# NEGATION IN DAGAARE

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**Abstract**

*Negation in Dagaare is marked mainly by pre-verb particles. Of the almost two dozen pre-verb particles in Dagaare, only four — ba,* kùŋ, *ta and* tɔ́ɔ́ *— are negation markers. The negation particles combine with different aspects of the verb to signal not only negation but also various other semantic relations. By some kind of negative focus however, the subject or any phrasal constituent of the predicate may be "negated" by naani or its clitic variant naa.*

## 1. Introduction

Negation in Dagaare is marked mainly by pre-verb particles. The presence of pre-verb particles in the Verb Phrase is a phenomenon that occurs in Gur languages in general and these particles are quite many. Bendor-Samuel (1971) for instance, lists as many as 30 pre-verb particles for Dagbani (see also Wilson 1972). Dong (1981) lists 18 pre-verb particles for Dagaare.

The pre-verb particles in Dagaare perform various functions including serving as markers of tense, mood, aspect and polarity. An interesting behaviour of these pre-verb particles observed earlier by Dakubu (1989) and Bodomo (1997) is that more than one function may be carried by the same particle as example 1 shows. In 1 for instance, *ta* indicates both mood and polarity; *ta* shows that the sentence is a negative imperative construction.

1. Ta zo!
   NEG-IMP run[+]
   (Do not run!)

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## 2. Negation

In Dagaare, negation is marked by the following pre-verb particles—ba, kʊŋ, ta and tɔɔ. The negation particles combine with different aspects of the verb and together signal various semantic relations.

Aspect is one of the fundamental categories of the Dagaare verb system as every Dagaare VP is marked for it. The Dagaare verb has two forms each of the perfective and imperfective aspects. These are referred to here as Perfective A and Perfective B and Imperfective A and Imperfective B.

The perfective A is the same as the bare or dictionary citation form of the verb. The perfective B suffix is a front mid vowel — /e/ or /ɛ/ — depending on the ATR value of the root vowels. In some instances /e/ or /ɛ/ combines the functions of both the perfective and the affirmative.

The imperfective A suffix consists mainly of a mid vowel preceded mostly by /r/. The ATR value of the suffix vowel is again dependent upon that of the root vowels. The imperfective B suffix is invariably a long front mid vowel — /e:/ or /ɛ:/ preceded by /r/. Like the perfective B suffix, the imperfective B suffix also combines the functions of both the perfective and the affirmative. Examples of these forms are shown in table 1. More detailed discussion of Aspect and the Dagaare verb may be found in Saanchi (2003).

| A<br>PERF A | B<br>PERF B | C<br>IMPERF A | D<br>IMPERF B | F<br>GLOSS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| tu | tue | tuuro | tuuree | dig |
| do | doe | duoro | duoree | climb |
| di | die | dire | diree | eat |
| dɛ | dɛɛ | dɪerɛ | dɪerɛɛ | trim |
| kʊ | kʊɛ | kʊʊrɔ | kʊʊrɛɛ | kill |
| kɔ | kɔɛ | kʊɔrɔ | kʊɔrɛɛ | farm |

Table 1. The perfective and imperfective forms of the Dagaare verb

## 3. Negative Pre-verb Particles

The particles ba, kuŋ, ta, and tɔɔ occur before the verb in Dagaare to negate the predicate. These forms usually occur with the perfective A and imperfective A forms of the verb but not the B forms since the B forms are also affirmative markers.

### 3.1 Bá (Non-Future Negative)

Ba is a non-future negative marker. It is used with the perfective A and imperfective A forms of the verb to negate constructions in the present tense and it is also used in conjunction with the past tense particle, *da* to negate constructions in the past tense. When used with *daŋ*, the remote past tense particle, it has the meaning of "never".

2a a bie ba dɔ a zie
DEF child NEG weed DEF place
(The child has not weeded the place)

2b a mɔnaabu ba ku a naŋkpaana
DEF buffalo NEG kill DEF hunter
(The buffalo has not killed the hunter)

2c a naŋkpaana daŋ ba ku wɔɔ
DEF hunter PAST NEG kill elephant
(The hunter has never killed an elephant)

2d a bie ba duɔrɔ a zie
DEF child NEG weed-IMPERF DEF place
(The child is not weeding the place)

2e Dakura ba ɔɔrɔ a nɛne
Dakura NEG chew-IMPERF DEF meat
(Dakura is not eating the meat)

2f Ayor da ba maala a sɪɪmaa
Ayor PAST NEG prepare-IMPERF DEF meal
(Ayor was not preparing the meal)

2g ?Ayor daŋ ba maala a sɪɪmaa

With the imperfective, ba can occur with the past tense marker da, but not with the remote past marker daŋ. Thus while 2f is grammatical, 2g has doubtful grammaticality and at best is incomplete.

**3.2 Kùŋ (Future Negative)**

Kùŋ is the negative future marker. It is used with the perfective A form of the verb to indicate that an event or situation will not occur as examples 3a and 3b show.

3a a nʊba kʊŋwa
DEF people NEG-FUT come
(The people will not come)

3b a bie kʊŋ gaa a tigri
DEF child NEG-FUT go DEF festival
(The child will not go to the festival)

Kʊŋmay also be used with the imperfective A form of the verb as shown in 3d and 3e. Usually this will in response to a command in the imperfective.

3d a nʊba kʊŋ waana
DEF people NEG-FUT come-IMPERF
(The people will not be coming)

3e a bie kʊŋ dire a kapala
DEF child NEG-FUT eat-IMPERF DEF fufu
(The child will not be eating the fufu)

The negative future marker, kùŋ has low tone and is thus distinguished from kúŋ with high tone which is a sort of negative conditional marker used to indicate that an event or situation should not or would not have occurred as examples 3g – 3j show. In 3h, for instance, it is clear that the

person has actually come but should not or would not have done so. Likewise in 3j it is obvious that the child has indeed eaten the yam but should not or would not have done so.

3g ʊ kùŋ wa
3SG NEG-FUT come
(S/he will not come)

3h ʊ kúŋ wa
3SG should/would not come
(S/he should not/would not have come)

3i a bie kùŋ ɔɔ a waarɪ
DEF child NEG-FUT chew DEF yam
(The child will not eat the yam)

3j a bie kúŋ ɔɔ a waarɪ
DEF child should/would not chew DEF yam
(The child should not/would not have eaten the yam)

### 3.3. Tá (Imperative Negative)

*Ta* is a negative imperative marker. *Ta* is used with the perfective form of the verb to prevent an event or situation that is just about to start from starting, while with the imperfective, *ta* is used to stop an event or situation that is already in process as the examples in 4a – 4d show.

4a ta zo NEG-IMP run-PERF
(Do not run!)

4b ta nyu a zɪɛrɪ
NEG-IMP drink-PERF DEF soup
(Do not drink the soup!)

4c ta zoro
NEG-IMP run-IMPERF
(Do not run! i.e. Stop running!)

4d ta nyuuro a zɪɛrɪ

NEG-IMP drink-IMPERF DEF soup

(Do not drink the soup i.e. Stop drinking the soup!)

### 3.4 Tɔ́ɔ́ (Imperative Negative)

Tɔ́ɔ́ /tɔ́:/ is also a negative imperative marker. As an imperative marker, tɔɔ always goes with the imperfective A form of the verb. Tɔɔ is used with the imperfective form of the verb to prevent an event or situation from beginning. Tɔɔ with the imperfective thus performs a similar function as ta and the perfective does — both are used to prevent an event or situation that is just about to start from starting. Thus 4a and 4b are equivalent to 5a and 5b respectively.

5a tɔɔ zoro

NEG-IMP run-IMPERF

(Do not run!)

5b tɔɔ nyuuro a zɪɛrɪ

NEG-IMP drink-IMPERF DEF soup

(Do not drink the soup!)

There is however a slight difference between and the perfective and tɔɔ with the imperfective because the latter may also be used to prevent an event which one suspects may occur even though there may be no immediate indication of this. For instance, a mother who is about to go out may also say 5b tɔɔ nyuuro a zɪɛrɪ ("do not drink the soup") to a child; even though there is no present evidence to indicate that the child is about to drink the soup, the mother suspects that once she is out, the child may drink it.

The question remains whether there is a semantic difference or for that matter any difference other than stylistic between ta with the perfective and tɔɔ with the imperfective since both are used to prevent an event or situation that is just about to start from starting. Native speakers express different views on this. While some say that there is no difference at all between the two, i.e. ta zo and tɔɔ zoro both mean "do not run", others are of the view that ta zo expresses greater urgency than tɔɔ zoro. As a

student of grammar and going by the principle that there are no perfect synonyms, one is inclined to agree with those who see a difference in the two. Ta with the perfective does seem to express a greater urgency or immediacy than tɔɔ with the imperfective. This view is buttressed by the fact tɔɔ with the imperfective may be used in conjunction with a hypothetical situation introduced by a conditional clause while ta with the perfective cannot. Thus while 5c is grammatical, 5d is not.

5c. ka a baa wa yi, tɔɔ zoro
COND DEF dog come out NEG-IMP run-IMPERF
(If/when the dog comes out, do not run!)

5d. ?ka a baa wa yi, ta zo
COND DEF dog come out NEG-IMP run-PERF

When used with the perfective form of the verb, tɔɔ no longer marks the negative imperative; rather it marks a dependent conditional clause that is an admonition, a suggestion against doing something.

5e tɔɔ gaa be ka a nʊba ŋmɛ yɛ
go-PERF there LINK DEF people beat 2PL
(What if you go there and the people beat you)

5f tɔɔ nyu a zɪɛrɪ ka fʊ pʊɔ bɪɛrɛ
drink-PERF DEF soup LINK 2SG stomach be sick
(What if you drink the soup and get stomach trouble?)

In 5e the clause introduced by ka —a nʊba ŋmɛ yɛ ("the people beat you") —is a probable consequence of the first clause introduced by tɔɔ; the construction is not a command but an implied suggestion or recommendation not to go because your going there may lead to the people beating you. Likewise in 5f the clause introduced by tɔɔ— nyu a zɪɛrɪ ("drink the soup") —is not a command but a suggestion not to drink the soup, and this is linked by ka to the second clause its probable consequence. The construction thus says that it is advisable not to drink the soup because doing so may lead to sickness.

## 4. Naanı and Non-VP Negation

Ba, kʊŋ, ta, and tɔɔ are all used to negate the Verb Phrase. Naanı or its shortened version naa on the other hand is used to negate the subject or any phrasal constituent of the Predicate. Naanı negatively focuses on either the subject or a phrasal constituent of the predicate.

Dakubu and Saanchi (1997), distinguish between "broad focus" and "narrow focus" in Dagaare. Broad focus means either the Subject or the Predicate is in focus and narrow focus means that a phrasal constituent of the Predicate is in focus. The two systems of focus cannot be expressed together. They also note that focus is not expressed if the Predicate is negative or imperative suggesting that in Dagaare these features carry inherent focus.

The present presentation proposes that negative non-Predicate focus may be expressed in Dagaare. Naanı or its clitic version naa is used to negate the subject as in 6a – 6e.

Moreover while none of the other negation markers may be used together with each other, it is possible to use naanı together with the non-future negative marker ba as in 6d or the future negative marker kʊŋas in 6e.

Apart from the subject, constituents of the Predicate may also be negatively focussed. Any constituent of the Predicate, whether Object, Adjunct or a nominalized copy of the verb may be negatively focussed. The constituent is moved to the beginning of the expression and naanı or naa follows it to negate it. The negatively focussed element is then joined to the rest of its clause by ka or alternatively by –ŋ suffixed to a pronoun subject as examples 6f to 6i show. In 6f for instance, the Direct Object of the sentence nuulee ("bird") is negated while in 6g the Adjunct zaamı ("yesterday") is negated. Ka and –ŋ are linking elements which also topicalize the preposed constituent.

6a. bie naanı
child NEG
(It is not a child)

6b. a bie naanɪ
DEF child NEG
(It is not the child)

6c. a bie naa kʊ a nuulee
DEF child NEG kill DEF bird
(It is not the child who has killed the bird i.e. it is someone else.)

6d. a bie naanɪ ba gaa a wɪɛ
DEF child NEG NEG go-PERF DEF farm
It is not the child who has not gone to the farm i.e. it is someone else who has not gone.)

6e. a bie naanɪ kʊŋ gaa a wɪɛ
DEF child NEG NEG-FUT go-PERF DEF farm
It is not the child who will not go to the farm, i.e. it is someone else who will not go.)

6f. nuulee naa ka a bie kʊ
bird NEG-FOC LINK DEF child kill
(It is not a bird that the child killed i.e. it is something else)

6g zaamɪ naanɪ ka a bie kʊ a nuulee
yesterday NEG-FOC LINK DEF child kill DEF bird
(It is not yesterday that the child killed the bird i.e. it is some other day)

6h kʊʊbʊ naanɪ ka a bie kʊ a nuulee
killing NEG-FOC LINK DEF child kill DEF bird
(It is not killing that the child killed the bird)

6i zaamɪ naanɪ ʊŋ kʊ a nuulee
yesterday NEG-FOC 3SG-LINK kill DEF bird
(It is not yesterday that s/he killed the bird)

## 5. Conclusion

While the Verb Phrase in Dagaare is negated by the pre-verb particles ba, kʊŋ, ta and tɔɔ, with the perfective A or imperfective A forms of the verb, the subject may be "negated" by naanɪ or its shortened version, naa. Any phrasal constituent of the Predicate — whether Object, Adjunct or a nominalized copy of the verb may also be preposed and "negated" by naanɪ or naa and then linked to its clause by the linker ka or its clitic variant –ŋ in the case of a pronoun subject.

## NOTE

[1]The following abbreviations are used in the paper:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| COND | - | Conditional |
| DEF | - | Definite Marker |
| FOC | - | Focus |
| FUT | - | Future |
| IMP | - | Imperative |
| IMPERF | - | Imperfective |
| LINK | - | Linker |
| NEG | - | Negative |
| PAST | - | Past |
| PERF | - | Perfective |

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