

Syntax of reduplication and negative-polarity items in Bùlì

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Abstract. Negative-polarity items in Bùlì, a Mabia (Gur) language spoken in Ghana, exhibit a mixed behavior between NCIs and NPIs (or between strong NPIs and weak NPIs). Thus, Bùlì presents a counterexample to Vallduví’s generalization that negative-polarity items come in two kinds. Adopting and extending the framework of Collins & Postal (2014) and Collins et al. (2017), we will show that the apparently mysterious mixed behavior of negative-polarity items in Bùlì can be explained by articulating an unary-NEG structure and syntax of reduplication.

Keywords. negative polarity item; negative concord item; DP; reduplication; noun class; Mabia/Gur languages

1. Diagnosing for NCIs and NPIs. Vallduví (1994) examined behaviors of negative-polarity items such as *n*-words and minimizers in Catalan and Spanish and proposed four diagnostic tests (1a)–(1d) to distinguish Negative Concord Items (NCIs) and Negative-Polarity Items (NPIs). Giannakidou (2000) further added clause-boundedness (1e) to the list. For example, *any* in (1) in English is diagnosed as an NPI (a weak NPI), while *n*-words in (2) in Spanish are considered to be an NCI (or a strong NPI) (see Ladusaw 1979, Haegeman & Zanuttini 1996, Haegeman 1995, Watanabe 2004, Giannakidou 2006, Giannakidou & Zeijlstra 2017, among others).

(1) English

- a. Did you see anyone? (Question)
- b. *Anyone did not come. (*Pre-negative subject position)
- c. *I didn’t see almost anyone. (*Modification by *almost*)
- d. *Anyone ~~(I didn’t see)~~. (as an answer to (1a)) (*Fragment answer)
- e. I didn’t say I saw anyone. (Long-distance licensing)

(2) Spanish (Vallduví 1994, Penka 2011)

- a. *¿Quieres nada?
2SG-want nothing
‘Do you want anything?’ (*Question)
- b. Nada funciona.
nothing 3SG-work
‘Nothing works.’ (Pre-negative subject position)
- c. ¿A quien has visto?
a who 2SG-PERF see
‘Who’d you see?’
A (casi) nadie.
a almost no.one
‘(Almost) no one.’ (Modification by *almost*/Fragment answer)

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- d. *No dije que había nada en el frigorífico.
 NEG said.1SG C there.was.IND n-thing in the fridge
 ‘I didn’t say that there was anything in the fridge.’

(*Long-distance licensing)

	NCI	NPI
Non-negative	*	✓
Pre-negative	✓	*
Modifiability	✓	*
Fragment Answer	✓	*
Long-distance	*	✓

Table 1. NCI vs. NPI (Vallduví 1994, Giannakidou 2000)

Contrary to the generalization in Table 1, however, NCIs and NPIs do not always show systematic behaviors cross-linguistically. For example, Korsah & Murphy (2017) show that negative-polarity items in Gã behave like NCIs, but cannot be used as fragment answers (see also Collins et al. 2017 on Ewe and Hiraiwa (2019) on Okinawan).

Negative-polarity items in Bùlì, a Mabia (Gur) language spoken in Ghana, also exhibit a mixed behavior, but their distribution is different from those in Gã and Ewe, as shown in Table 2. They pattern with NCIs in that they can appear in pre-negative subject position, but they pattern with NPIs in that they are allowed in non-negative downward-entailing contexts, cannot be used as fragment answers, and are licensed long-distance (note that Bùlì lacks a straight-forward counterpart of *almost* and hence modifiability of negative-polarity items cannot be tested). Thus, Bùlì presents yet another counterexample to Vallduví’s generalization.

	NCI	NPI	Spanish	English	Gã	Bùlì
Non-negative	*	✓	*	✓	*	✓
Pre-negative	✓	*	✓	*	✓	✓
Modifiability	✓	*	✓	*	*	N/A
Fragment Answer	✓	*	✓	*	*	*
Long-distance	*	✓	*	✓	*	✓

Table 2. Cross-linguistic Variations

Adopting and extending the framework of Collins & Postal (2014) and Collins et al. (2017), we will show that the apparently mysterious mixed behavior of negative-polarity items in Bùlì can be explained by articulating an unary-NEG structure and syntax of reduplication.

2. Negative-sensitive items in Bùlì.

2.1. MORPHOSYNTAX OF NEGATIVE-POLARITY ITEMS IN BÙLÌ. Before examining each diagnostic test in Bùlì, let us first detail morphosyntactic properties of negative-polarity items in Bùlì (see Akanlig-Pare 2005, 2014).

Negative-polarity items in Bùlì come in two varieties, a form based on reduplication of a noun class (NC) pronoun *wa/di/ka/ku/bu* and a suffix *-i* (e.g. *wāā-(ī)wāā-ī* ‘anyone’) (hereafter

reduplicated noun class pronouns: Table 3) and one based on reduplication of an indefinite ordinary noun (e.g. *núr núr* ‘anyone/any person’) (hereafter reduplicated indefinite nominals: Table 4)¹. In nominal reduplication, just as in all compounds, coda of the proposed stem is deleted and hence partial reduplication results.

NC	Wh	Negative-Polarity Items	Universal/FC	Existential	Relativizer
wa	wà-nà	wāā(-ī) wāā-ī	wāā-ī mééná	wāā-ī	-wāā-ī
dí	dì-nà	dīī(-ī) dīī-ī	dīī-ī mééná	dīī-ī	-dīī-ī
ka	kà-nà	kāā(-ī) kāā-ī	kāā-ī mééná	kāā-ī	-kāā-ī
ku	kù-nà	kūū(-ī) kūū-ī	kūū-ī mééná	kūū-ī	-kūū-ī
bu	bù-nà	būū(-ī) būū-ī	būū-ī mééná	būū-ī	-būū-ī

Table 3. Negative-Polarity Items in Bùlì

	Indefinite NP	Negative-Polarity Items
<i>person</i>	núr	núr núr
<i>child</i>	bíík	bíí bíík
<i>hen</i>	kpīāk	kpīā kpīāk
<i>house</i>	yér	yér yér

Table 4. Reduplicated Indefinite Nominals in Bùlì

Examples (3) illustrate the use of these expressions with negation.²

(3) Bùlì

- a. Mí àn nyǎ wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone.’
- b. Mí àn nyà núr núr ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF person person SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone.’

Each of the morphemes (*wa/dí/ka/ku/bu*) in Table 3 is a noun class pronoun. This is illustrated in the following example with *wa*.³

¹ We assume that a long vowel is purely phonological, but it could be an independent morpheme with its own function. We also leave open the source of the mid-tones for these items, as independent noun class pronouns have low tones.

² The sentence-final particle *ā* (also realized as *yā* or *wā* phonetically) appears post-object position in negative and question sentences. But it never appears when the object is followed by an adjunct.

(i) Bùlì

- Mí àn nyǎ wāā(-ī) wāā-ī (*ā) dèlā (*ā).
 1SG NEG see NC-i here NC-i here SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone here.’

We assume it is more like a conjunct/disjunct marker and not a negative particle of a bipartite negation structure, unlike Ewe (see Collins et al. 2017). See Section 4.

³ We leave it open whether the pronoun *wa* itself in (4) is a noun class pronoun or a noun class marker with a null pronoun [NCP *wa* [NP \emptyset]].

- (4) Bùlì
 Àtìm nyà Àmòàk, àlègè, mí àn nyǎ wà.
 Atim see.PERF Amoak but 1SG NEG see NC
 ‘Atim saw Amoak, but I did not see him.’

Following Hiraiwa et al. (2017), we assume that actual (in)definiteness of noun class pronouns is marked by tone (definiteness with high tone and indefiniteness otherwise) and that the suffix *-i* is for marking indefiniteness SOME. This makes sense because *-i* also appears in existential quantifiers and relativizers.

- (5) Bùlì
 Mí nyá wāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF NC-i
 ‘I saw someone.’

- (6) Bùlì
 Àtìm nyà [nùrú-wāā-ī àlè dà mángò lǎ].
 Atim see.PERF person-NC-i C buy mango DEM
 ‘Atim saw the person who bought a mango.’

Reduplication is obligatory for negative-polarity items (7a)–(7b). Without reduplication, *wāā-ī* functions as an existential quantifier that is not negative-polarity (7c)–(7d).

- (7) Bùlì
- a. *Mí nyá wāā(-ī) wāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF NC-i NC-i
 ‘I saw someone.’
 - b. Mí àn nyǎ wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘I didn’t see.PERF anyone.’
 - c. Mí nyá wāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF someone
 ‘I saw someone.’
 - d. Mí àn nyǎ wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF someone SFP
 ‘I didn’t see someone/anyone.’

With this in mind, let us examine syntactic distribution of negative-polarity items in Bùlì.⁴

⁴ There is another form *bā bāā-ī* (note the short form *bā*), which can only be used in plural noun class pronouns and expresses a partitive meaning ‘some of X’.

- (i) Bùlì
- a. Mí nyá bā bāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF NC.PL NC.PL-i
 ‘I saw some of them.’
 - b. *Mí nyá wā wāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF NC NC-i
 ‘I saw some of them.’

2.2. ARE NEGATIVE-SENSITIVE ITEMS IN BÙLÌ NCIS OR NPIS?. Both reduplicated noun class pronouns and reduplicated indefinite nominals in Bùlì cannot appear in positive declarative clauses. On the other hand, the fact that they can be licensed in questions indicate that they are so-called (weak) NPIs (van der Wouden 1997).

(8) Bùlì

a. Mí *(àn) nyǎ wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone.’ (*Positive declarative)

b. Fí nyá wāā(-ī) wāā-ī â:?
 2SG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘Did you see anyone?’ (Question)

(9) Bùlì

a. Mí *(àn) nyà núr núr ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF person person SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone.’ (*Positive declarative)

b. Fí nyá núr núr â:?
 2SG see.PERF person person SFP
 ‘Did you see anyone?’ (Question)

As expected, being (weak) NPIs, they cannot appear as fragment answer as shown in (10)–(11), in response to a question like *Who did you see?* or *Did you see anyone?*⁵

(10) Bùlì

*Wāā(-ī) wāā-ī (ā).
 NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘No one.’ (*Fragment answer)

(11) Bùlì

*Núr núr (ā).
 person person SFP
 ‘No one.’ (*Fragment answer)

Finally, they can be licensed by a non-clausemate negation.

(12) Bùlì

Mí kàn pōlī/wēēnī [àyǐn mí nyá wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā].
 1SG NEG think/say C 1SG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘I don’t think/will not say that I saw anyone.’ (Long-distance licensing)

(13) Bùlì

Mí kàn pōlī/wēēnī [àyǐn mí nyá núr núr ā].
 1SG NEG think/say C 1SG see.PERF person person SFP
 ‘I don’t think/will not say that I saw any person.’ (Long-distance licensing)

⁵ There are some speakers who allow for such fragment answers in Bùlì (Abdul-Razak Sulemana p.c.). Those speakers may be interpreting the NPIs in (10)–(11) as NCIs (see Section 4). They also tend to require the sentence-final particle *a* in fragment answers, while the first author and other speakers find fragment answers ungrammatical, irrespective of *a*, as (10)–(11) show. We leave the issue for future research.

All of these diagnostic tests corroborate evidence that these items are (weak) NPIs. However, they also pattern with NCIs in that they can appear in subject position (followed by sentential negation).

- (14) Bùlì
 Wāā(-ī) wāā-ī àn chěng Wīāgā.
 NC-i NC-i NEG go.PERF Wiaga
 ‘No one went to Wiaga.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

- (15) Bùlì
 Núr núr àn chěng Wīāgā.
 person person NEG go.PERF Wiaga
 ‘No one went to Wiaga.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

In the discussion below, we offer a theoretical analysis for the apparently mixed behaviors in the framework of Collins & Postal (2014). We focus on reduplicated noun class pronouns, as basically the same analysis is available for reduplicated indefinite nominals, too.

3. Syntax of pre-negative subject NPIs and (partial) reduplication. Collins & Postal (2014) and Collins et al. (2017) propose that NPIs come in two varieties. One has a unary-NEG structure and the other has a binary-NEG structure.

- (16) a. [[NEG1 SOME] NP] (NCIs/strong NPIs)
 b. [[NEG1 [NEG2 SOME]] NP] (weak NPIs)

They observe that *ke*-NPIs in Ewe are NCIs/strong NPIs because they cannot be licensed in questions or at long-distance. However, unlike *any*-NPIs in English, which are weak NPIs, they can appear in subject position (with sentential negation).

- (17) Ewe (Collins et al. 2017)
 Ame áǎǎké mé-vá nyě-afé-me o.
 person any NEG1-come 1SG-house-inside NEG2
 ‘Nobody came to my house.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

- (18) English (Collins et al. 2017)
 Anybody didn’t come to my house. (Pre-negative subject position)

They argue that the reason why the English sentence in (18) is ungrammatical, is because it has the derivation in (19). NEG1 raises to sentential negation position out of the NPI, while the remnant NPI raises to subject position.

- (19) [_{DP2} [<NEG1> SOME] body] did NEG1 [_{VP} come <DP2> to my house]

Here, the higher occurrence of NPI (i.e. DP2) c-commands the raised copy of NEG1. Thus, they propose condition (20), which prohibits such a structural relation.

- (20) The Remnant Raising Condition (Collins et al. 2017)
 If M = [_{DP} [_D<NEGx> SOME] NP], then no occurrence of M c-commands an occurrence of NEGx.

In contrast, they propose that *ke* in Ewe is a copy of the original NEG and argue that the Ewe example in (17) does not violate (20) “since a copy NEG, cNEG1 rather than <NEG1> fills

the original position of NEG1 in DP2. In effect, the copy NEG allows the structure to avoid a violation of (20), just as resumptive pronouns in certain English cases allow a structure to avoid a violation of island constraints.” (Collins et al. 2017). The derivation of (17) is given in (21).

- (21) Ewe (Collins et al. 2017)
 [Ame áǰé-ké] mé-vá <DP2> nyě-afé-me o.
 person SOME-cNEG1 NEG1-come 1SG-house-inside NEG2
 ‘Nobody came to my house.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

But their analysis is challenged by Bùlì. This is because there is no morphological evidence of a copy NEG, cNEG1 in the original position of NEG1 in DP2, which is necessary in order to avoid a violation of (20).

- (22) Bùlì
 Wāā(-ī) wāā-ī àn chěng Wīāgā. (= (14))
 NC-i NC-i NEG go.PERF Wiaga
 ‘No one went to Wiaga.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

Nevertheless, we argue that Collins et al.’s analysis, once we articulate substructures that reduplication targets in Bùlì, provides a principled account for the apparently mysterious behavior. To see this, first recall that NPIs in Bùlì are necessarily reduplicated.

- (23) Bùlì
 Mí àn nyǎ wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG see.PERF NC-i NC-i SFP
 ‘I did not see anyone.’

- (24) Bùlì
 Mí nyá wāā-ī.
 1SG see.PERF NC-i
 ‘I saw someone.’

Without reduplication, *wāā-ī* only has an existential quantifier reading (recall (7c)). Thus, reduplication is clearly the key to understanding the syntax of negative-polarity items in Bùlì. We follow Travis (2001) and Jackendoff (2008) to propose that certain instances of reduplication is syntactic. In particular, we adopt Travis’s theory of syntactic reduplication in which a reduplicant (RED) appears in the specifier of QP (where Q stands for a head with “quantity feature”, which we assume here that the Neg head in Bùlì has). This is illustrated in Figure 1.

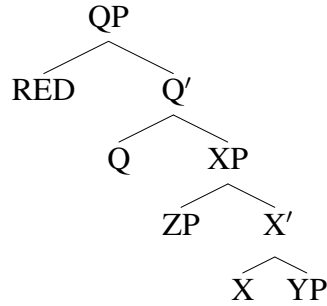


Figure 1. Travis (2001) on syntactic reduplication

We assume the structure in Figure 2 for existential quantifiers such as ‘somebody’. Bùlì is head-initial and NCP raises to the specifier of DP (see Hiraiwa et al. 2017 for relevant discussion on DP-internal word order).

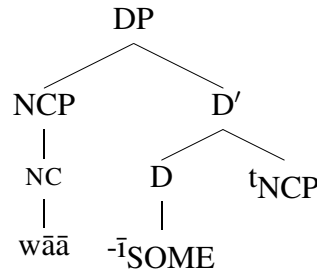


Figure 2. Existential quantifier ‘somebody’

The underlying structure of negative-polarity items in Bùlì is illustrated in Figure 3. We assume that NEG is located above DP and as it is a null affix, it undergoes affix-hopping to *wāā*.

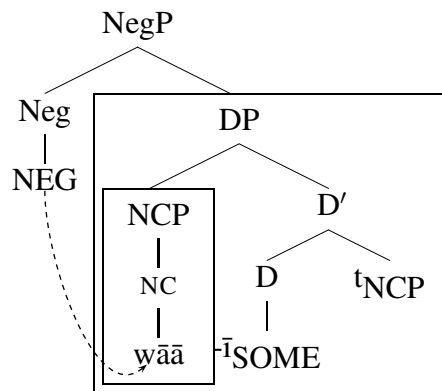


Figure 3. The underlying unary-Neg structure

From the earlier discussions, it follows that reduplicated indefinite noun class pronouns in Bùlì should contain an odd number of NEGs, when they behave as NCIs and co-occur with sentential negation, while they should contain an even number of NEGs when they behave as (weak) NPIs.

Now, suppose reduplication targets NCP before affix-hopping in Figure 3. Note that NEG structurally c-commands SOME. Then we get the partially reduplicated structure in (25).

(25) [[_{NCP} wāā] [_{NegP} NEG wāā -ī]]

If, on the other hand, reduplication targets DP *before* affix-hopping, then we get the fully reduplicated structure in (26).

(26) [[_{DP} wāā -ī] [_{NegP} NEG wāā -ī]]

As a result, both (25) and (26) have an unary-NEG structure, as shown in Figure 4. We argue that this reduplication is syntactic and the reduplicant *wāā(-ī)* is located in the specifier of NegP (see Travis 2001 for syntactic reduplication).

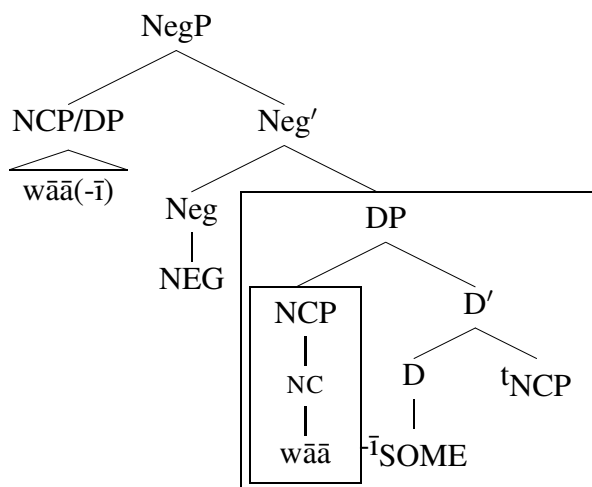


Figure 4. Reduplicated class pronouns with a unary-NEG structure

This makes them an NCI and explains why they can appear in pre-negative subject position in Bùlì (14)–(15). This is because NEG is deeply embedded within the reduplicated indefinite noun class pronouns, just as such subject NPIs are grammatical in English (the data cited from Boeckx 2000; 362 and Bošković 2002; 179).

- (27) a. [Pictures of anyone/*someone] did not seem [*t* to be available].
 b. [Pictures of any linguist] seem to no psychologist [*t* to be pretty].

On the other hand, suppose that reduplication *after* affix-hopping of Neg to NC. Then we get partially reduplicated structure (28) or fully reduplicated structure (29), depending on whether NCP or DP is targeted by reduplication.

(28) [[_{NCP} wāā-NEG] [_{NegP} NEG wāā -ī]]

(29) [[_{DP} wāā-NEG -ī] [_{NegP} NEG wāā -ī]]

This time, NEG is “copied” as reduplication targets NCP or DP that contains NEG as shown in 5. As a result, both (28) and (29) have a binary-NEG structure. Assuming that the two NEGs cancel out each other (Collins et al. 2017, Watanabe 2004), they behave as (weak) NPIs. Thus, interaction of reduplication and affix-hopping of NEG correctly explains why

NPIs in Bùlì can be licensed by questions (8b)–(9b) and non-clause-mate negation (12)–(13), but are unable to occur as fragment answer (10)–(11).

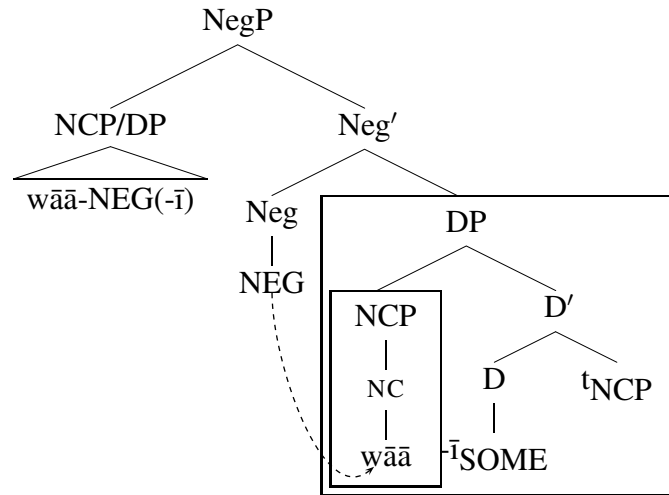


Figure 5. Reduplicated class pronouns with a binary-NEG structure

One piece of supporting evidence that reduplicated noun class pronouns have a binary-NEG structure comes from the fact that they can be replaced by an existential quantifier *wāā-ī*.

(30) Bùlì
 Fí nyá wāā-ī â:?
 2SG see.PERF NC-ī SFP
 ‘Did you see anyone?’ (Question)

(31) Bùlì
 Mí kàn pōlī/wēēnī àyǐn mí nyá wāā(-ī) wāā-ī ā.
 1SG NEG think/say C 1SG see.PERF NC-ī NC-ī SFP
 ‘I don’t think/will not say that I saw anyone.’

(Long-distance licensing)

(32) Bùlì
 Wāā(-ī) wāā-ī àn chěng Wīāgā.
 NC-ī NC-ī NEG go.PERF Wiaga
 ‘No one went to Wiaga.’ (Pre-negative subject position)

Weak NPIs, whose two NEGs cancel each other, have a positive interpretation, just as existential quantifiers do.

The syntactic reduplication proposed above also explains why the forms **wāā-ī wāā* and **wāā wāā* are not attested, because reduplication takes place after *wāā-ī* is built in syntax.

4. Parameter. Collins et al. (2017) propose a parameter that allows/disallows binary-NEG (Type 2) nominal NPIs. English allows, but Ewe doesn’t allow, a binary-NEG structure. They also suggest an implicational relation that a language having binary-NEG nominal NPIs will also have unary-NEG nominal NPIs.

Bùlì allows an unary-NEG structure underlyingly, and a binary-NEG structure is derived through reduplication by copying NEG. Thus, our analysis provides support for the implicational relation in that a binary-NEG structure is structurally based on a unary-NEG structure. We leave it for future research to investigate whether there are other types of NPIs in Bùlì. Reduplication is not an unfamiliar strategy for forming negative-polarity items cross-linguistically. It is observed in Vietnamese, Ainu, Yoruba, Malagasy, etc. (Haspelmath 1997). According to (Haspelmath 1997; 179), however, no languages that use partial reduplication were in his sample. Bùlì, in this respect, offers a case of NPIs with partial reduplication.

One remaining important question is what reduplication is employed for. Reduplication is typically used to express plurality or iterated events (Moravcsik 1978, Travis 2001, Haspelmath 1997, among others). In Bùlì, for one thing, reduplication is required in order to obtain two copies of NEG required for (weak) NPIs. There are also languages that use reduplication for building universal quantifiers/free choice items (Haspelmath 1997, Travis 2001, Cheng 2009). From this viewpoint, it is important to point out that universal quantifiers/free choice items in Bùlì do not rely on reduplication (see Table 4). For another thing, Haspelmath (1997) conjectures that reduplication is used to express distributive plurality. We concur with his conjecture. In Bùlì, the form *wāā-ī* consists of a singular noun class pronoun and an indefiniteness marker. This is necessarily interpreted as singular. But NPIs are often considered to yield distributivity. It is not unnatural to think that reduplication is used (as a means of domain widening (Kadmon & Landman 1993) to yield required distributivity.

To summarize, we have proposed the following ingredients that compose NPIs in Bùlì.

(33) Ingredients of NPIs in Bùlì

- a. Indefiniteness SOME: *-i* (with noun class pronouns) or $-\emptyset$ (with ordinary nouns)
- b. Negation NEG: $-\emptyset$
- c. Neg-copying: reduplication
- d. Distributivity/Pluraity: reduplication

5. Conclusion. Reduplicated indefinite noun class pronouns and reduplicated nominals in Bùlì behave as NPIs in that they can appear in non-negative contexts and can be licensed at a long-distance. On the other hand, they behave as if they were NCIs in that they can appear in pre-negative subject position. We have argued that the mixed behavior can be explained if we articulate an unary/binary-NEG structure proposed in Collins & Postal (2014) and Collins et al. (2017) and understand which part of the structure reduplication targets.

There are remaining questions that must be answered in future studies. First, the existential quantifier *wāā-ī* cannot come in subject position in the absence of sentential negation (cf. (7c)). Instead, it is necessary to nominalize *wāā-ī* by prefixing *a-*.

(34) Bùlì

- a. *Wāā-ī *(àn) chěng Wīāgā.*
NC-i NEG go Wiaga
'Someone didn't go to Wiaga/No one went to Wiaga.'
- b. *Ā-wāā-ī chěng Wīāgā.*
Hm-NC-i go Wiaga
'Someone went to Wiaga.'

It is also interesting and puzzling that the sentence-final particle *a* is missing when the NPI

appears in subject position. We don't have a good account for these at this moment.

Second, NPIs in Bùlì, while they can be licensed in questions, are not licensed in conditionals (see Collins et al. 2017 for a similar observation in Ewe).

- (35) Bùlì
*Fì dàn nyà wāā(-ī) wāā-ī, wēēnī àtè ò wōm.
2SG COND see NC-i NC-i tell C 1SG hear
'If you see anyone, please let me know ' (Conditional)

In contrast, an existential quantifier *wāā-ī* can also appear in conditionals. This discrepancy needs to be explained, too.

- (36) Bùlì
Fì dàn nyà wāā-ī, wēēnī àtè ò wōm.
2SG COND see NC-i tell C 1SG hear
'If you see anyone, please let me know ' (Conditional)

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