

Negation in Buwal: Order, form and meaning

Melanie Viljoen

Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University, Australia

SIL Cameroon

Buwal is a Central Chadic language spoken by around 7000-10 000 people (Brye 2000, 2) in the Far North Region of Cameroon. This language conforms to the VO & Vneg word order observed by Dryer (2009) and Watters (2000, 207) as dominant for the Chadic languages in this region of Africa. Clauses are negated with a negative word which occurs at the end of a clause after objects, adverbs and adjuncts (1). However, it is possible for certain sentence adverbs and adverbial clauses to follow the negative marker.

(1)

Sá k̄ā-ndā á lúmà ákwāw.

1sS IMPF-go to market NEG(EX)

I am not going to the market.

Unlike certain other Chadic languages such as Hausa (Newman, 1971), double negation is not possible in Buwal. Also in line with Dryer's observations is the fact that the question particle occurs at the end of a clause and the negative word precedes this if both are present (2).

(2)

Hwā ká-vàl-ēnē ákwāw vāw ?

2sS PF-give-3sIO NEG(EX) Q

Haven't you given (it) to him?

There are two negative markers in Buwal, the plain negative marker *kwāw* (or *skwāw*) and the existential negative marker *ákwāw* (or *áskwāw*). This second marker is derived from a contraction of the existential marker *ákā* and the plain negative marker *skwāw*. In fact *ákā skwāw* is frequently used in place of *ákwāw/áskwāw* with no change in meaning. The use of the existential negative marker reflects its existential origin in that it is used for situations that either will never exist, or not exist over an extended period of time. The plain negative marker *kwāw/skwāw* on the other hand indicates that the negative situation is relevant at the reference time with the implication that it is possible for that situation to change at some point. Often there is an implied or explicitly stated reason which prevents the positive alternative. These two markers interact with tense, aspect, modality and verb semantics to give rise to distinctive readings of certain negative clauses (examples (3) and (4)).

(3)

Sā ká-zàm ùdā kwāw.

1sS PF-eat food NEG

I haven't eaten food (yet).

(Planning on eating some.)

(4)

Sā ká-zàm ùdā ákwāw.

1sS PF-eat food NEG

I haven't eaten food.

(Not planning on eating.)

This talk explores the distribution, semantics and use of these two negation markers in more detail based on data from narratives, conversations and elicitation.

References

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