

# **Negation in Medumba**

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# Outline

- introduction to the language and the phenomenon
- basic findings
- some problems
- time for discussion

# About Medumba

- Bamileke < Grassfields-Bantu < Niger-Congo
- ~ 210.000 speakers, mainly western Cameroon
- basic word order: SVO
- tone language
  - two level (H ´, L `) and two contour tones (LH ``´, HL ´`)
  - lexical and grammatical tone, floating tones

# About Negation

- „converting a sentence S1 into another sentence S2 such that S2 is true whenever S1 is false, and vice versa” (Dahl 1979)
  - scope?
    - (1) Peter schläft nicht.
    - (2) Nicht Peter schläft.
  - contrasting alternatives?
    - (3) PETER schläft nicht.
    - (4) Peter SCHLÄFT nicht.
- different languages, different strategies
  - e.g. discontinuous (ne...pas), affixal, intonation, focus marker, different negation particles per clause type, etc

# Methodology

- original data collected between Aug and Dec 2018
- speaker of Bazou dialect
- acceptability judgments and translations
- all elicitation sessions via Skype

# About Negation in Medumba

- (at least) four different negation particles
  - proposition negation      kúù? (NEG.HL)
  - constituent negation      kú (NEG.H) or kù (NEG.L)
  - negative imperatives      káà (NEG.IMP)
- differs from most Grassfields languages in not having discontinuous negation marking

# Proposition Negation with *kúù?*

- “operator changing the truth value of a proposition p to its opposite  $\neg p$ ” (Miestamo, 2017)
- personal evaluation of a proposition as false
- strict position between subject and TAM markers or verb

(1)    nùŋgè            kúù?            zí  
      Nuga            NEG.HL        sleep  
      ‘The proposition that Nuga slept is false.’

(2)    \*nùŋgè            kúù?            à?    zí  
      Nuga            NEG.HL        FUT    sleep

# Constituent Negation with *kú* or *kù*

- singles out wrong alternative (similar to contrastive focus)
- particles have similar function, different distribution

(3) wàtèét kú fə́ ɲ-kú m-fá bùʔɲwàʔnì nùŋgè  
Watat NEG.H PST.AGR IPFV give packet.school Nuga  
'Watat was not giving the book to Nuga.'

(4) wàtèét fə́ kù ɲ-kú m-fá bùʔɲwàʔnì nùŋgè  
Watat PST NEG.L IPFV give packet.school Nuga  
'Watat was not giving the book to Nuga.'



# Negative imperatives with *káà*

(5) *káà*            *fá*      *bhù má*            *ngùn jún-n↓í*  
NEG.IMP    give    orange            girl    agr.c1-1prox  
'Do not give the orange to this girl!'

(6) *káà*            *fá*      *á*      *bhù má*            *ngùn jún-n↓í*  
NEG.IMP    give    FOC    orange            girl    agr.c1-1prox  
'Do not give the orange to this girl! (but the apple)'

# Negative Habitual

(7) nùṅgèé (\*kɛ̀) nùúm n-swéèn bhùmá  
Nuga (\*NEG) HAB N-HAB.sell oranges  
'Nuga usually sells oranges.'

(8) nùṅgèé kɛ̀ mɛ́ swèén bhùmá  
Nuga NEG.L HAB.NEG sell.H oranges  
'Nuga does not habitually sell oranges.'

# Problem 1: Tense

- the default reading for all negation markers is past, only for NEG.H it is future

- (9)    nùŋgèé       kù       zí  
      Nuga        NEG.L      sleep  
      ‘Nuga did not sleep.’
- (10)   nùŋgè       kú       zí  
      Nuga        NEG.H      sleep  
      ‘Nuga will not sleep.’

# Problem 1: Tense

- NEG.H incompatible with overt future marking?

(11) a. nùŋgè      à?      zí  
Nuga      FUT      sleep  
'Nuga will sleep.'

b. \*nùŋgè      kǎ      à?      zí  
Nuga      NEG.H      FUT      sleep

- Mucha (2015): à? is not future marker, but modal that obligatorily combines with (c)overt temporal shifter

# Problem 1: Tense

(12) a.

nùṅgè    tʃók    kù    swèén bhùmá  
Nuga    TOD    NEG.L sell    oranges  
'Nuga sold oranges in the morning.'

b.

nùṅgè    zí    kù    swèén bhùmá  
Nuga    TOD    NEG.L sell    oranges  
'Nuga sold oranges at night.'

(13) a.

nùṅgè    kù    tʃók    n-swéè bhùmá  
Nuga    NEG.H REM    N-sell    oranges  
'Nuga will not sell oranges.' (tomorrow)

b.

nùṅgè    kù    zí    n-swéèn bhùmá  
Nuga    NEG.H REM    N-sell    oranges  
'Nuga will not sell oranges.' (in the  
distant future)

# Problem 1: Tense

(12) a.

nùṅgè tʃók kù swèén bhùmá  
Nuga TOD NEG.L sell oranges

‘Nuga sold oranges in the morning.’

b.

nùṅgè zí kù swèén bhùmá  
Nuga TOD NEG.L sell oranges

‘Nuga sold oranges at night.’

(14) a.

nùṅgè à? tʃók kù swèén bhùmá  
Nuga FUT REM NEG.L sell oranges

‘Nuga will not sell oranges tomorrow’

b.

nùṅgè à? zí kù swèén bhùmá  
Nuga FUT REM NEG.L sell oranges

‘Nuga will not sell oranges. (in the distant future)’

# Problem 1: Tense

- negation and future marker *à?* are not incompatible
- possible combinations:
  - A) NEG.H + covert temporal shifter
  - B) NEG.H + overt temporal shifter
  - C) *à?* + overt temporal shifter + NEG.L
- NEG.H and *à?* in complementary distribution

# Problem 2: Scope

(15)

&wàtèét      kǎ      fə́      ŋ-kǎ    m-fá    bù?ŋwà?nì      nùŋgè  
Watat            NEG.H PST.AGR      IPFV    give    packet.school      Nuga

‘Watat was not giving the book to Nuga yesterday.’

10-way scope ambiguity, with NEG scoping over:

- |                     |                                  |                        |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| (i) PST             | (v) V                            | (ix) subject (Watat)   |
| (ii) PST and below  | (vi) V and below                 | (x) entire sentence/CP |
| (iii) IPFV          | (vii) direct object (Nuga)       |                        |
| (iv) IPFV and below | (viii) indirect object<br>(book) |                        |



“Solution”

## ~~Problem 2: Scope~~

(16) nùŋgèé kù khìí bù?ŋwà?nì á nèén tón  
Nuga NEG.L write packet.school 3SG.H go market  
'Nuga did not write the book, he went to the market.'

(17) nùŋgè kú fá á bhù má ŋùn jún-n↓í  
Nuga NEG.H give FOC orange girl agr.c1-1prox  
'Nuga will not give ORANGES to this girl. (but apples).'

(18) nùŋgè kúù? fá á bhù má ŋùn jún-n↓í  
Nuga NEG.HL give FOC orange girl agr.c1-1prox  
'It is false that Nuga gave oranges to this girl. (He gave apples to this girl.)'

# Problem 3: Double Negation

## *Quick Terminology*

- double negation

$\neg(\neg p) \leftrightarrow p$       *She does not not eat.*

- discontinuous negation  $\neq$  double negation!

neg ... neg = 1x NEG      *Elle ne mange pas.*

- negative concord

NEG + NEG = 2x NEG      *There ain't no food.*

# Problem 3: Double Negation

- (19) \*nùŋgèé (kùù?/kù/kú) (kùù?/kù/kú) zí  
≠ Nuga does sleep.  
≠ Nuga does not not sleep.

- (20) m̀ kùù? kwèd̀ mb̀ nù mí (kùù?/kù/kú) fá bù?ŋwà?nì nùŋgè  
1SG NEG.HL think C Numi NEG give book Nuga  
lit. 'I did not think that Numi did not give the book to Nuga.'  
= 'I did think that Numi gave the book to Nuga.' (affirmative)

# Problem 3: Double Negation

(21) &#x2113; m̀ ḱ kẁd̀ mb̀ ǹḿ ḱ fá bù?hwà?nì ǹng̀è  
1SG NEG.H think C Numi NEG.H give book Nuga

I will think that Numi will give the book to Nuga.

→ but two negative clauses with NEG.H...NEG.L/NEG.HL

(22) &#x2113; ḿ k̀ kẁd̀ mb̀ ǹḿ (k̀ù?/k̀/ ḱ) fá bù?hwà?nì ǹng̀è  
1SG NEG.L think C Numi NEG give book Nuga

'I did not think that Numi did not give the book to Nuga.'

# Some remarks on the nature of the negation markers

## *Two possibilities*

- a) tone is lexical: negation particles are lexically different and therefore distributed differently
- b) tone is grammatical: one underlying form, tone conditioned by syntactic environment

## *Egg or Hen?*

Do properties determine distribution or does the position determine properties?

# Summary

proposition negation	kúù? (NEG.HL)
constituent/contrastive negation	kú (NEG.H) or kù (NEG.L)
negative imperatives	káà (NEG.IMP)
negative habitual	NEG m'í

- negation interacts with tense and aspect
- NEG.H might actually be modal like *à?*
- flexible scope, ambiguity can be resolved with the help of focus
- no discontinuous negation, but double negation across clauses

# Future Research

- test data with more speakers, also from other dialects
- explain the flexible scoping behaviour, especially of NEG.H
- explain interaction of constituent negation markers (NEG.H/NEG.L) across clauses
- find out if egg or hen was first

# Thank you!

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