THE HAUSA NEGATIVE MARKERS

Paul Newman
Department of Anthropology
Yale University

1. **Introduction**

Modern standard Hausa marks negation in six different ways, five involving some variant or variants of the morph ba(a), the sixth employing the morph kàdà. In traditional treatments of Hausa these variants are listed individually as the negative of one or another affirmative construction. No previous attempts have been made to relate these variants to one another nor to explain their similarities and differences. The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic account of the negative markers found in modern Hausa in terms of their historical derivation from a reconstructed negative marking system. While the historical analysis presented in this paper has implications for synchronic studies of negation in Hausa, it does not purport to be a generative/transformational description of the language as it now stands.

2. **Hausa negative types**

The Hausa negative (henceforth 'Neg') markers are as follows:

1. \( \text{bàa...bà} \)  
   e.g. \( \text{shfì bàa sàrkì bà nòe} \)  
   'he is not chief'

2. \( \text{bà...bà} \)  
   e.g. \( \text{gìwàà bà tà jàa bà} \)  
   'the elephant didn't pull it'

3. \( \text{bàa...} \)  
   e.g. \( \text{bàa yàa fìtàa} \)  
   'he is not going out'

4. \( \text{bàà...} \)  
   e.g. \( \text{bàà sù dà kòomèe} \)  
   'they do not have anything' \( \text{bàà míyàà} \)  
   'there isn't any soup'

---

1This work was supported by a National Science Foundation grant GS-2279. I am indebted to Russell Schuh for comments on an earlier version of this paper.
(Note: The tonal sequence High-Low in the same syllable is realized as a fall, i.e. bàà = [\].)

(5) bàabù... e.g. bàabù mìyàa
   'there isn't any soup'

(6) kádà... e.g. kádà kà mánfàa
   'don't forget'

Neg type (1) is used to negate equational sentences, individual words, and sentences as a whole (i.e. 'It is not the case that...'). Neg type (2) is used with verbal sentences in all tenses except the continuous and the subjunctive. It co-occurs with a short unmarked preverbal pronoun set. In addition to the past (illustrated above), Neg type (2) is used in the future, the second future (or potential), and the habitual. Neg types (1) and (2) are the only ones in Hausa that use discontinuous markers. In both cases, the initial marker (Neg₁) goes at the beginning of the sentence and the final marker (Neg₂) goes at the end. Neg type (3) is used with a long/low pronoun set to form the negative of verbal sentences in the continuous. Some speakers also use this Neg type in preference to Neg type (4) in "have" sentences, e.g. bàa swàà dà kóome 'they do not have anything'. Neg type (4) is used in two different constructions. First, it occurs with the high tone "object" pronoun set in "have" sentences and in the parallel sentences with gà, e.g. bàa mú gà sàrkìì 'we are not with (i.e. partisans of) the chief'. In northern dialects of Hausa, this construction replaces Neg type (3) as the normal means of forming the negative of the continuous, e.g. bàa shì fìttàà 'he is not going out'. Secondly, Neg type (4) functions as a negative existential marker equivalent to Neg type (5) in sentences with overt complements. It is never used by itself, i.e. one may say bàa kùɗi 'there isn't any money' but not ??bàà 'there isn't any'.

2The double question mark ?? is used to indicate ungrammaticality. The asterisk * is used in accordance with standard practice in historical linguistics to indicate reconstructed or hypothetical forms.
functions solely as a negative existential marker meaning 'there is no...'. It may be used either with a complement or by itself, e.g. the complete sentence bāsābā 'there isn't any'. Neg type (6) kādā serves as the negative of the subjunctive and the imperative. It co-occurs with the short pronoun set normally used in the subjunctive. Unlike the Neg₁ ba(a) markers, kādā can optionally be separated from its pronoun and shifted in front of the subject, e.g.:

(7) ...yāšārō kādā yà fîtá = ...kādą yāšārō yà fîtá
    'lest the boy go out'

(8) Cf. yāšārō bā yà fîtaa ≠ ?? bā yāšārō yàa fîtaa
    'the boy is not going out'

Syntactic facts such as the one just described plus the obvious phonological difference between ba(a) and kādā suggest that the two forms are etymologically distinct. Therefore, in the historical discussion that follows, Neg types (1) to (5), which make use of the morph ba(a), will be treated as a group while Neg type (6) kādā will receive separate treatment.

3. The reconstructed proto-form

The proto-form from which the five Neg types (1) to (5) are historically derived can be reconstructed as *bāa...bā. This reconstruction embodies three claims:

(a) The proto-Hausa Neg in all morpho-syntactic environments was discontinuous and included a Neg₁ in addition to a Neg₁. This Neg₁ was *bā.

(b) The vowel of Neg₁ in the proto-language was long.

(c) The tone of Neg₁ in the proto-language was low.

Claim (a) is based primarily on comparative evidence from other languages in the Chadic family to which Hausa belongs.³ Throughout Chadic, one finds two common Neg marking systems, namely (i) Neg₁... Neg₁, and (ii) ...Neg₁. In addition to Hausa, languages with discon-

³For the composition of the Chadic family and Hausa's position in it, see Greenberg [1963], Newman and Ma [1966], and Hoffman [1971].
tinuous Neg markers include Kanakuru, where Neg₁ and Negᵢ are indicated by variants of the same morph (wọi...w(u)), and Jegu, where Neg₁ and Negᵢ morphs are distinct (báa...dó). A larger number of Chadic languages (e.g. Bolewa, Ngizim, Angas, Ron (Bokkos), Gisiga, and Hig) make use of only a single Neg marker at the end of the sentence. Neg marking by the use of a single Neg at the beginning of the sentence—such as is the case with Hausa Neg types (3), (4), and (5)—is not found elsewhere in Chadic. It thus must represent a Hausa innovation rather than an archaic feature. The most likely explanation is that the anomalous Hausa Neg types (3), (4), and (5) came about through the loss of the Negᵢ component of what at an earlier time was a discontinuous morpheme. As far as the shape of Negᵢ is concerned, there seems to be no reason to reconstruct it other than as *bá.

The Neg₁ is reconstructed as *bàa with a long vowel for both internal and comparative reasons. The internal reason is that all of the present-day Neg₁ markers except one are long. Moreover, the environments in which the long vowel Neg₁'s are found are too disparate to lend themselves to a general lengthening rule whereas the short Neg₁ is limited to an easily specifiable environment. The comparative evidence is provided by Sura and Kanakuru, two languages closely related to Hausa that also have discontinuous Neg markers. In both of these languages the Neg₁ marker is long, i.e. Sura bàa... kás and Kanakuru wọi...w(u).

The reconstruction of Neg₁ as *bàa with low tone is based primarily on the discovery of what I believe to be the historical change that in some environments resulted in the original low tone being replaced by high. This rule is presented in (17) below.

4. Derivation of the Hausa negative types (1) to (5)

Given the reconstructed proto-form *bàa...bá, we are now ready to derive the Neg variants found in present-day Hausa.

(9) *bàa...bá > bàa...bá

Neg type (1), used in equational sentences, has retained the form of the proto Neg marker without change.
(10) *bàà...bá > bà...bá / ___[CV]pp

[pp = pronominal prefix]

In modern Hausa most tenses are formed with the help of a set of short vowel pronominal prefixes (nì, kà, kì, shì/yà, tà, mù, kù, sù, 'à'). The historical shortening of *bàà to bà took place when and only when the initial *bàà was attached to an immediately following pronominal suffix, e.g.:

(11) *bàà tà fìtá bà > bà-tà fìtá bà
    'she did not go out'

(12) *bàà mú kàn fìtá bà > bà-mú kàn fìtá bà
    'we don't go out'

(13) *bàà nàà (< nì + à) fìtá bà > bà-nàà fìtá bà
    'I will not go out'

Although ultimately derived from a sequence of a pronominal prefix plus a tense marker àà, the continuous tense forms (nàa, kàa, kyàa, etc.) had already coalesced into inseparable pronouns by the time of the Neg shortening rule and thus the Neg marker occurring with them was not affected by it, i.e.:

(14) *bàà swàa fìtáa bà ≠ ?? bà-swàa fìtáa bà
    'they are not going out'

Interestingly, Kanakuru has a synchronic Neg shortening rule which is remarkably similar to the Hausa rule (10), namely:

(15) wòi ===> wo (with polar tone) / ____pronoun

E.g.:

(16) ámná wòi nèné ù = ámná wò-shìi nèné ù
    'the chief is not there'

gùnyòi wòi pòrà-tà ù = gùnyòi wò-shèe pòrà- tà ù
    'the girl did not go out'

*The low tone in the underlying representations is automatically raised to high under certain conditions. A detailed study of Hausa preverbal pronouns by Russell Schuh and myself is now in preparation.*
(Use of the pronoun after the noun subject is optional, but if chosen, the shortening of the Neg marker is obligatory.)

An apparent failing of rule (10) is that it does not account for the use of the short Neg₁ with the standard Hausa future construction in which the Neg₁ is separated from the pronominal prefix by an intervening tense marker záa, e.g. bà záa tà fîtá bá 'she will not go out'. One would not, however, expect to explain the use of bà...bá with the záa future by rule (10) since it is unlikely that this form of the future even existed at the time the rule was in operation. The future construction formed with záa plus a pronominal prefix (e.g. záa tà fîtá 'she will go out', bà záa sù yàrdá bá 'they will not agree') appears to be a very recent innovation limited to standard Nigerian Hausa. While it has established itself with great success throughout this dialect area, it has failed so far to spread to northern and western dialects. Considering the young age of this tense construction, the form of the Neg used with it must have been adopted from the other tenses that form negatives with bà...bá rather than being derived from proto *bàa...bá via a historical shortening rule:

(17) *bàa...bá > bàa...ô > bàa...

Condition: Blocked in equational sentences.

Except in equational sentences, Negs with an initial long *bàa (i.e. those not having undergone rule (10)) underwent a complex change in which the final Neg was dropped and the tone of the Neg₁ marker was raised, e.g.:

(18) *bàa mwàà dáfàawáà bá > bàa mwàà dáfàawáà

'we are not cooking it'

(19) *bàa shí dà dóoklí bá > *bàa shí dà dóoklí

'he doesn't have a horse'

(20) *bàa dà rúwáa bá > *bàa dà rúwáa

'there isn't any water'

The subsequent change of the Neg₁ from bàa to bàa in the latter two examples will be accounted for below (cf. (21) - (26)).
Rule (17) is proposed to account for what I think is a non-accidental correlation in Hausa, namely that Neg₁ is absent in just those cases where Neg₁ is long and has an initial high tone. At this point, I have no explanation as to why the Neg₁ was dropped nor why the deletion failed to take place in equational sentences. The claim I wish to make is that when the Neg₁ was dropped, its high tone survived and was shifted to the initial *bàa, the resultant bàa in effect constituting a compressed Neg₁/Negₐ marker.

Neg type (4) is presumed to have undergone rule (17) along with Neg type (3), thereby ending up with a high tone Neg₁ and no Negₐ. What remains to be accounted for is the change from the hypothetical form *bàa to the present form bàa. Here I would suggest that there was not one derivation, but two—the change *bàa to bàa occurring independently in the case of the two distinct Neg (4) constructions. The first:

(21) *bàa > bàa / --- [CV]₀p

Under the influence of an immediately following high tone "object" pronoun, the Neg₁ marker *bàa weakened to bàa. It is assumed that this change was due to a depressing effect exerted by the pronoun set in question on the length component of the preceding *bàa. This process also explains the future tense and locative constructions formed with zàa plus this same pronoun set, e.g.:

(21) *bàa shi dà d̩ókli > bàa shi dà d̩ókli
    'he doesn't have a horse'

(22) *bàa mú gà sàrkì > bàa mú gà sàrkì
    'we are not partisans of the chief'

(23) Cf. *zàa n̩f g̩d̩àa > zàa n̩f g̩d̩àa
    'I'm going home'

While the second:

(24) *bàa dà > bàa

In modern Hausa the negative existential markers bàa and bábù
are generally regarded as replacements for the corresponding affirmative forms da and 'akwal. Historically, existential sentences in Hausa were undoubtedly negated like all other sentence types by being enclosed in *bàa...bà.5 After the loss of the Neg_i by rule (17), negative existential sentences would still have been formed by Neg_i + S, e.g. *bàa da rûwàa 'there is no water' vs. da rûwàa 'there is water'. The claim embodied in the above rule is that the marker da was not actually deleted in negative sentences, but rather that it fused with the Neg_i marker. The low tone on the second mora of bàa thus represents the contribution of the underlying da to the present day portmanteau negative-existential marker, e.g.:

(25) *bàa da rûwàa > bàà rûwàa
     'there is no water'

(26) *bàa da kóowàa yànzú > bàà kóowàa yànzú
     'there is no one now'

Now, consider Neg type (5):

(27) *bàà + *tàbù > *bàabù

The negative existential form bàabù 'there is not/are not' is historically derived from a fusion of the Neg_i marker *bàa with the noun *tàbù 'thing'.6 This rule must necessarily have followed the

5 This analysis was prompted by comparative evidence from other Chadic languages, e.g. Bolewa: ga dodo 'there is money' vs. ga dodo sa 'there isn't any money', Kanakuru: ayim yik ì 'there is water' vs. woi ayim yik-u 'there isn't any water', Tera: a nde 'there is (some)' vs. a nde bà 'there isn't (any)'. Eulenberg [1971] correctly came to this same analysis on internal, synchronic grounds.

6 As far as I am aware, this traditional analysis of bàabù as being derived from *bàa plus *tàbù has always been thought of in historical terms. When Eulenberg [1971] purports to challenge this analysis—suggesting instead "that bàa is a contracted form of baabù"—it is not clear whether he is questioning the historical facts or whether he has mistakenly attributed a synchronic significance to the analysis never imputed by its adherents.
incorporation of dà into the Neg form bàà described above. Originally bàbabù was probably in complementary distribution with bàà, the former being used in place of the latter only when there was no overt complement following the negative, i.e. (a) bàà nâmàa 'there is no meat', or (b) bàbabù 'there isn't (any)', but not (c) ?ibabù nâmàa. The use of bàbabù in constructions with a complement, such as in the now grammatical sentence (c), must be the result of a subsequent innovation. 7

5. The negative type (6)

The remaining Neg type to be accounted for, type (6), is the construction with kàddà, which is used in the subjunctive (including the negative imperative), e.g.:

(28) kàddà kà shìgà
'don't enter'

(29) nàà bùuyà kàddà yàäròo yà bìí nì
'I hid lest the boy follow me'

From a synchronic point of view, this construction is peculiar in two ways: (i) it makes use of an entirely unrelated morph kàddà instead of the normal Neg1 ba(a); and (ii) it lacks a Negf. Neither of these factors, however, seems particularly strange or unusual when Hausa is compared with other Chadic languages. In fact, the present-day kàddà negative construction lends itself to a straightforward explanation when related to a reconstructed West Chadic negative construction of the form *LEST...Negf. It was pointed out in section 3 that Chadic languages generally have one of two Neg types: (a) Neg1...Negf, and (b) ...Negf, the

7This analysis provides a natural historical explanation for some of the questions concerning bàà and bàbabù raised by Eulenberg [1971], specifically (a) why doesn't bàà occur without a complement? and (b) why does bàbabù permit a complement without the normal changes associated with N + N constructions? The answer to (a) is that bàà should no more occur by itself than the affirmative existential marker dà, of which it is composed, or a preposition such as gà. When not generated with any other complement, bàà came to take the non-specific noun
latter being the more common. However, in the negative subjunctive and the negative imperative, even languages that have no Neg_1 use some kind of marker at the beginning of the sentence in addition to the Neg_2 occurring at the end. This marker, which I will label LEST (a term by which it can often be translated), is structurally a type of adverbial-conjunction. Though inherently semantically negative, it is not a true Neg marker. The existence of such negative adverbials is common in Chadic and their usage is similar wherever they are found. Although the forms match closely in terms of syntactic function, they vary widely in terms of phonological shape, cognate forms being the exception rather than the rule. In the following examples drawn from closely related West Chadic languages, sentences of the form LEST...Neg_2, used in the negative subjunctive and imperative, are contrasted with negative sentences in other tenses which do not use the adverbial.

(30) Bolewa:

ka basa su sa  'you didn't shoot them'

sa = Neg_2

kobo ka bese su sa  'don't shoot them'

kobo = LEST

Ron (Fyer):

yi hwali naat  'I didn't hear it'

naat = Neg_2

...kada ti nyi door naat  '...lest she be annoyed'

kada = LEST

àbù 'thing' as its obligatory, space-filling complement. Similarly, in Angas the existential marker ì always requires a complement. If a specific complement slot, e.g. am ì 'there is water', or nyi ì 'there is (some)', but not ??í. The answer to (b) is that while báábù historically developed from báà + àbù, it has long since been reinterpreted as a monomorphemic negative-existential marker equivalent to báà and thus in modern Hausa functions accordingly.

8kobò is an older form. Nowadays kádàa (sic), borrowed from Hausa, is more commonly used.
Angas:
ma met ka 'they have not gone'
ka = Neg₁

manta a met ka 'don't go'
manta = LEST

Sura:
baa wan ka na kas 'I haven't seen it'
baa = Neg₁, kas = Neg₁

taji wu sat pwoo kas 'don't say it'
taji = LEST

It should be obvious by comparison with the above that Hausa kàdà is also a LEST adverbial syntactically corresponding to kobo, kàdà, manta, and taji, and not an anomalous Neg₁ marker. The examples from languages such as Bolewa that do not use a discontinuous Neg show clearly that the use of LEST is completely independent of the existence of a discontinuous Neg, point to a basic incompatibility between LEST and Neg₁ and suggest that proto-Hausa (like Sura and modern Hausa) also had a rule that prevented the use of Neg₁ whenever LEST was present, i.e. LEST Neg₁...Neg₁ ==> LEST...Neg₁. Hausa's use of a LEST marker (kàdà) in the negative subjunctive and imperative is thus typical of the Chadic subgroup to which it belongs.

A second peculiarity of the Hausa kàdà construction is the absence of the final Neg marker. A possible explanation would be to relate the deletion of bà after kàdà to the historical deletion of the final Neg₁ from Neg types (3), (4), and (5) described earlier. However, there is evidence which indicates that the two deletions represent independent historical changes, the loss of bà after LEST being simply a Hausa manifestation of a tendency found elsewhere in Chadic.

In all of the languages cited in (30) above, for example, the use of Neg₁ in sentences with LEST is reported to be optional [indicated by ( ) in (31) below]:

---

⁹manta has a short variant man. In addition to the normal Neg₁ marker ka, Angas also has a special Neg₁ marker ka† which can only be used in the negative subjunctive.
10 In my own materials, só was invariably used in imperative constructions, but was commonly deleted in embedded "lest" clauses.
REFERENCES


