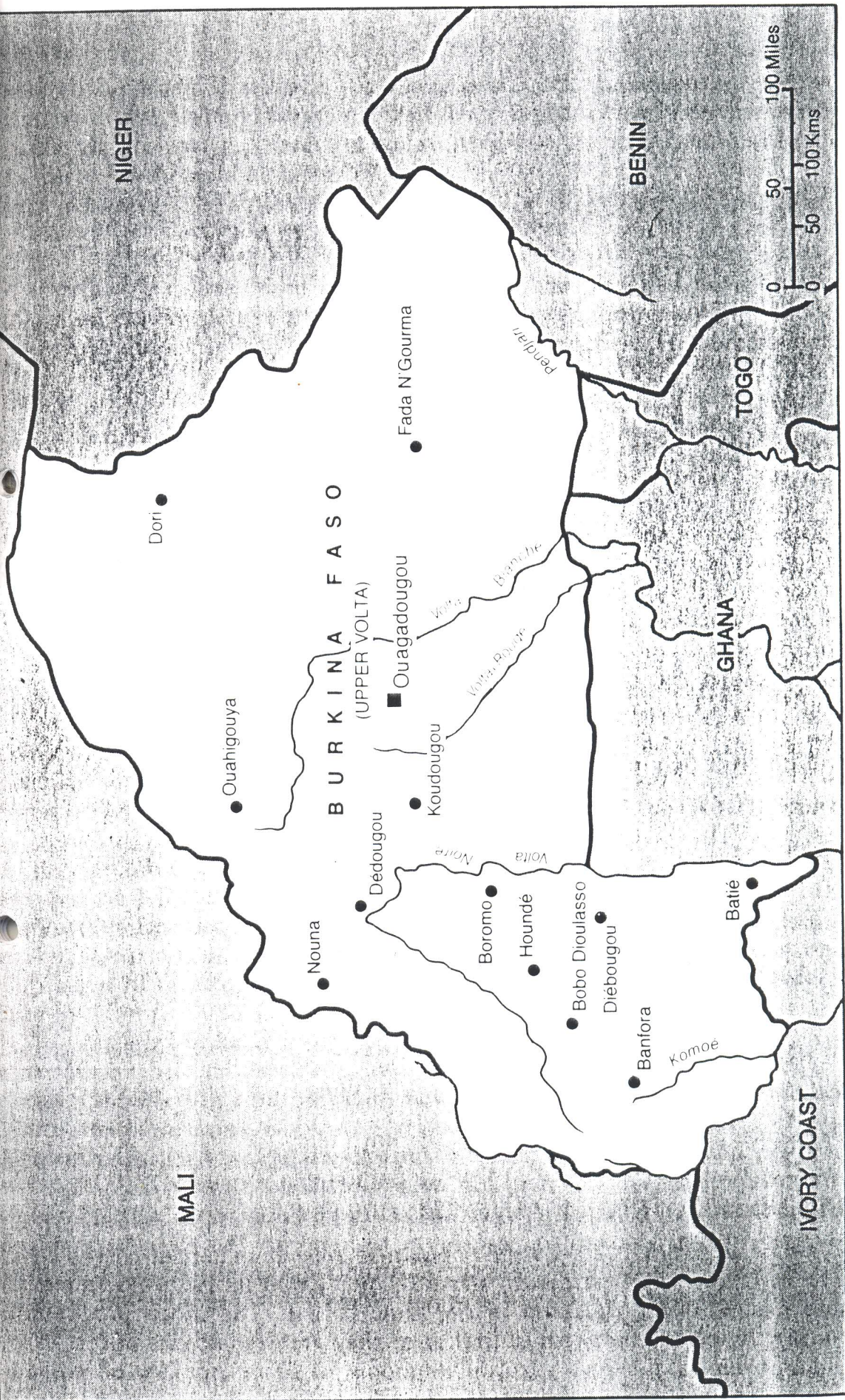
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# AFRICA

Map 1:



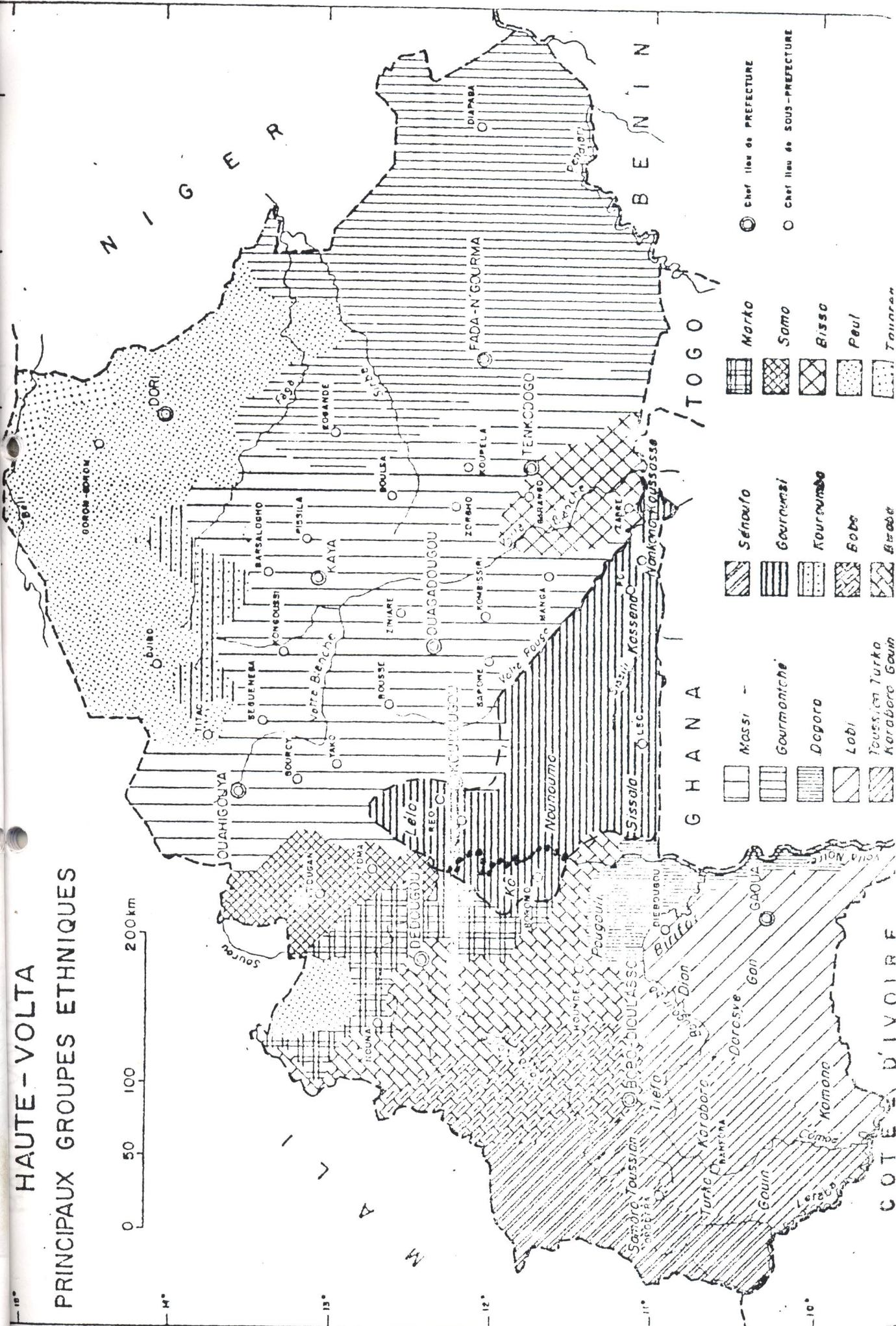




Map 2: BURKINA FASO

Moroney (1989: 46)

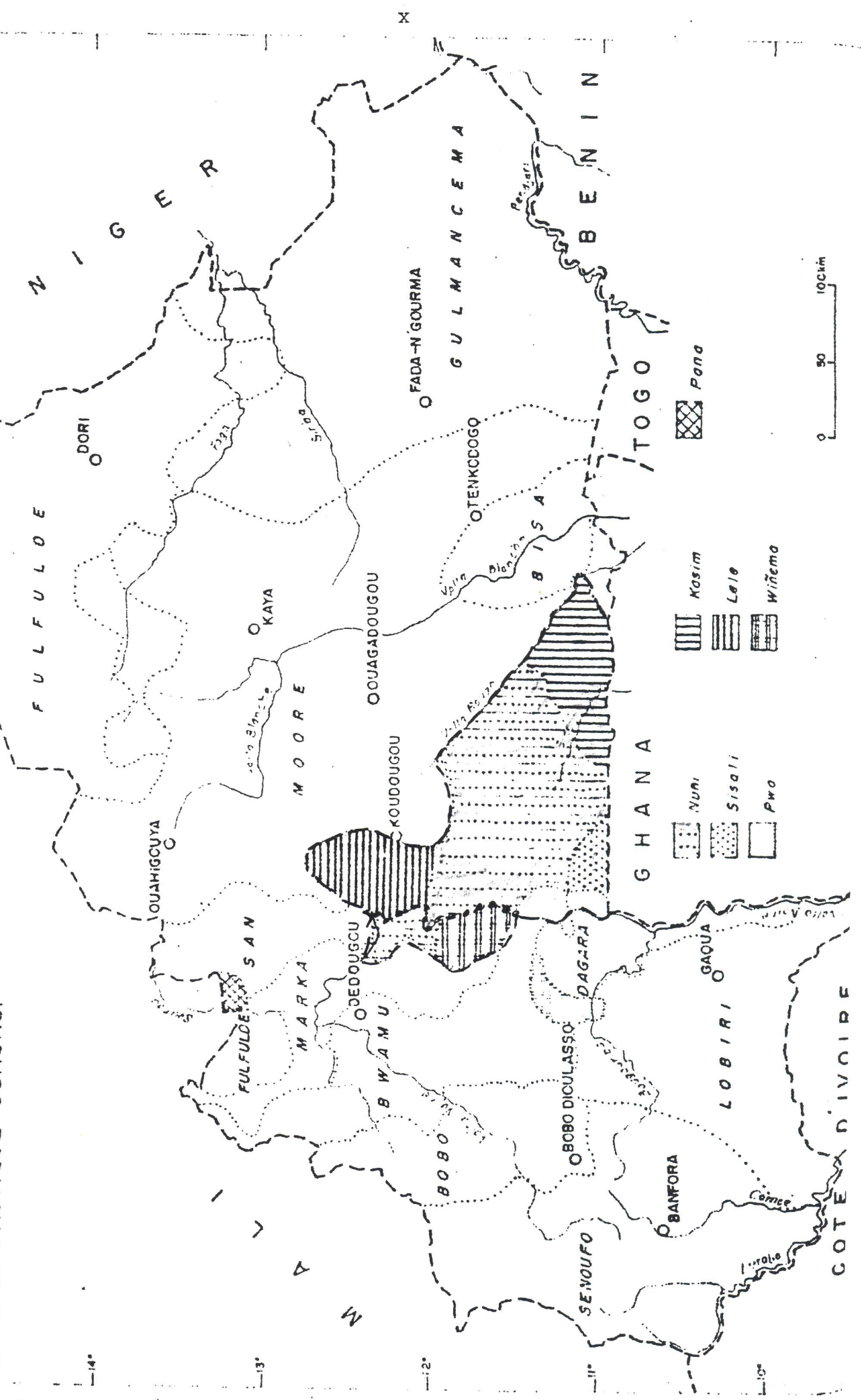
# HAUTE-VOLTA PRINCIPAUX GROUPES ETHNIQUES



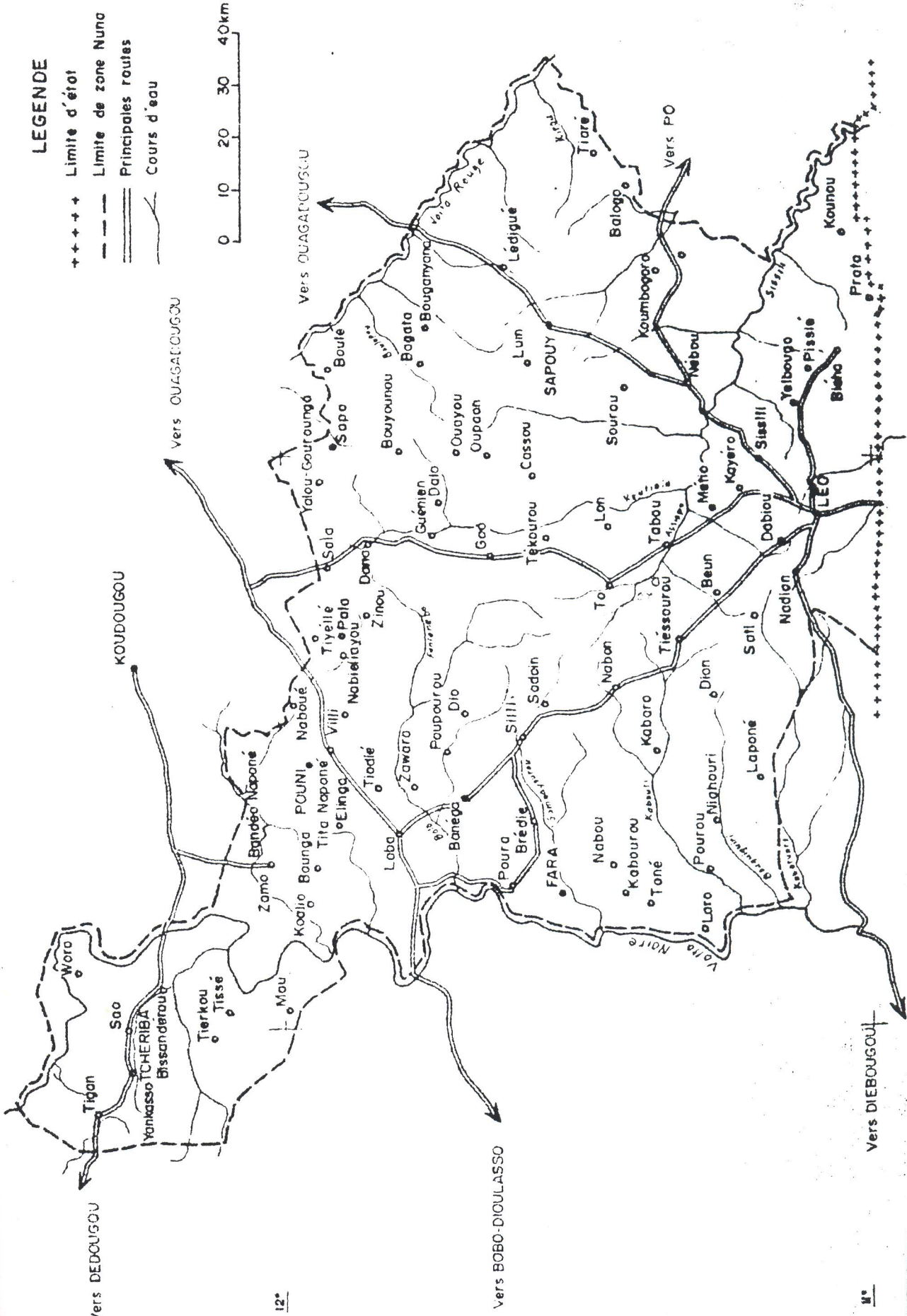
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|--|-----------------|--|-----------|--|---------|--|------------------------------|
|  | Mossi           |  | Sénoufo   |  | Marko   |  | Chef lieu de PREFECTURE      |
|  | Gourmantché     |  | Gourmansi |  | Samo    |  | Chef lieu de SOUS-PREFECTURE |
|  | Dagara          |  | Kouroumbo |  | Bissa   |  |                              |
|  | Lobi            |  | Boba      |  | Peul    |  |                              |
|  | Toussian/Turka  |  | Biraba    |  | Tainran |  |                              |
|  | Karabara/Gaouin |  |           |  |         |  |                              |

Map 3: BURKINA FASO: Major Ethnic Groups. Yago (1984)

ZONE LINGUISTIQUE GURUNSI



Map 4: BURKINA FASO: Gurunsi Linguistic Area. Yago (1984)



Map 5: Nuna Area. Yago (1984)

## PRESENTATION OF THE NUNI LANGUAGE

Nuni is one of the 69 languages spoken in BURKINA FASO (West Africa). Barbara Grimes' (1996) linguistic research shows two major Nuni regions located in the south of the country: Northern Nuni with 55,000 speakers, and Southern Nuni with 200,000 speakers. There is intercomprehension between the two groups. Their difference consists in some minor dialectal divergence.

Nuni is a Grusi language belonging to the Gur language family. According to Grimes (1996), the Gur language family itself is part of the large Niger-Congo language phylum. One of the branches of that major language group is Atlantic-Congo, which includes Nuni through the following subdivisions: Volta-Congo, North, Gur, Central, Southern, Grusi, and Northern. Nuni is closely related to Kasem and Lyélé.

Basinyari, Bwana, Gori, Micari, Sankura, and Yatini are the main dialects of Nuni. The people are called Nuna, or Nunu when referring to one person. The Nuna are divided up into Sisili province around Léo, Ziro and Grands Ballés provinces, southern Bulkiemdé and Sanguié provinces, and western Nahuri and Kosi provinces.

Nuni alphabet and orthography have been worked out by some native speakers through the joint effort of SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) and INA (Institut Nationale d'Alphabétisation). Twenty consonants and ten vowels are used in Nuni transcription. The twenty consonants found in Nuni are: p, b, t, d, c, j, k, g, f, v, s, z, m, n, ny (ɲ), ŋ, l, r, y, and w. The ten vowels are: i, e, ə, u, o, ɪ, ε, a, ʊ, and ɔ. Vowel harmony is very important in Nuni. The first five vowels (i, e, ə, u, o) are tense, and the last five (ɪ, ε, a, ʊ, ɔ) are lax. These two types of vowel never co-occur in a Nuni word, except in the case of compound words. Nuni is a tone language. Low, high, mid,

low-high and high-low tone patterns are noted. Mid tone is not labelled. Generally, words that carry tone labels in the standard Nuni orthography as well as in this practicum, are those which, were it not for tone, would be homophones with other Nuni words. Thus, only the tone labels can settle the difference between them.

Nasalization of vowels is indicated by a following nasal consonant within the same syllable. Nuni has CV, CVV, and CVC syllables. Nuni has SVO clause structure.

The SIL Nuni Team has produced a significant amount of literature in Nuni: Three primers, *Nagv I* and *II*, and *Syllabaire Fonctionnel* ('Functional Primer,' well appreciated in the North because of the northern dialect used in it). Some portions of the scripture such as *Marəkə sagi* ('The Gospel According to Mark'), *Zwezi Kərisə totona totunan yoo* ('The Acts of the Apostles'), *Abəramə miu yoo* ('The Life of Abraham'), *Zwezi twi ta yuu wa* ('Jesus Came on Earth,' also available on audiotape), and three children's books: *Zwezi də Zasi* ('Jesus and Zacchaeus'), *Bïú tə nə jen* ('The Prodigal Son'), and *Samari bəe don fwà bicabwanu tutuŋi* ('The Good Samaritan') have been published. The Nuni New Testament is at the stage of printing. There are also other books dealing with health, agricultural and cultural matters such as *Bïsiná wodiu yuu wa sisari sagi* ('Children's Nutrition'), *Nətu tə nə nə wá cì, nə ga ywari yaliŋa* ('How to prevent and treat Malaria'), *A fwà à pùrú* ('How to Make Compost'), *Nuna tian dəkurən* ('The Legend of Nuni Villages'), and fairy tales. The only linguistic publication available about Nuni is the doctoral thesis of Zakaria Yago. 1984. *LE NUNI, Langue Gurunsi de Haute-Volta: Phonologie, Elements de Grammaire*. Abidjan: Université nationale de Côte d'Ivoire.

Nuni is written, and there is a high motivation for literacy: 10% in Nuni versus 1% in French.

## INTRODUCTION

Paragraphs, particularly near the beginning of both narrative and argumentative discourse, often begin with stative or imperfective clauses and full noun phrase participant reference to establish background or set of scenes. Negation is also a sort of background. Grimes (1975: 337) treats it as a kind of collateral information, setting against actual events a consideration of what might have happened, but did not. According to Payne (1997: 282), “a negative clause is one which asserts that some event, situation, or state of affairs does *not* hold. Negative clauses... occur in the context of some presupposition, functioning to negate or counter-assert that presupposition....The most common negative strategies in any language are those used to negate an entire proposition” (clausal negation). The negative in Nuni as well as in many other languages, is normally a particle or auxiliary between the subject (agent) and the main verb (constituent negation). In Nuni it is often echoed by clause- or sentence-final marker, and one or both of these may be realised non-segmentally by tone (lexical negation), or non-release feature.

There are also verbs with intrinsically negative lexical meaning: ‘not-exist’ or ‘not-be-located’ seems to be present in virtually all languages. Other common negative verbs are ‘not-be’ (equative), ‘not-know’ and ‘not-be-able’.

There is more than one way to express a negative idea in Nuni. That diversity is to be noticed through the time, aspect and mood of the sentence in which the negation is embedded.

The common word order in Nuni syntax is SVO. But this general pattern is often modified at sentence negation level and becomes S + NEG + O + V.

Some of the data provided in this paper are from Nuni narrative and non-narrative books published by SIL-Burkina. Many other data are from the Nuni New Testament which is not published yet. The translated data are reliable because they have been tested several times and proved natural by Nuni speakers and translation consultants. Some other data are from scholars



who have produced excellent works on negation in other languages than Nuni before, and now, used in this paper as an adaptation to Nuni. Also, as a native speaker of Nuni and having grown up in Nuni society, I have provided some data from my own knowledge and experience of the Nuni language. All these data have been checked by my wife, also a native speaker of Nuni, for naturalness and meaningfulness.

It appears more appropriate to approach this analytical exercise starting from the modals because of their verbal structure.

# 1. DESCRIPTION OF NEGATIVE MODAL VERBS CONTRASTED WITH THEIR COUNTERPARTS

Negative modal verbs, also referred to as lexical negation, describe a situation in which the concept of negation is part and parcel of the lexical semantics of a particular verb (Payne 1997: 282). The negative modal verbs maintain the normal Nuni word order.

## 1.1 *Wàá* ‘can’ versus *wàrì* ‘cannot’

*Wàá* expresses the capability of somebody or something carrying out an action or in achieving a certain goal.

- (1) Zwan *wàá* mwian garəwa ɔ dɛ ɔ zwè.  
John can rice tin 3sg eat 3sg finish  
“John can eat up a tin of rice.”

*Wàrì* is the opposite of *wàá*. It expresses the incapability, or limitation, or weakness of somebody or something in achieving a certain state of affairs through action. It immediately precedes the object just as in the positive proposition. If the sentence does not have an object, then the modal verb stands in final position.

- (2) Zwan *wàrì* mwian garəwa ɔ dɛ ɔ zwè.  
John cannot rice tin 3sg eat 3sg finish  
“John cannot eat up a tin of rice.”

Both *wàá* and *wàrì* act as a finite auxiliary to the lexical verb, which in turn typically occurs in an invariant participial form. Thus the whole sentence presents a structure similar to that of serial verb constructions: it modifies slightly the normal word order. Instead of SVO, we have S + NEG.AUX + O + V.

## 1.2 Yəḏ ‘to know’ versus yə̀rĩ ‘to not know’

With *yəḏ* the subject of the modal verb is asserting that he is informed about something, such as a given situation. The speaker commits himself to the positive truth value of the statement.

(3) Də u nə yɪ cunu à mù yə̀rĩ ku.  
 CON 3sg FOC be transgressor 1sg EMPH not-know it  
 “If he is a sinner, I don’t know it.”

Yoo nədu nə à yəḏ. A yà yɪ liliu,  
 matter one FOC 1sg know 1sg PAST be blind  
 “There is one thing that I know. I was blind,”

yá síú nə à yíá dāń na lá.  
 CONTRAST now at 1sg eyes then see there  
 “But now, my eyes can see.” (NNT: John 9: 25)

With *yə̀rĩ* the subject is denying the knowledge about something or concerning a given situation. It shows his ignorance concerning the matter or the situation under consideration. It also precedes the object that is not known. It has a negative truth value, though that negative truth value might not be relevant. The speaker might lie.

(4) Q: Bεε təntə wulə yən nə?  
 man DEM exist where at  
 “Where is that man?”

A: A yə̀rĩ u bwálí.  
 1sg not-know 3sg place  
 “I don’t know where he is.” (NNT: John 9: 12)

The blind man’s answer in this verse of John 9 might not be relevant. It might be a lie, with the implication that if he showed where Jesus was, maybe the Jews would do wrong to him (Jesus). It could be that he deliberately refused to tell them where Jesus was, by saying that he did not know.

Whereas the tone pattern on *wàá* and *yəṑ* is low-high, it is low-low on *wàrì* and *yəř* which are their respective negative counterparts.

N.B.: *wàrì* and *yəř* are not morphological negatives with *-rì* suffixed to the first syllable of the positive modal verb. They are rather considered as lexical negative modal verbs because *-rì* does not occur elsewhere in Nuni except in these two verbs. *Wàrì* and *yəř* may have derived diachronically from a combination of a putative *\*-rì* and verb stems *wà* and *yə*, but synchronically *wàrì* and *yəř* are considered each to be one morpheme just like *təlé*.

### 1.3 **Wulə** ‘to exist’ versus **təlé** ‘to not exist’

**Wulə** is a locative modal verb. It affirms the existence of somebody or something in a certain environment or circumstance.

- (5) A      nyina *wulə* kára wa.  
       1sg    father exist farm in  
       “My father is in the farm.”

It may also express a state of being when used without any locative complement. In this case, it means “there is!” It has an informative or presentative implication.

- (6) Síṑ            wulə!  
       peanuts      exist  
       “‘There are peanuts!’”

**Təlé**, the negative counterpart of **wulə**, expresses the non-existence of somebody or something in a given location. The place of existence or non-existence of the subject follows immediately after the modal verb in both positive and negative cases.

- (7) A nyina tǝlǝ kára wa.  
 1sg father not-exist farm in  
 “My father is not in the farm.”

*Tǝlǝ* is often used to establish a social relationship between the speaker and the listener. In such a case it expresses a state of security or reassurance. The speaker reassures the listener not to worry or to fear in a certain social circumstance.

- (8) Fǝn tǝlǝ!  
 fear not-exist  
 “(There is) no fear/Do not be afraid!” (NNT: Luke 11: 21).

The tone pattern on *tǝlǝ* follows that of its positive counterpart *wulǝ* which is also low-high, but is not labelled simply because *wulǝ* does not have a homophone. So far, it will be noted that exactly the same inflections carried by the lexical verbs in the positive sentences are carried by the negative verbs in the negative sentences, with variations according to vowel harmony. For example, all of them occur exclusively in the present tense.

However, it is sometimes difficult to isolate a particular verb as the lexical negative of some other verb. For example, one cannot assert with certitude whether *zìgí* ‘to stand’ is the lexical negation of *jǝǝ* ‘to sit’, of *pǝǝ* ‘to lie’, of *tu* ‘to fall’, or whether these are all distinct verbs.

## 2. SENTENCE NEGATION

Sentence negation is the kind of negation which involves the whole sentence in the negative scope. Blass in the light of Klima's diagnostic tests done on English in order to define sentential negation, describes sentential negation in Sisaala as VP-negation (Blass 1980: 4). That description is also tested and found relevant in Nuni. Universally two categories of sentential negation are distinguished: Analytical negation and morphological negation. In Nuni, however, only the former is noted.

Analytical negation is the most standard means of constructing negative clauses in Nuni. Three negative particles are used with regard to tense, aspect and mood of the main verb with which they are associated or cliticized at clause-level.

### 2.1 Aspect Description of Sentence Negative Markers (*ba*, *bá*, *wà*)

While negative verbs are without any doubt the most interesting of the varied forms of standard negation, the field worker is more likely to be faced with some kind of negative particles in Nuni. These particles vary according to the tense, aspect and mood expressed by the main verb in the sentence in which they are used. Though they are most often associated with the main verb of the sentence, sentence negative markers are not bound to their main verbs. They are separate morphemes and sometimes, they function as clause-level clitics.

Negative markers tend to occur early in the sentence, usually just after the subject. The common word order is S + NEG + O + V.

### 2.1.1 The use of *ba*:

*Ba* is a sentence negative particle always used to express either a state of affairs in the simple present tense, or a state of affairs which is still in progress by and after the time of speaking. It may also be used to express a permanent general truth.

- (9) Vee            yíá    curə, yá    ✓            tə    *ba*    na!  
 foreigner    eyes    big    CONTRAST    it-pl    NEG    see  
 “The eyes of a foreigner are big, but do not see!” (Nuni folktales: book2. P9).

This is a proverbial statement with the implication that only insiders may know what is going on in their midst. It expresses a present state of affairs, which might also be considered as a general permanent truth at least in Nuni understanding of the proverb.

Sometimes the negative expression is the only alternative to express some state of affairs, because of lack of accurate positive expression.

- (10) Gùnú ganlɔɔ            *ba*    duu.  
 cotton sack            NEG    heavy  
 “A sack of cotton is not heavy.”

This statement is a remark. It does not have a positive equivalence such as “a sack of cotton is light,” because the word for ‘light’ in Nuni may also means ‘fine’ the opposite of ‘thick’.

Then the negative particle is used in association with ‘heavy’ in order to avoid any confusion.

Thus the idea of ‘being light’ is rendered in Nuni by negating its opposite term ‘heavy’.

In some sentential negations introduced by the particle *ba* the subject of the sentence is excluded from the scope of negation. This occurs mainly when the subject is a quantifier. That seems to be the main reason why Blass defines sentential negation in Sisaala as VP-Negation. Horn considers the type of negation which has as one function the negation of the most minimal

and basic sentence, ‘standard’ negation (Horn 1978: 135). He would consider a Nuni sentence like the following ambiguous with respect to negative scope.

- (11) Lìù    mama *ba*    wobria jə    ɔ    pulu    wa.  
 Person all    NEG grain have 3sg barn in  
 “Everyone does not have grain in his barn.” (Nignan 1988: 13).

The sentence is ambiguous in the sense that it may mean that no one has grain in his barn, or some people have grain in their barns and some others do not have, or everyone has grain in something else than barns. The sentence would have been semantically clearer if expressed in focal negation, which we will examine in 3.2.

### 2.1.2 The use of *bá*:

*Bá* is a future negative marker. It is used to foreshadow a future situation with regard to an implicit or explicit state of facts in the present or in the past. Exceptionally, *bá* does not modify the ordinary SVO word order.

- (12) U        *bá*        cògù        lìù    tə,  
           3sg    NEG    destroy    person the  
  
 ɔ    nə        *ba*        dɾàn        jə.  
 3sg REL    NEG    strength    have  
 “He will not destroy the person who is weak.”

This sentence contains two clauses: a main clause and a relative clause. While in the main clause we have a future mood negative marker with S + NEG + V + O word order, in the relative clause we have present tense negative marker with verb-object inversion in the word order. Once again with the present tense negative marker the notion of being socially or physically weak is rendered in Nuni by “not having strength.” The idea of social or physical



weakness is thus expressed by negating the opposite of ‘weakness’ which is ‘strength’, because in Nuni the word for ‘weakness’, *bwàná*, also means “to be humble”.

The particle *bá* is usually associated with the repetitive particle *kúù* to express a change of mind on a given assumption. In this case it means “no longer”.

- (13) Kar- nyma tə kúù *bá* bà.  
 teaching-father the REP NEG come  
 “The teacher is no longer going to come.”

Due to some circumstances or events that have occurred, students who were in class waiting for their lecturer can assume that he will no longer come to class as he was supposed to. The assumption might be that after waiting for a lecturer a certain interval of time, students can assume that he will no longer come to class. Depending on our knowledge of the context, we can assert whether something will still happen, or will no longer happen. The context is in the past, but the direction of the movement of the action is from the present to the future.

- (14) (Jesus addressing his disciples): A kúù *bá* na nə.  
 2pl REP NEG see 1sg.ob  
 “You will no longer see me.” (NNT: Matthew 26: 11).

Knowing that certain events were going to take him away from the sight of his disciples, Jesus tells them that they would no longer see him. It is a contextual conclusion based on some contextual implications. The disciples would no longer see him because he would no longer be around, living with them in the same environment.

Sometimes the particle *bá* is used in selective negative expressions.

- (15) L'jà *bá* va kára zən.  
 Persons NEG go farm today  
 “People will not go to farm today.”

The reason why people would not go to farm ‘today’ is probably well known to the speaker. Maybe they have worked so hard the previous day that they feel very tired ‘today’, or ‘today’ is a day off, or something happened in the community that might prevent people from going to their farms, or they heard about a fierce animal or a wicked person who can harm them at the farms. All the same, the expression is selective. It is not all people that would not go to their farms. Some people would not go, but some others might still go, whatever the situation might be. It may also be just a guess with regard to a certain situation.

### 2.1.3 The use of *wà* :

*Wà* is a past tense negative marker. It behaves exactly like *ba*, as far as its place in the word order is concerned. It also comes just after the subject, with verb-object inversion. Thus we have the following word order: S + NEG + O + V.

(16) Zuzefə            *wà*    Mari    *yəni*,  
       Joseph            NEG    Mary    know

ku     va     ku     yí     M ari    bǐú    tə     luru.  
 It     go     it     reach    Mary    son     the     birth

“Joseph did not know Mary, until the birth of Mary’s son.” (NNT: Matthew 1: 25).

Though collateral, this sentence is quite informative. It tells us figuratively that sexual relations did not happen between Joseph and Mary until the birth of Jesus. It may be asked why we use a negative particle + a positive verb (*yəni*, past tense of *yəḏə*), while that verb has a negative counterpart (*yəḏri*) which could have been used to express such a state of affairs shortly. That is a problem of tense and aspect. The lexical negative verbs do not have past tense. They always express some state of affairs in the present tense, with a permanent aspect. But in the above example, we are concerned with a past tense event which is now completed.

*Wà* is also used to express the idea of something which might or should happen, but has not yet happened.

- (17) A tə wà gəru nàgú dí.  
 1sg yet NEG lion meat eat  
 “I have not eaten lion meat yet.”

In his experience of meals that he has eaten so far, the speaker realizes that he has not eaten lion meat yet. It does not mean that he does not want lion meat, but he did not get any chance yet to eat it. The experience of eating lion meat might or might not happen in the future. But for the time being the speaker cannot argue about lion meat, for he does not know how it tastes since he has not eaten it yet.

The negative particle *wà* is often associated with the modal verb *mɛ* (‘must/shall’) to communicate an idea of prohibition. However, in agreement with Palmer in Bybee and Fleischman (1995: 453), it is worth mentioning that the form used for modality accompanied by negation in Nuni shows that there is a great deal of irregularity, in the sense of lack of regular correspondance between the form in Nuni and its meaning in English. For example, *mɛ* may fit in the meaning of the English modal verbs ‘must’ or ‘shall.’ Only the context can tell which meaning to choose. Thus, the English meaning of *mɛ* is unpredictable.

- (18) Pà- bǐú wà mɛ, sə ʊ yà la- bwanu.  
 king-son NEG must for 3sg be person-feeble  
 “A prince should not be feeble.” (Bísíná Wodiu Yuu wa Sísarí Sagr: p.10)

Kingship is a sign of glory and honour. However, the prince must be mighty in order to maintain his glory and honour vis à vis his subjects. A prince cannot rule without power. Power is then the basic of kingship.

*Wà* + *mɛ* can also express laws or commandments.

- (19) N      *wà*    *mɛ*    *sə*    n      *ŋu!*  
       2sg    NEG    must    for    2sg    steal  
       “You shall not steal!”

Stealing here is regarded as an abnormal thing that is condemned by the law. Any person caught guilty of stealing must be punished for disobedience to the law.

## 2.2 Negative Imperative Clause (*dàn ká/dànà ká*)

In Nuni imperative clauses are possible only in second person singular and plural. Generally the subject is not expressed but implied in the grammatical structure of the clause.

Negative commands are used in Nuni to express an interdiction on one hand, or some advice on the other hand. The negative form of a command varies according to the number of the addressee: *dàn ká* is a singular negative imperative marker, whereas *dànà ká* marks the plural form of the negative imperative.

As noted by Yago (1984: 254-55), the negative imperative particles always precede the infinitive form of the verb. He also notes that the pronoun of the second person plural (*á*) may precede the affirmative or negative plural forms of the particles.

The word order in a negative imperative clause in Nuni is the following: (2pl.pron.) + NEG + V + O. Except the negative particles, it is almost the same as the affirmative clause word order.

- (20a) Sg:      *Dàn ká*            *mà*    *bíú*    *tə!*  
               NEG                beat    child    the  
               “Don’t beat the child!”

- (20b) Pl:      (*á*)    *dànà ká*            *mà*    *bíú*    *tə!*  
               2pl    NEG                beat    child    the  
               “Don’t beat the child!”

(21a) Sg: *Dàn ká*      tɔ!  
           NEG            fall  
           “Don’t fall!”

(21b) Pl:    (*À*)    *dànà ká*      tɔ!  
           2pl    NEG            fall  
           “Don’t fall!” (Yago 1984: 255).

These negative imperative clauses function like injunctions. In (20a and b) it is assumed that the addressee(s) is/are beating or wanted to beat the child. In (21a and b) it is assumed that the addressee(s) wanted to fall. Then the utterance comes out from the speaker like a plea or wishful thinking for prevention from falling.

The negative imperative may also express warning or threat.

(22) *Dàn ká*      pa      bisima      mama kwi!  
       NEG            give    child      all      weep  
       “Don’t make any child weep!”

That can happen when an elder child plays with some other children younger than him. So, an adult can warn that child not to make any other child weep by abuse of power over the younger ones.

One can console somebody who is going through a sorrowful situation by using the negative imperative.

(23) *Dànà ká*      kwi!  
       NEG            weep!  
       “Don’t weep!” (NNT: Mark 5: 39).

The speaker is soothing the addressees who are weeping because they may be going through some hardship.

In the case of advice, the repetitive particle *kúò* always precedes the negative imperative markers and expresses some advice to stop doing something or to no longer do it.

- (24) *Kóù dān ká nyu níán cici.*  
 REP NEG drink water only  
 “Do no longer drink water only.” (NNT: 1 Timothy 5: 23).

In (24) apparently Timothy the addressee was drinking only water. So Paul advises him no longer to do so, but to drink in addition some wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent ailments.

The negative imperative can also be used to give a solemn command to somebody.

- (25) *Dànà ká swìn ku, á birí liù mama nə.*  
 NEG speak it 2pl show person all at  
 “Do not tell it to anybody.” (NNT: Mark 5: 43).

The matter dealt with in (25) is something to be kept secret. Jesus solemnly commands the parents of the little girl not to let anyone know that he has brought their daughter back to life.

So far we have analysed the use of the negative imperative only in direct speech. It can also occur in indirect reported speech.

- (26) *Zwezi wú ba dānà ká swìn*  
 Jesus say 3pl NEG speak  
  
*ku tə ɔ nə yɪ, ba birí.*  
 it DEM 3sg FOC be 3pl show  
 “Jesus commanded them not to reveal who he is.” (NNT: Matthew 12: 16).

(26) is the indirect form of (27) which is a direct negative imperative utterance uttered by

Jesus:

- (27) *Dànà ká swìn ku tə à nə yɪ, á birí.*  
 NEG speak it DEM 1sg FOC be 2pl show  
 “Do not reveal who I am!”

In this indirect speech somebody else is reporting indirectly the severe command Jesus gave to those he healed. In indirect speech the subject of the negative verb is expressed (*ba*), whereas in the direct speech, it is not. Some other transformations take place when passing from direct

speech to indirect speech. For example *à* (1sg) becomes *u* (3sg), *á* (2pl) becomes *ba* (3pl which should not be confused with *ba* the present tense negative particle). In indirect speech there is an introductory clause introducing the person who uttered the words in the direct speech.

### 2.3 Negative Interrogative clause (Rhetorical Questions)

While statements affirm some information and imperatives attempt to change someone's behaviour, questions seek for information from the addressees. However, we should notice that not all questions seek for information. For example rhetorical questions, which we are going to deal mainly with in this section, are not really seeking for information. Relevance theory claims that the grammatical form of interrogative utterances ostensibly asserts that their answer is relevant. Blakemore (1992: 114-15) distinguishes six sub-types of questions: real, pedagogical, expository, speculative, guess, and rhetorical questions. Gutt and Sim (1994: 146) claim that in these various sub-types of questions, the answer is relevant to either the hearer or the speaker.

The reason for asking a question implies the speaker's intention. In rhetorical questions, the speaker's intention is to put the addressee to the test dealing with something that is emphatically stated and which the addressee surely knows. In this sub-category of questions, the answer is relevant to the hearer, and the hearer also knows that the answer is relevant to the speaker too. So the speaker is not actually seeking for an answer, but as Gutt and Sim (1994: 147) say, "It seems that often it is some high level explicature that is relevant--the speaker's attitude towards the proposition entertained by the interrogative, or the hearer identification of his/her own attitude." In Nuni, any question can have a rhetorical meaning when processed in a certain context.

A negative interrogation can be either a polar question, or a content question. Negative verbs or sentential negative particles are used for expressing negation questions.

- (28) Wàà nə yèrĩ gəru swíán?  
 who FOC not:know lion difference  
 “Who doesn’t know a lion?”  
 Q: SQ + FOC + NEG.V + O

- (29) Wàà tə nə wà gəru nɪ?  
 who yet FOC NEG lion see  
 “Who has not seen a lion yet?”  
 Q: SQ + Adv + FOC + NEG + O + V

- (30) Zwan bá vu kára naaa?  
 John NEG go farm polar marker  
 “Won’t John go to farm?”  
 Q: S + NEG + V + Loc./O + Q

- (31) Zwan wà kára vəli naaa?  
 John NEG farm go polar marker  
 “Didn’t John go to farm?”  
 Q: S + NEG + Loc./O + V + Q

- (32) Zwan ba cacala pìà naaa?  
 John NEG eggs want polar marker  
 “Doesn’t John want eggs?”  
 Q: S + NEG + O + V + Q

Questions (28) and (29) can be considered as real or pedagogical if analysed from the speaker’s point of view. They presuppose that we have a group of addressees and the speaker or instructor is asking to know who among that group does not know a lion. But let us suppose that question (28) is uttered by one person from the group of addressees, after the speaker showed them the picture of a lion. In this case, the question is to be considered as rhetorical and implies that there is no need for showing them the picture of a lion, for they all know what a lion is.

From (30) to (32) we have real questions. The speaker is seeking for information. In (30) and (31) he wants to know about John’s going to farm. However, they can also be regarded as



rhetorical if the speaker well knows that John (depending on the case) will go or did go to farm, but he is asking because the addressee or someone else has adopted an attitude which is odd, compared to the expected attitude that should prevail when John will go or has gone to farm.

Question (32) is just an offering.

The word order is predictable. With the interrogative clauses which contain lexical negative verbs, the word order is almost the same as that which we have in statements introduced by the same negative modal verbs. The only exception is that in content interrogative clauses the subject or the object may be an interrogative pronoun. Also, the particle of focus, *nə*, is specific to interrogative and subordinative clauses. For the negative questions with negative markers, the word order corresponds also to that imposed by each sentential negative marker studied in 2. 1 above.

In Nuni, negative tag questions are considered as rhetorical questions. They involve the negative particle, *tà* (which we are going to study in 3.2), in their structure. However, *tà* does not have an emphatic function in the context of the tag questions. In (33) and (34) the part indicating the tag question is underlined, and its translation printed in bold face.

(33) Nyiən        ba        níán    nywì. Ku    tà    cígá?  
 crocodile    NEG    water    drink    it        NEG    true  
 “The crocodile does not drink water. **Is it not true?**”

(34) Nyiən        yɪ        voo     ku        nywì. Ku    tà    cígá?  
 crocodile    be        air     it        drink    it        NEG    true  
 “The crocodile drinks air. **Is it not true?**”

• The fact of questioning what has been first affirmed is not that the speaker doubts what he said, but that he wants the hearer to approve it or support it.

Unlike English where when the statement is positive the question tag is negative, and when the statement is negative the tag is positive, in Nuni the tag is always negative whatever is the polar value of the statement.

True rhetorical questions are expressed in Nuni by the negative particle *tà* + the polar question marker *naaa*.

- (35) Lìà            tə      nə      zwi    gan- mula,  
 Persons        the      REL    wear   cloth-sumptuous
- tà*    ba    wulə   pìá    kàrí            wa    naaa?  
 NEG 3pl   exist   kings   courtyards    in    polar marker
- “Those who wear sumptuous cloths, are they not in kings’ palaces?”

(NNT: Matthew 11: 8).

QR: S + NEG + Pron. + V + Loc./ O + Q

The speaker does not expect an answer from the hearer, for he is not seeking for information. Rather, the speaker is drawing the hearer’s attention to the evidence of a reality, that he supposes the hearer knows and agrees with. It is intended to correct a wrong assumption in the hearer’s attitude.

### 3. THE MORPHO-SYNTAX OF NUNI NEGATION

#### 3.1 NP Specification

The first device in this section concerns the properties of what is referred to by an NP. As you may have noted, gender is not expressed in Nuni. Indefinite nouns either in positive or negative contexts tend to have at least number. *Don* (sg) or *duən* (pl) mark the indefiniteness of the noun preceding them. According to Davison (1978: 30), unnegated indefinites do have specific reference, and so they can be specified for number and individual properties. In the following examples the specific NP is underlined.

- (36) Lìù            don    wà    twí.  
person            other NEG come  
“**Nobody else** came.”

In pragmatic terms it means that someone came, but since that person came, no one else came. She is the only person who came so far. The NP has a singular specification.

- (37) Lìà            duən    wà    twí  
persons            others NEG come  
“**Some people** did not come.”

- (38) Lìà            duən    wà    won    mama    ni.  
persons            other NEG thing all see  
“**Some people** saw nothing.”

Examples (37) and (38) have a selective meaning: that is, in (37) some people came but not all people have come. Some did not come. In (38) some people saw something but some others didn't. The NP is specific for plurality in the nominal ending *lìà*, and in the adjective *duən*.

The unnegated indefinite nouns in (36), (37) and (38) although indefinite, refer to some specific members of a group. For example, In (37) some people did not come but some others came. In (38) Some people saw nothing but some others saw something. That state of affairs could be summarized under a Gricean principle of relevance (Grice: 1975: 46). That is, these

specific properties are relevant only if you are actually referring to some existing referent. It may also be a reflection of the principle of quality, the injunction to give as much information as is necessary. Thus, it would be misleading to use an indefinite without qualification to refer to an existing referent in a negative context.

- (39) Zwan nɪ wɔn don kárá wa.  
 John see thing other farm in  
 “John saw **something** at the farm.”

The thing that John has seen is not defined. It is something non-identified.

- (40) Zwan nɪ wǐ̀èn duən kárá wa.  
 John see things others farm in  
 “John saw **some things** at the farm.”

The difference between (39) and (40) is on the morphosyntactic level. In (39) we are dealing with a singular object NP, whereas in (40) we have a plural object NP. Otherwise, the two sentences are pragmatically the same.

- (41) Nə wulə mágá don wa.  
 1pl exist time other in  
 “See you **sometime(s)**.”

The frequency of the time to meet next is undetermined or unspecified. It may be at any time, or just occasionally.

- (42) A nɪ ganu ku tə yírí bwálí don nə.  
 1sg see cloth it the similar place other at  
 “I saw a cloth like this **somewhere**.”

I do not remember where exactly I saw the cloth. Therefore, the place where I saw it is unspecified.

- (43) Dùà ba bwálá duən nə nè̀è.  
 rain NEG places others at fall  
 “It does not rain at **some places**”

I have evidence or knowledge that it does not rain at some places. Though I did not specify where these places are, nevertheless I must be able to cite the names of some of these places where it does not rain, so that my information might be relevant.

However, indefinite nouns are not clearly marked for number when they are negated. In that context, the negated indefinite noun occurs in its singular form, followed by the quantifier *mama* ‘all’, and the negative particle. Thus, it has singular agreement features, but pragmatically it communicates a plural idea. The fact that the negated indefinite nouns are unmarked for number is not surprising, since negative indefinites have no reference. Therefore they cannot have any specific properties aside from the most general ones by which indefinites differ from each other.

(44) Lìù mama wà twí.  
 person all NEG come  
 “Nobody came.”

(45) Zwan wà won mama yə yəə wa.  
 John NEG thing all buy market in  
 “John bought **nothing** in the market.”

The second example is ambiguous. It may mean that John bought nothing at all anywhere, or John bought something somewhere else than in the market.

If we examine the positive sentences (39-42) with regard to the principle of relevance, we will find that it does not matter that the indefinite NP is unspecified in some way. The specification of its properties might be less important and irrelevant, or these properties might be clear from a previous context, so it would be unnecessary to be repeated. The principle of quantity also states that the unspecified of the NP shows that the speaker does not have any more information: one cannot specify an idea beyond the extent of one’s knowledge.

In the negative sentences (36-38) and (43-45), however, the specification of the NP marks the NP as not being in the scope of the negation. Unspecified indefinite NPs are understood to be negated unless the context forces the opposite interpretation. It follows from the principle of quality that a negated indefinite, referring to nothing concrete, cannot be further specified.

### 3.2 The Emphatic Use of *tà*

Proper inclusion and equative clauses are more or less similar in Nuni, at least on the basis of their syntactic structure. The use of the negative particle *tà* is convenient in both types of clause. Only the semantic knowledge of the predicate nominal can help distinguish them as either proper inclusion clause or equative clause.

- (46) Zwan *tà* kar- nyina.  
 John NEG teaching-father  
 “John is not a teacher.” (Proper inclusion).

Denial of John’s profession. John may have any other profession, but to the knowledge of the speaker, he is not a teacher.

- (47) Zwan *tà* à nyina.  
 John NEG 1sg father  
 “John is not my father.” (Equative.)

Denial of John’s paternal relation to the speaker. John may be the uncle or the brother of the speaker, but not the father. In both cases the word order is NP(subj.) + NEG + NP(predicate nominal).

The emphatic or focal negative marker *tà* marks an NP as being in the scope of negation and so, as being in focus. It is a kind of cleft construction in which we have a predicate nominal consisting of a NP and a relative clause. Payne (1997: 278) argues that the NP is commonly

referred to as the “clefted constituent.” It is normally found to the left of the rest of the clause, preceded first, by the impersonal pronoun ‘it’ in initial position, and then by the negative marker.

*Tà* is a complex negative particle in the sense that it does not simply play the role of negating an NP but also involves in its meaning the copula ‘be’. Thus *tà* does not simply mean ‘not’ but ‘not be’ as we may notice in (48) and (50). However, we should also notice that the copula is not expressed in Nuni negative sentences but it is implied.

- (48) K<sub>U</sub>    *tà*    v<sub>à</sub>rú    nə    y<sub>à</sub>rú            tə    lwĩ.  
          it    NEG   hoe   REL   blacksmith   the   forge  
          “It is not a hoe that the blacksmith is forging.”

Word order = Pron. + NEG + O + Rcl

- (49) (K<sub>U</sub>    y<sub>I</sub>    cwĩ.)  
          it    be    spear  
          (“It is a spear.”)

When the speaker negates the assumption that what the blacksmith is forging is a hoe, nevertheless he has in mind another assumption that he thinks is true. If what the blacksmith is forging is not a hoe, since he is forging something anyway, that thing might be a spear or anything else than a hoe.

- (50) K<sub>U</sub>    *tà*    Zwan    nə    gua    c<sub>ə</sub>rú            tə.  
          it    NEG   John   REL   kill   chicken   the  
          “It is not John who killed the chicken.”

Word order = Pron. + NEG + S + Rcl

While in (48) the emphasis is on the object, in (50) it falls on the subject. In (50) the speaker refutes the assumption that John is the subject causing the death of the chicken. It might be John’s father who killed the chicken, or the chicken died by itself, or it has undergone

another accident caused by someone else. Thus in both examples the NP functions like a theme. In example (48) it has the function of an object, while in example (50) it is a subject.

According to Croft, the emphatic negative marker occurs in constituent negation, where the negated element is the most prominent piece of information, while the rest of the clause is presupposed ( cf. examples 48 and 50 above). He defines focus as a foregrounding construction: “Focus or foregrounding constructions across languages have common structural characteristics: the foregrounded element, usually an NP, is structurally separated from the backgrounded rest of the clause, and the rest of the clause is distinctively marked (special verb form, complementizer, special pronominal/agreement forms). Thus, the focus sentence structure mirrors the sentence function, by separating the foregrounded element and marking the backgrounded clause” (Croft 1990: 170).

In Nuni, focus, WH-question, negation and relative clause constructions all have in common the fronting of the foregrounded NP.





## CONCLUSION

Negative constructions in Nuni involve many operators. These operators are used either alone in a sentence to express the negative concept, or in association with other particles which are not negative in isolation. Negative particles bring about change in the common word order in Nuni. One might speculate that, since a negative assertion is communicatively so distinct from the corresponding affirmative, languages tend to develop very strong but easily perceived devices to express the difference. However, there is a problem for that speculation: in some languages like English, the contracted form of the negative particle is perceptually weak in certain environments.

Negative in Nuni has, in addition to its strictly logical aspect, a great number of pragmatic components that cannot be predicted from the logic.

Negative utterances constitute a different speech act than affirmatives. While the latter are used to convey new information on the presumption of ignorance of the hearer, negatives are used to correct misguided belief on the assumption of the hearer's error. Therefore, negatives are consistently marked in terms of discourse-pragmatic presupposition, as compared to affirmatives. More specifically, negatives are uttered in a context where corresponding affirmatives have already been discussed. Elsewhere the speaker assumes the hearer's belief in the corresponding affirmative.

The ontology of negation in Nuni is firmly grounded in the perceptual principle of figure or ground, where the most perceptually prominent pole of an antonymic property turns out to designate the positive pole or the presence of its property, while the less perceptually prominent antonym turns out to designate the absence of this property. Such a state of affairs is similarly noted in eventline communication or discourse. The changes in the inertia of the flow of the events is conceived as the positive pole, while the absence of changes stands for the negative.

This is all the same motivated by the perceptual principle of figure or ground, since a change in the state of the universe constitutes a break in the norm, whereas we know that there is a tendency for a norm to stay unchanged for a long period of time.

This paper also points to the divergent ways human beings perceive and conceive information. In terms of communication theory, information is defined as ‘surprise’ or ‘breaking the norm’. The same concept is true in terms of perception too. Our attention is attracted to the figures over the background, and to changes over the norm. Since communication presumably involves knowledge and thus our conceptual system, it seems reasonable to assume that in the relatively infrequent instances when the normative figure-ground relations are reversed, and where the affirmative is established as the background expectation in discourse, negative propositions become salient and informative.

Although negation is perceived as a sign of impoliteness in Nuni society, it remains all the same an important linguistic topic because of the diverse ways and contexts in which negative expressions are used in the language.

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