



HAL
open science

Negation in Northwest Gbaya

Paulette Roulon-Doko

► **To cite this version:**

Paulette Roulon-Doko. Negation in Northwest Gbaya. Matti Miestamo & Ljuba Veselinova. Negation in the world's languages I: Africa, I, Language Science Press, pp.379-410, 2025, Research on comparative grammar, 978-3-96110-552-6. <10.5281/zenodo.18233772>. <halshs-05526852>

HAL Id: halshs-05526852

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-05526852v1>

Submitted on 26 Feb 2026

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 - Attribution - International License

Chapter 12

Negation in Northwest Gbaya

Paulette Roulon-Doko
CNRS-LLACAN

In Northwest Gbaya there is a single dedicated negative marker *ná* which is reconstructed in Proto-Gbaya. It is placed after the verb, in the very last position of the verb phrase. For standard negation, negative verbal constructions are symmetric in realis mood, as the negator is simply added with no changes, but there is a paradigmatic asymmetry as perfective forms are blocked in the negative. The paradigm of the imperfective forms is narrowed to three forms. In the virtual mood, both perfective and imperfective forms carry the negator, but these paradigms are narrowed to the two neutral forms. Attributive verbal predication can be negated but this is not frequent. In the command mood, the construction is the same as in Realis mood, but there are two new forms dedicated to negative commands (vetitive and prohibitive). All non-verbal predications (identificational, locative, existential and presentative) add the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ when negated. This potential verb carries the negator which is placed clause-finally. Finally, there is a constituent negator to negate any element except a predicate.

Keywords: negation, verbal predication, non-verbal predication, Niger-Congo, Gbaya .

1 The language

Northwest Gbaya (ISO: *gya*, Glottocode: *nort2775*) is part of the main linguistic group Gbaya-Mandja-Ngbaka, an Ubangian language family (a branch of the Niger-Congo phylum, Adamawa Ubangi). It is spoken in the northwest of the Central African Republic (CAR) and in the central-eastern part of Cameroon. It is subdivided in six dialects: four in CAR, referred to as [*òdòè*, *òkpan*, *ònìnà*, *ògù*], and usually collectivley named Gbaya-Kara, and two in Cameroon [*òyà*] and [*yáyùwèè*]. In 1996, there were 265,000 speakers: 200,000 in the western



part of CAR and 65,000 in the central-eastern part of Cameroon. This paper, which deals with the Gbáyá Bòdòè, a Northwest Gbaya dialect spoken in the Central African Republic, is based on a corpus of spontaneous speech collected in the field between 1970 and 2013. The statistics are drawn from my current 4.5-hour oral corpus.

Gbaya is the mother-tongue of all the inhabitants of the region under study. It is used in the home and for all interactions of daily life. Most of the men and women can speak Sango, the national and official language of CAR, but it is not used in everyday life. They can also speak some Fulfulde when meeting Mbororo people (nomadic cattle-herders, a subgroup of the Fulani ethnic group). Gbaya is mainly a spoken language, although there is a Bible translation in the Yaayuwee dialect (Glottocode yaay1238).

Gbaya verbs are always the expression of a process since there are no verbs of quality. Verbs have no lexical tones, so tones on the verb are grammatical elements. Depending on the aspect-mood (AM) constructions, the verb attests a bare form *vB* and two bound forms *vBi* and *vBa*, which will be simply glossed as *vB* in the word-for-word examples. The Gbaya verbal paradigm consists of 21 constructions whose semantic (or conceptual) domain is structured on two axes, mood and aspect (AM). Verbs do not indicate temporal reference. There are three moods (realis, virtual and command) and two aspects (perfective and imperfective). The AM constructions are complex forms including a tonal scheme. Most often they appear in pairs combining an imperfective form and a perfective form, depending on the chosen perspective. Furthermore, some AM constructions (in italics in Table 1) are linked forms that identify the clause they predicate as a subordinate clause without any subordinate conjunction.

In the glosses, the names of conjugated forms (AM constructions) are most often compound nouns, the mention of the aspect being systematically added for all those which have an aspectual opposition (PROG.IPFV, PROG.PFV, VRT.IPFV, VRT.PFV, etc.). Only the neutral forms of the realis mood are reduced to the mention of the aspect (IPFV and PFV), whereas the mention of the aspect is not indicated for those which have only one aspectual form (KNOW, HYPO, CONS, INCH). Additionally, note that AM is sometimes marked by tone only, either on the verb, or on both the verb and preceding personal pronoun.

In addition to these AM markers placed before and on the verbal base (*vB*),¹ the verb may have other optional markers which are placed in strict order after the verb. Among these, the negative morpheme is always in the very last position of

¹To keep the preverbal position of the AM markers and the associated tonal pattern, instead of a *vB*\LH-a^H notation I chose the ^{LH}*vBa*^H notation.

Table 1: The 21 AM categories of verb paradigms in affirmative clauses

Moods	AM constructions		Aspects	
	Names	Glosses	IPFV	PFV
Realis	Neutral	∅	^H VB	^{LH} VBA ^H
	Progressive	PROG	<i>bítí</i> - ^L VB	<i>ḃònáá</i> -{ ^L VB... ~ ^{LH} VB <i>i</i> }
	Inchoative	INCH	<i>bítí</i> -(<i>mé</i>)- ^L VB	
	Known	KNOWN		^L VB
	Permanent	PERM	<i>bàá</i> - ^L VB	
	<i>Temporal condition</i>	COND	^H VB ^L VB	^H VB <i>téé</i> - ^L VB
	<i>Hypothetical</i>	HYPO		<i>né</i> - ^{LH} VBA ^H
	<i>Consecutive</i>	CONS		<i>né</i> - ^L VB
Virtual	Neutral	VRT	<i>té</i> - ^L VB	<i>téé</i> - ^L VB
	Imminent	IMN	<i>dé</i> - <i>mé</i> - ^L VB	<i>déé</i> - <i>mé</i> - ^L VB
	<i>Contingent</i>	CTG	<i>mé</i> - ^L VB	<i>mé</i> - <i>téé</i> - ^L VB
Command	Neutral	IJT	PERS ^L ^H VB	PERS ^L ^L VB
	Imperative	IMP	[PERS = ∅] ^H VB	[PERS = ∅] ^L VB

the verb phrase in clause final position, eventually being followed only by some sentence particles, adverbs and interrogatives, as mentioned earlier.

Gbaya is an isolating language with very little morphology and no agreement at all. The word order is very strict. It is an SVO language which also makes use of non-verbal predication. It has verbs, non-verbal predicates, nouns and four categories of adjectives. The verbal system is organized in three moods (realis, virtual and command) and two aspects (perfective and imperfective) (see Roulon 1975, Roulon-Doko 1993). Verbs always express a process where the obligatory subject is either external to the process (transitive construction = transitive voice) or included in the process (intransitive construction = middle voice). It is a tonal language with two levels and four tones. The high tone can mark grammatical distinctions (functioning as a supra-segmental marker, TM, in glosses). It occurs between various elements. When it occurs between two elements, it modifies the tonal melody of the first element. How the tones are realized depends on the tone of the second element. Gbaya phonology has 3 glottalized consonants, 3 labio-velars and a complete range of nasals and semi-nasals; it has nasal vowels too.

The paper is organized according to the questionnaire provided by the editors (Miestamo 2025 [this volume]). In §2, I present clausal negation first in verbal clauses, then in non-verbal clauses. In §3, I focus on non-clausal negation in-

cluding negative replies and a discontinuous negation. In §4, I address pragmatic phenomena and specific devices used in connection with negation. A summary in §5 concludes the chapter.

2 Clausal negation

Gbaya has a single dedicated negative marker, the morpheme *ná* (NEG). It was reconstructed in Proto-Gbaya showing its great stability throughout the Gbaya-Manza-Ngbaka group (Moñino 1995). This negative morpheme occurs with verbs only. It is always placed after the verb, in the very last position of the verb phrase, and after all the complements and adverbs following the verb, if there are any. This clause-final position may be shared with some other morphemes that can follow the negative morpheme *ná* in strict order, as (i) two adverbs, a restrictive one and an additive one (cf. §4.4), (ii) sentence particles which manifest the attitude of the speaker towards the utterance and the addressee, and in the last position, (iii) some interrogative particles (cf. §4.5). This brief characterization is given here just to put into perspective the clause-final position of the negative morpheme. There are different constructions used to express negation according to the type of clause, verbal clause opposed to non-verbal clause.

2.1 Standard negation

2.1.1 Negation in the realis mood

In the realis mood, aspect serves to differentiate between a non-delimited process for the imperfective and a delimited process for the perfective. The perfective AM categories (PFV) cannot be negated; the verb must be in an imperfective form to be negated. So there is asymmetry in the paradigm as all perfective forms are blocked in the negative. Furthermore, only two imperfective forms can be negated (the neutral and the permanent); the others (the progressive, the inchoative, and the temporal condition) are only used in affirmative clauses. The negative marker is added to a corresponding affirmative construction and placed in clause-final position. So in both cases the constructions are symmetric.

The neutral realis imperfective is the most frequent form, attested in 48,8% of all the realis AM forms in my corpus. As the perfective form is blocked, the negative clause (1) corresponds to both the imperfective and perfective forms that the speaker can use in affirmative as (2) and (3) to express his\her point of view. Such a choice is not possible in negative clauses; the opposition perfective / imperfective is neutralized. The structure of the negative clause (1) is symmetric to the

corresponding imperfective positive construction (2) and the negative marker *ná* is simply added in clause-final position.

- (1) *Nàá-ngòdĩ bá sóyó kǐí ná*
 PN IPFV:take seat of:LOG.SG NEG
 ‘Naa-ngòdĩ does not take her seat.’

- (2) *ʔèé Nàá-ngòdĩ bá sóyó kǐí*
 and:TM PN IPFV:take seat of:LOG.SG
 ‘Then Naa-ngòdĩ takes her seat [and sits down on the side of the road].’

- (3) [Context: The speaker has convinced the man to enter her house.]
ká Nàá-ngòdĩ bàà sóyó kǐí
 then PN PFV:take:TM seat of:LOG.SG
 ‘Then Naa-ngòdĩ takes her seat [and they enter the house].’

For some verbs in an intransitive construction such as *gasi* ‘grow’ the English translation as a verb of quality can be misleading. Such verbs also refer to a process and their perfective forms express the result of the process that can be a quality as in (4). This is especially the case of verbs from which verbal adjectives are derived and whose resultative process corresponds to a quality. These verbs can be negated, but when they are negated they still refer to processes as in (5)². They are not stative verbs. Stative constructions would be expressed with the stative verb *ʔo* ‘be’, or with constructions without any dedicated predicate (see §2.3.2).

- (4) *sààyé hɛ̀ gàsá*
 village PROX PFV:grow
 ‘This village is big.’ (lit. ‘has grown’)

- (5) *sààyé hɛ̀ gásí ná*
 village PROX IPFV:grow NEG
 ‘This village is not big.’ (lit. ‘has not grown’)

The permanent, which has only an imperfective form, can be negated without any change. The permanence of the process meaning “always having” for

²A note on the placement of diacritics is in order. In this chapter, nasal diacritics appear under vowels, tone diacritics are placed above the vowels.

the affirmative value (6) becomes “never having” for the negative value (7). The permanent is used with negation very seldom, most probably because of its very specific meaning; it has 0,1% of all its occurrences in my corpus, that is, 7 occurrences, only one of which is negated.

- (6) *ʔéí bàá-k̚ ḱéí ʔó bóíbémáà*
 LOG.SG PERM-want as_for:LOG.SG PL boy:DEF
 ‘He always wanted boys.’

- (7) *ʔéí bàá-k̚ ḱéí ʔó bóíbémáà ná*
 LOG.SG PERM-want as_for:LOG.SG PL boy:DEF NEG
 ‘He never wanted boys.’

Within the linked AM forms of realis mood, only the hypothetical can be negated. Since in the affirmative the hypothetical ‘HYPO’ *né^{-LH}vba^H* is always a perfective form (a process that is considered delimited), see (8), there is no corresponding imperfective form to carry the negative morpheme. However, it is possible to hypothesise a negated process, and for this purpose a special form is created, *né^{-L}vb*, as in (9). This form reuses the form of the consecutive, highlighting a usual practice in Gbaya syntax: one form used with different meanings in two mutually exclusive contexts. I call this special form hypothetical negative ‘HYPO.NEG’. This form could fill the empty place of the imperfective form of the Hypothetical in Table 1. However, as it is only attested in negative clauses, it cannot be opposed to the perfective form in the affirmative and is therefore only mentioned in Table 2. In my corpus, the hypothetical negative has 4 occurrences, i.e. 0.06%, while in affirmative clauses the hypothetical has 44 occurrences, i.e. 0.6%. Both therefore represent 0,66% of all AM forms.

- (8) *kàà né-k̚ám*
 when:3SG HYPO-want:1SG
 ‘If he loves me [let him get a dowry to marry me].’

- (9) [Context: The two girls ask him to marry them.]
ʔá k̚mè né-k̚ ná
 and_now when:2SG HYPO.NEG-want NEG
 ‘And if you do not want (= love us) [choose the one you love].’

To sum up, in the realis mood, the constructions are symmetric as the negator is simply added with no further structural changes. All perfective forms are blocked in the negative and so there is a paradigmatic asymmetry. Moreover, the

paradigm of the imperfective forms which can carry the negative morpheme is narrowed to three forms, the neutral form being the most frequent. These imperfective forms represent 91,3% of all negative predications in my corpus (see Table 3).

2.1.2 Negation in the virtual mood

The virtual mood in Gbaya contrasts with the realis by encoding, for example, plans or possibilities. In this mood, aspect distinguishes between events that may be realized (possible) using imperfective forms (11) or will not be realized (irrealis) using perfective forms (13). Both can be negated just by adding the negative morpheme at the end of the clause. So in both cases the constructions are symmetric.

Only the neutral form of the virtual mood is attested in negative clauses. The other forms (the imminent and the contingent as mentioned in Table 1) are not possible because of their semantic nature. The imminent focuses on the short time frame leading up to the action. The contingent is a linked form expressing the process as a final purpose or a possibility to be taken into account. Both the imminent and the contingent are only used in affirmative clauses. In the virtual mood the paradigm of the negative forms is narrowed to the two neutral forms, imperfective (10) and perfective (12).

- (10) *ʔéí tɛ̀-fɛ̀ ná*
 LOG.SG VRT.IPFV-die NEG
 ‘He will not die.’
- (11) *ʔéí tɛ̀-fɛ̀ kóí ʔín ʔá yè*
 LOG.SG VRT.IPFV-die for:LOG.SG COM:TM 3SG finally
 ‘As for him, he finally will die with her.’
- (12) *Wàntò tɛ̀-̀kpà mà mbùl ná*
 PN VRT.PFV-find INDF spider_web NEG
 ‘[If it hadn’t been like that] Wanto would not find some spider web.’
- (13) *ʔám tɛ̀-̀kpà kàà wí ʔém néné*
 1sg VRT.PFV-find RPT.ADD person help:NMLZ:1SG going
 ‘[If possible] I would find someone to go with me.’

To sum up, in the virtual mood, both imperfective and perfective AM categories can be negated, but the paradigm is limited to neutral perfective and imperfective forms. They represent 4,8% of all negative predications in my corpus.

2.1.3 Negation in serial verb constructions

In serial verb constructions (SVC) the negative morpheme is always attached to the first conjugated serialized verb. The second serialized verb has an infinitive form. There are three forms of the infinitive: an imperfective ‘INF.IPFV’, a perfective ‘INF.PFV’ and a virtual ‘INF.VRT’. Most often SVCs are affirmative clauses. In my corpus, SVCs that carry negation can have any verb as their first serialized verb when the second serialized verb has a perfective infinitive form (14). But when the second serialized verb has an imperfective infinitive form, only the modal verb *kɔ́* ‘want’ is attested in the corpus as the first serialized verb, see (15). Finally, when the second serialized verb has a virtual infinitive form, only the verbs *kɔ́* ‘want’ and *ɲem* ‘be suitable to’ are attested as the first serialized verbs in the corpus (16), as summarized in Table 2. While in such affirmative SVCs the first serialized verb can have an imperfective or a perfective realis form, in the negative counterpart only the neutral imperfective is attested for this verb that falls under the scope of the negation.

Table 2: Types of verbs in negated SVCs

VB ₁ + IPFV	VB ₂ +			in final position
	INF.PFV	INF.IPFV	INF.VRT	
any verb	x ^a	—	—	+ <i>ná</i> NEG
<i>kɔ́</i> ‘want’	x	x	x	+ <i>ná</i> NEG
<i>ɲem</i> ‘be suitable to’	x	—	x	+ <i>ná</i> NEG

^ax = attested; — = unattested

(14) *sósòò hɛ́ ʔá né zók pɛ́r ná*
 today here 3SG IPFV:go INF.PFV:see trap NEG
 ‘Today he is not going to visit his traps.’

(15) *ʔá kɔ́ gíí gbòlò wó ná*
 3SG IPFV:want INF.IPFV:cook Corchorus really NEG
 V1 V2
 ‘She really does not want to cook gooey leaves.’

(16) *ʔám kɔ́ mɔ́-tɔ́ tò ná*
 1SG IPFV:want INF.VRT-say tale NEG
 ‘I do not want to tell a tale.’

2.2 Negation in non-declaratives

In the command mood, imperfective forms are used to encode commands that are either feasible or not feasible to be carried on by the hearer. This is in contrast with the performative command, which is interpreted as already realized and thus belongs to the perfective aspect. As for realis mood, all perfective forms are blocked in the negative.

Within imperfective command forms, only the impersonal form i.e. the imperative can be negated by adding the negative morpheme at the end of the clause without any change (17–18). The construction is symmetric. Such a form is common after a vocative.

- (17) *ʔó nókó hújí yíkné ná*
 POL maternal_uncle IMP:open eye:2POL NEG
 ‘Uncle, do not open your eyes.’

- (18) *hújí yíkné*
 IMP.IPFV:open eye:2POL
 ‘Open your eyes.’

But most often, there are two new forms dedicated to negative commands: the vetitive or injunctive negative (IJT.NEG), and a stronger form, the prohibitive (PROH).

The vetitive, constructed in the same way as all the personal forms of the command mood, is encoded by both the verbal base and the personal pronoun that precedes it. The verbal base has a low tonal scheme as the injunctive perfective, and the personal pronoun has a low tonal scheme as for both injunctive forms, to which is added a vowel with an identical vocal quality and a high tone: PERS^L[^HV] ^HVB (19). This construction is the most common one to express a negative command. It corresponds, in the affirmative, to the injunctive imperfective (20), but the constructions are not symmetric. The vetitive is glossed as injunctive negative ‘IJT.NEG’.

- (19) *wóoyèé mèé hèi kǎá ná*
 no 2SG:IJT.NEG IJT.NEG:pour tears NEG
 ‘No, do not cry.’

- (20) *mè héi kǎá*
 2SG:IJT IJT.IPFV:pour tears
 ‘Cry.’

The prohibitive uses the verb *yak* ‘leave’ as an auxiliary verb. It is followed by the temporal coordinative *ká* ‘then’ (21), or by the noun *tè* ‘entity, body’ (22) carrying the high tone of the tonal marker $tè^H$, or by the quality noun *tí* ‘identity, front’. Any of these terms (*ká*, $tè^H$ or *tí*) precede the verb which has the low tonal scheme [L VB] and is regularly in a non-finite form used for any verb in complex forms and for the nominalization of a verb within a nominal phrase (23). The prohibitive has thus three variants: (i) *yak-ká*- L VB, (ii) *yak-tè* H - L VB and (iii) *yak-tí*- L VB. The auxiliary verb is attested with three AM markers: a high tonal scheme for IMP.IPFV, IJT.IPFV, and a low tonal scheme for IJT.NEG.

(21) *yák-ká-t̃* wèn ná
 IMP.IPFV-PROH-say speech NEG
 ‘You must not say anything.’

(22) *ʔám yák-té-kùr* ná
 1SG:IJT IJT.IPFV-PROH-get_up NEG
 ‘I must not get up.’

(23) [Context: The squirrel pretends to be ill and commands the lion not to disturb him.]
ʔènèé yák-ká-s̃m géè ná
 2POL:IJT.NEG IJT.NEG-PROH-disturb:1SG needlessly NEG
 ‘You must not disturb me for any reason.’

To sum up, in the command mood, as in the realis mood, only the imperfective forms can be negated; all the perfective forms are blocked. For the imperative-imperfective, the negative construction is symmetric, but most often two new forms dedicated to negative command, the vetitive and the prohibitive, are used within non-symmetric constructions. All these forms represent 3,9% of all negative predications in my corpus.

In the case of negation in an interrogative sentence, where the question marker *ndé* is always placed at the absolute end of the sentence, the negation morpheme *ná* is positioned at the end of the clause, just before the question marker, as illustrated in §4.6.4 (see 100–101).

To sum up this presentation of AM categories in verbal clauses, Table 3 shows the negative counterpart of AM categories for affirmative clauses shown in Table 1. The specialized forms dedicated to carry negation are in bold in Table 3.

Table 3: The 7 AM categories of the verbal paradigm in negative clauses

Moods ↓	AM forms ↓		IPFV	PFV	frequency
Realis	Neutral	∅	^H VB		91,3%
	Permanent	PERM	<i>bàá</i> - ^L VB		
	Hypothetical negative	HYPO.NEG	<i>né</i> - ^L VB		
Virtual	Neutral	VRT	<i>té</i> - ^L VB	<i>tèé</i> - ^L VB	4,8%
Command	Imperative	IMP	PERS =∅ ^H VB		3,9%
	Injunctive negative	IJT.NEG	PERS ^L [^H V] ^H VB		
	Prohibitive negative	PROH	<i>yak</i> -{ <i>ká</i> ~ <i>té</i> ^H ~ <i>tí</i> }- ^L VB		

2.3 Negation in stative predications

Gbaya stative predications are divided into several types presented below. They include identificational, locative, existential and presentative predications, which have a dedicated term each (see §2.3.1). Possessive, similitive, qualitative, adverbial and numeral predications are encoded by juxtaposition with no dedicated predicates. Adding the potential verb to carry the negative morpheme is the dedicated negative construction common to all non-verbal clauses. They represent a quarter of all negated clauses in my corpus (see §2.3.2). Predication of property is also encoded by clauses where the copular element is a position verb (see §2.3.3). The negation of each of subtype of stative clauses is discussed in the respective sections.

2.3.1 Clauses with a non-verbal predicate

There are four types of clauses whose predicate is non-verbal: identificational, locative, existential and presentative.

In affirmative clauses, identificational predication uses a dedicated predicate: the identifier *né* 'ID' that most often links two noun-phrases within a three-constituent clause NP *né* NP (24). It can also sometimes be reduced to a two-constituent clause *né* NP that refers to an impersonal construction, often in response to (26). For the negation of this construction, the potential verb *be* 'can

Table 4: Negation of clauses with a non-verbal predicate

Predications	in affirmative clauses	in negative clauses	with a non-verbal predicate
Identificational	[NP] <i>né</i> NP	[NP] <i>bé né</i> NP <i>ná</i>	<i>né</i> ID
Presentatives	NP <i>ʔáá</i>	NP <i>bé ʔáá ná</i>	<i>ʔáá</i> PRST-LOC
	NP <i>ʔá-híí</i>	NP <i>bé ʔá-híí ná</i>	<i>ʔá-híí</i> PRST-CONS
Locative	NP <i>ʔá</i> NP	NP <i>bé</i> locative NP <i>ná</i>	<i>ʔá</i> LOC
Existential	NP <i>ʔá-sèné</i>	NP <i>bé ná</i>	<i>ʔá-sèné</i> LOC-inside/EX

be' is placed just before the identifier and the negation morpheme is placed, like in verbal predications, clause-finally (25, 27).

(24) *mé né bêm*
 2SG ID child
 'You are a child.'

(25) *mé bé né bêm ná*
 2SG IPFV:can_be ID child NEG
 'You are not a child.'

(26) *né tùà kóm*
 ID house of:1SG
 'It's my house.'

(27) *bé né tùà kóm ná*
 IPFV:can_be ID house of:1SG NEG
 'It's not my house.'

Among the presentatives which are placed after the term they present (28), only two of them, the locative 'be here' *ʔáá* PRST.LOC and the consecutive 'be like that' *ʔá-híí* PRST.CONS are attested in a negative clause. The anaphoric locative 'be there' *ʔáí* PRST.ANAPH is not attested in a negated sentence. For the negation of these constructions, the potential verb *be* 'can be' is placed just before the presentatives and the negation morpheme is placed, like in verbal predications, clause-finally, in the same way as for the identifier (29–31).

(28) *bêm ʔáá*
 child PRST.LOC
 'Here is the child.'

- (29) *bêm bé ʔáá ná*
 child IPFV:can_be PRST.LOC NEG
 ‘The child is not there.’
- (30) *wí héí mɔ-ʔò ʔin bé ʔáá ná*
 person to:LOG.SG CTG.IPFV-lay COM IPFV:can_be PRST.LOC NEG
 ‘Someone you can sleep with cannot be this one here.’
- (31) *wèi kéí ndèi péí ʔínà bé*
 husband of.LOG.SG REL.LOG.SG IPFV:revenir COM.TM.3SG IPFV:can_be
ʔá-híí ná yè
 PRST-CONS NEG finally
 ‘My husband, with whom I have returned, cannot be like that after all.’

In affirmative clauses, locative predication uses a dedicated predicate: the locative predicate *ʔá* ‘LOC’ to introduce a noun phrase referring to a location (32). For the negation of this construction, the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ replaces the locative predicate *ʔá* ‘LOC’ and the negative morpheme is, like in verbal predications, placed clause-finally (33).

- (32) *béi ʔá kútùà*
 people LOC house
 ‘People are in the house.’
- (33) *béi bé kútùà ná*
 people IPFV:can_be house NEG
 ‘People are not in the house.’

In affirmative clauses, the dedicated predicate to express an existential is a compound term: *ʔá-sèné* (LOC-inside), literally ‘is inside’, which follows the NP (34). For the negation of this construction, the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ replaces the existential predicate as it does for the locative predicate (35). The negative morpheme is placed, like in verbal predications, clause-finally.

- (34) *wèn ʔá-sèné*
 word LOC-inside
 ‘There is a problem.’
- (35) *wèn bé ná*
 word IPFV:can_be NEG
 ‘There is no problem.’

2.3.2 Clauses with no dedicated predicate

In Gbaya the mere juxtaposition of two specific constituents encodes predication. The first constituent is always a NP, and the second one is either a prepositional noun phrase or a simple term. These constructions express various predications such as possessive (36), simulative, qualitative, and numeral predications. For the negation of these constructions, the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ is placed between the two constituents. It hosts the negative morpheme *ná*, which is placed in clause-final position. The addition of the potential verb is comparable to what happens with the locative predicate and the existential predicate which are not used in negative statements. In addition, adverbial predications, which have only one constituent that functions as a predicate, are negated in the same way, the potential verb being placed before the adverb and the negative morpheme after it. The potential verb which is added in all these clauses is negated by the standard negator *ná* (see Table 5).

Table 5: Negation of clauses with no dedicated predicate

Predications	in affirmative clauses	in negative clauses	with preposition
Possessive	NP <i>nè</i> NP	NP <i>bé nè</i> NP <i>ná</i>	<i>nè</i> ‘with’
Attributive	NP <i>nè</i> ADJ. MNLZ	NP <i>bé nè</i> ADJ. NMLZ <i>ná</i>	<i>nè</i> ‘as’
Simulative	NP <i>hé màá gá</i>	NP <i>bé hé màá gá ná</i>	<i>hé... gá</i> ‘like’
Numeral	NP NUM	NP <i>bé</i> NUM <i>ná</i>	—
Adverbial	ADV	<i>bé</i> ADV <i>ná</i>	—

In the possessive, simulative and attributive clauses the second constituent is a prepositional noun phrase as in the examples below. Possessive clauses are common (36–38).

- (36) [Context: He is trying to find out if anyone has goats in the village.

Somebody warns him.]

Singà nè dùà

PN with goat

‘Singa has goats.’

- (37) *Singà bé nè dùà ná*

PN IPFV:can_be with goat NEG

‘Singa has no goats.’

- (38) *té mà ngìmbì ʔám bé nè tùà ná*
 by:TM INDF time 1SG IPFV:can_be with house NEG
 ‘At that time I didn’t have a house.’

Attribution is a domain most often used affirmatively (39, 41) and relatively seldom negatively (40, 42). Attributive clauses are not frequent. In this construction the adjectives are nominalized and introduced by the preposition *nè* used here with a comparative sense ‘as’. Here the use of *nè* as a comparative marker introducing adjectives (39)–(41) is different from the *nè* ‘with’ which is part of the predicative possessive construction (36)–(38). I present two examples, one with a verbal adjective *dúrá* ‘long’ and one with an adjective *tór* ‘raw’.

- (39) *wáŋá hɛ nè dúráà*
 leaf PROX as long:NMLZ
 ‘This leaf is long.’
- (40) *wáŋá hɛ bé nè dúráà ná*
 leaf PROX IPFV:can_be as long:NMLZ NEG
 ‘This leaf is not long.’
- (41) *sàdî hɛ nè tóràà*
 animal PROX as raw:NMLZ
 ‘This meat is raw.’
- (42) *sàdî hɛ bé nè tóràà ná*
 animal PROX IPFV:can_be as raw:NMLZ NEG
 ‘This meat is not raw.’

Similitive clauses encode similarity between two constituents, the second one being surrounded by the discontinuous similitive adposition *hé...gá* ‘SIMV...SIMV’ (44). Only similitive clauses where the second constituent is the reciprocal pronoun *màá* ‘RECP’ and which express a comparison of equality are negated in the corpus, (43).

- (43) *yíkwà bé hé màá gá ná*
 face:TM:3PL IPFV:can_be SIMV RECP SIMV NEG
 ‘Their faces are not the same.’ (lit. ‘not like one to the other’)
- (44) *yíkwà hé màá gá fét*
 face:TM:3PL SIMV RECP SIMV all
 ‘Their faces are exactly the same.’ (lit. ‘like one to the other’)

In numeral clauses the second constituent is always a numeral (46, 48), and the negative construction is common (45, 47).

(45) *tòyó bé náár ná*
 dog IPFV:can_be four NEG
 ‘The dogs are not four.’

(46) *tòyó náár*
 dog four
 ‘The dogs are four.’

(47) *bêm kǝ̀ǝ̀ bé tààr ná*
 child of:3SG IPFV:can_be three NEG
 ‘He doesn’t have three children.’ (lit. ‘his children are not three’)

(48) *bêm kǝ̀ǝ̀ tààr*
 child of:3SG three
 ‘He has three children.’ (lit. ‘his children are three’)

There are only a few adverbs that are used predicatively, either as the second element in a juxtaposition construction, or alone in a holophrastic use. Most of these adverbs in a predicative function are found in affirmative constructions, and some are found in interrogative constructions. Only the adverb *hǝ̀ǝ̀* ‘like this’ is observed with negation in my corpus (49–50). This adverb is very commonly negated.

(49) *bé hǝ̀ǝ̀ ná*
 IPFV:can_be like_that NEG
 ‘It is not like that.’

(50) *hǝ̀ǝ̀*
 like_that
 ‘It is like that.’

To sum up, under negation the locative predicate *?ǝ̀* and the existential predicate *?ǝ̀-sèné* are replaced by the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ and the standard negator *ná* in clause-final position. In all other stative predications, the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ is placed before the non-verbal predicate or between the two constituents in a juxtaposition construction. With adverbial predications, the potential verb *be* and the standard negator *ná* surround the adverb as in (49).

In all cases the negative morpheme is placed clause-finally and the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ is negated by standard negation. Thus adding it to carry the negative morpheme is the dedicated negative construction for non-verbal clauses.

- (54) *kòmè ʔó nù ná kómé Wàntò kàdà ʔé*
 when:2SG IPFV:lay ground NEG then:2SG PN PFV:finish:TM yet
 ‘If you don’t lie down then it will be the end of you, Wanto.’

When a SC follows the main clause, the negative morpheme always scopes over the verb of the main clause; the SC cannot be negated, see (55).

- (55) *ʔéí jém kèi ʔá yù ʔín f̂rò ná*
 LOG.SG IPFV:be_able so_that:LOGS IPFV:put race COM:TM elephant NEG
 ‘He is not able to race with the elephant.’

- (56) *ʔám ʔíŋ kóm mà mò há mój-dè s̄n*
 1SG IPFV:know as_for:1SG INDF thing so-as-to CTG.IPFV-do in:TM
ʔòyáà ná
 remainder:DEF NEG
 ‘Personally, I don’t know what I will do to correct this mistake.’

- (57) *ʔám gbé sàd̄i há kòò kóm ʔój ná*
 1SG IPFV:kill animal so-as-to wife of:1SG IPFV:eat NEG
 ‘I did not kill any animal to feed my wife.’

Purpose SC as (56) and (57) above, which is placed behind the main clause, can be negated by changing the conjunction. To introduce a negative purpose clause, there is a new conjunction specific to negation *tá ~ té* ‘so as not to’ or ‘lest’ that replaces the conjunction *há* ‘so-as-to’ of the affirmative counterpart. In this use, the negative morpheme *ná* which is placed clause-finally at the very end of the sentence always and refers to the verb of the SC, is optional. Most often the negative morpheme is absent (59), and its presence is redundant with the negative purpose conjunction (58).

- (58) *ʔà bón nù ʔínàm h̄è t̄àà*
 3SG IPFV:remain ground COM:TM:1SG here so_as_not_to:3SG
sí ná
 IPFV:go_away NEG
 ‘She stays here with me so that she does not leave.’

- (59) *wà h̄upà n̄n̄wà tá kòrò ŋmáwá*
 3PL PFV:detach:TM foot.3PL so_as_not_to rain IPFV.hit.3PL
 ‘They hurried so that the rain did not get them wet.’

The linked AM forms that create dependence without any conjunction do not accept negation, except for the Hypothetical form. The negative hypothetical clause is always placed in front of the main clause as it has been presented (cf. (8) and (9)).

A relative clause (RC), which, in Gbaya, is always introduced by the relative marker *nè* REL, can be negated. As for any subordinate clause, it depends on the position of the RC within the main clause. When the noun that the RC modifies is the subject of the main verb, the RC is placed in front of the main clause verb and the negative morpheme is placed at the end of the RC. The RC is negated by standard negation (60). Most often the antecedent of the relative marker is the subject of the main clause verb, but it may also be a topicalized term placed before the verb of the main clause (61).

- (60) *mà làà nè ndótí ná ʔó zéngbézéngbé*
 INDF garment REL IPFV:thicken NEG IPFV:be fragile
 ‘A garment which is not thick is fragile.’ [antecedent = subject]

- (61) *ndàyá mò nè dilà zéí gér yéré náú ʔá-nàm*
 bottom:TM thing REL lion IPFV:hear voice buffalo NEG:ANAPH TOP-1SG:TM
dé-mé-t̃
 IMN-IPFV-say
 ‘The reason why the lion does not hear the voice of the buffalo I am about to say.’ [antecedent = topicalized object]

But when the noun the RC modifies is placed behind the verb of the main clause, as for any SC in the same position, the negative morpheme placed at the very end of the sentence refers to the verb of the main clause (62–64).

- (62) *ʔà ʔíŋ fàrà nàá yàkà sí sèné ná ʔòé*
 3SG IPFV:know place REL:3SG PFV:leave:TM INF.PFV:go inside NEG too
 ‘He does not even know in which place he went.’

- (63) *ʔám zéí wèn kómé nèmè t̃úú ná*
 1SG IPFV:hear speech of:2SG REL:2SG:TM IPFV:say:ANAPH NEG
 ‘I do not understand what you are saying.’

- (64) *ʔám ʔíŋ tí mò nè dém ná*
 1SG IPFV:know identity thing REL IPFV:do:1SG NEG
 ‘I do not know what is happening to me.’

2.5 Negative lexicalizations

There are two verbs, *mbosi* ‘be absent, be missing’ (68) and *ndan* ‘miss, lack’ (66) (in relation to the numeral *ndán* ‘one’) that express a lack. They can, however, be negated by standard negation (65, 67).

- (65) *sàdì ndán ná*
 animal IPFV:miss NEG
 ‘[After checking] No game is missing.’
- (66) *kàfèè ndàngám mójútùyè*
 coffee PFV:miss:TM:1SG in morning
 ‘I did not get coffee this morning.’
- (67) *yák-té-mbòsì mé mòósá ná*
 IMP.PFV-PROH-be_absent in tomorrow NEG
 ‘You must not be absent tomorrow.’
- (68) *wànyé mbòsá*
 chief PFV:be_absent
 ‘The village chief is absent.’

2.6 Other clausal negation constructions

Gbaya uses a complex clause to express impossibility. The main clause with the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ is followed by a subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction *kà* ‘so that’ expressing a consequence (55). The negative morpheme is clause-final. In such constructions, the two clauses have the same subject that is mentioned before each verb and the potential verb always takes a realis neutral imperfective form: S_1 *bé* *kà* S_1 VB *ná* (69–71).

- (69) *ʔám bé kàm né ná*
 1SG IPFV:can_be so_that:1SG IPFV:go NEG
 ‘I cannot go.’
- (70) *ʔéé bé kèè bá wéi ná*
 2PL IPFV:can_be so_that:2PL IPFV:take husband NEG
 ‘We cannot get married.’
- (71) *ʔà bé kàà yák ná*
 3SG IPFV:can_be so_that:3SG IPFV:leave NEG
 ‘He can’t leave.’

Sometimes, the subject of the main clause is not mentioned in the SC, and the construction becomes a set phrase *bé kà* (72). This construction shows low frequency.

- (72) *mé bé kà bá ná*
 2SG IPFV:can_be so_that IPFV:take NEG
 ‘You cannot take it.’

It is interesting to point out that unlike Gbaya Bodoë, in Gbaya Yaayuwee, another Northwest Gbaya language, such a set phrase, *bé kà*, is the only construction used. So in Gbaya Yaayuwee this set phrase has become a verbal marker of impossibility *bé-kà*, which is not the case in Gbaya Bodoë (see Noss 1981).

3 Non-clausal negation

3.1 Negative replies

Negative replies to polar questions are not related to the negative morpheme *ná*. There are two negative replies: *wòóyèé ~ òóyèé, ?ùú?ù* meaning ‘no’ which are interjections in Gbaya. They correspond to the affirmative replies *?íí ~ ?úú, híí* meaning ‘yes’. In response to a question, these negative replies always disagree with the content of the question and never with its polarity.

3.2 Negative indefinites and quantifiers

There are no negative indefinites and quantifiers in Gbaya. To say ‘nobody’ (73) or ‘nothing’ (74) Gbaya uses the nouns *béí* ‘person’ and *mò* ‘thing’ in a negative clause, most often with the indefinite determiner *mà*.

- (73) *béí té ná*
 person IPFV:come NEG
 ‘Nobody comes.’
- (74) *mà mò bé kútùà hê ná*
 INDF thing IPFV:can_be house PROX NEG
 ‘There is nothing in this house.’

3.3 Negative derivation and case marking

No negative derivation is attested in Gbaya, which has very little derivation but very productive compounding. There is no adposition ‘without’ either, but there are a lot of adjectives-adverbs (AA) to express lack. These AA are original terms corresponding to derived terms in other languages: *béngéé* ‘ineffective, without result’, *wálásáyá* ‘without stopping’, *fâû-fâû* ‘nonstop’, *kpáká-kpáká* ‘thoughtless, without thinking’, *dók-dók* ‘speechless’, etc. This way of expressing lack takes in account a lot of contexts as for example ‘noiseless’: *ʔíyóó* (standing or walking), *yòkòkò-yòkòkò* (specific to the way you put your foot on the ground), *gédééñ* (gait of an animal), *yékét* (quiet), *yélélé* (acting slowly). So negative meaning expressing lack is lexicalized into specific AAs. Verbal expressions of absence are discussed in §2.5.

There is also a new conjunction specific to negation, *tá ~ té* ‘so as not to’ or ‘lest’, that replaces the conjunction *há* ‘so as to’ of the affirmative counterparts (see §2.4).

4 Other aspects of negation

4.1 The scope of negation

In clausal negation the predicate is always in the scope of negation whether it is the verb of the clause (see §2.1 and §2.2) or the potential verb for non-verbal predications (see §2.3.1 and §2.3.2).

To narrow the scope of negation to a specific constituent, Gbaya creates a discontinuous negation that reuses the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ into a fixed set where this verb has no longer any predicative function. In this construction, the potential verb, which has an imperative imperfective form carrying the polar tone of insistence modality (*béè* [\emptyset^H *be*.INS]), is in clause-initial position and the negative morpheme is in clause-final position. This construction *béè...ná*, which surrounds the clause and which can target any element except the predicate, functions as a constituent negator. This discontinuous negation objects to something else but not to the content of the verb, whatever is the AM form of the verb in the clause. Depending on the context, the constituent in the scope of this negation is most often an adverb (75–76); an oblique object (77–78); a way to point out, in case of a verb in realis neutral perfective, that is a delimited process has to be put in perspective (79), or an element topicalized or focalized (80–81).

the main clause appears before a subordinate or relative clause. However, this linkage is blocked if the verb of the main clause is in the realis perfective, as this form cannot support negation. In such cases, if a relative clause follows the main clause, the negation at the end of the sentence will instead apply to the verb of the relative clause (82). Another case of incompatibility between the perfective and negation is observed between coordinated clauses sharing the subject of the first clause; the negation at the end of the second clause cannot apply to its verb if that verb is in the realis perfective. Therefore, negation scopes over the verb of the first clause, see (83).

- (82) *ʔéné zòkà b́éí yàrà yíitòò nè kàm b́ír ná.*
2PL PFV:see:TM person day two REL cassava_dough IPFV:pass NEG
'You have seen someone who hasn't eaten for two days.'

- (83) *mà b́éí mb́íí kùtí m̀ò séká p̀ìí ǵúá*
INDF person IPFV:sweep first:TM thing and_then PFV:throw:TM firewood
nù ná
ground NEG
'Nobody sweeps the place and then throws firewood on the ground.'

4.2 Negative polarity

No negative polarity items have been found in Gbaya.

4.3 Marking of NPs in the scope of negation

The marking of NPs is not affected by negation in Gbaya.

4.4 Reinforcing negation

In a negative clause, unlike all the other adverbs, two adverbs *ʔòé ~ ʔòí* 'also' and *ʔèá* 'only' can be placed right after the negative morpheme. The sequence *ná ʔòé* 'neither, not also' (84–85) is more frequent than the sequence *ná ʔèá* 'not even' (86–87), but both are well-attested in my corpus.

- (84) *ʔéí kpá tí sàdì ná ʔòé*
IMPS IPFV:find entity:TM animal NEG also
'There is no game either.'

- (85) *mà tórsì bé ná ʔòé wá*
 INDF electric_torch IPFV:can_be NEG also unfortunately
 ‘Unfortunately, he does not have a flashlight either.’
- (86) *mò ndèi ʔíŋ ndàyá mò ná ʔèá*
 thing REL:LOG.SG IPFV:know bottom:TM thing NEG only
 ‘Something you do not even know anything about...’
- (87) *zòòmí kéí bá kòò héí ná ʔèá*
 elder_brother of:LOG.SG IPFV:take wife to:LOG.SG NEG only
 ‘His elder brother didn’t even get a wife for him.’

We can compare the regular order *ʔèá ná* (attested only for *ʔèá*, but impossible for *ʔòé*) to the opposite order *ná ʔèá*, in order to bring out the difference of meanings: *ʔèá ná* (only NEG) means ‘not only’ (88), and *ná ʔèá* (NEG only) means ‘not even’ (86–87).

- (88) *ʔàm dé nè tòm kòfè hógó fàà ʔèá ná*
 1SG IPFV:do CIRC work:TM son-in-law like_that always only NEG
 ‘I will not keep on doing the son-in-law’s work like that forever.’

Placed after the negative morpheme, the scope of these two adverbs seems to refocus on the negative morpheme and no longer on the verb of the clause.

4.5 Negation, coordination and complex clauses

Only for subordinate purpose clauses, there is a new conjunction specific to negation *tá ~ té* ‘so as not to’ or ‘lest’ that replaces the conjunction *hə* ‘so-as-to’ of the affirmative counterparts (see §2.4).

4.6 Miscellaneous aspects of negation

4.6.1 Negative transport

In Gbaya, there is no negative transport. When a subordinate clause follows the main clause it cannot be negated (see §2.4).

4.6.2 Metalinguistic negation

No examples of metalinguistic negation have been found in the data.

4.6.3 Non-negative uses of negatives and expletive negation

In an isolating language like Gbaya, word order is very important and changing the place of an item can lead to giving it a new function and a new signification, as described in §2.1.1 for the AM forms of the hypothetical-negative and the consecutive. When the negative morpheme *ná* is not placed clause-finally, it is used with two functions: (i) a discourse particle or (ii) an element of quantifier adverbs.

(i) There are two contexts where *ná* is a discourse particle, depending on its position in the clause: after a noun or after a verb. First, when the negative morpheme *ná* is no longer placed clause-finally but right after a noun, it becomes a discourse marker that identifies this noun as the addressee (89–90). Doing so, it keeps its negative semantic feature that contributes to the identification of the addressee as not being the person who speaks, but the person to whom something is said. As a discourse marker, *ná* is an affirmative item, ‘ADRE’ in the glosses (see Roulon-Doko 2008).

(89) *wà ná wà dé gìmà kpók kpók kpók.*
 3PL ADRE 3PL:INJ INJ.IPFV:do song one one one
 ‘They are told to sing one by one.’

(90) *kó kàó Dàà mí ná ?ám dúk.*
 then:POL maternal_uncle PN 1SG ADRE 1SG IPFV:stay
 ‘Then uncle Dàà told me to stay.’

Secondly, *ná* can be placed after the verbs *zei* ‘hear’ and *zók* ‘see’ in a specific construction of two clauses, which is different from complement clauses. In Gbaya, complement clauses follow the verb as a direct object without any conjunction. In the first clause these verbs are followed by the neutral direct object *mò* ‘thing’ while the second one is a coordinate clause introduced by *ká* ‘then’. In both cases *ná* keeps its negative semantics. With the verb *zók* ‘see’, *ná* indicates the possibility of seeing X or being aware of the presence/coming of X as in (91); when used with the verb *zei* ‘hear’, *ná* does not indicate hearing but rather understanding as in (92).

(91) [Context: She is with her older sister who takes care of her.]
?ám zók mò ná kó dàà tèà
 1SG IPFV:see thing DISC then:POL older_sister PFV:come
 ‘I become aware that the older sister comes [to warn me].’

In the next example (92), the first clause is a temporal subordinate and the main clause a coordinate clause. Compare with a clause without *ná* (93).

- (92) [Context: She decides to go to her older sister's house because her husband is never at home.]
kàm té-zòk mò ná wó kàà gbòó nè tútùyè
 when:1SG VRT.IPFV-see thing DISC really then:3SG PFV:go_out in morning
dòṅám
 after:TM:1SG
 'When I realize that he has arrived in the morning at home (= behind me).'
- (93) [Context: They all think that the older sister is dead. The family is eating.]
ʔá-nè bé kàyáíí kàà zòk mò wó ká
 and_now small eldest:ANAPH when:3SG IPFV:see thing really then
ʔáá téíí
 3SG:TOP IPFV:COME:ANAPH
 'Then, as the eldest child looks up, there she is, coming back.'

I would like to point out that there are some other discourse markers based on the negative morpheme *ná* and the interrogative marker *ndé* that function alike but will not be discussed in this paper.

(ii) There are seven quantifier adverbs that are compound words. All of them include the negative morpheme *ná* as the last element of the compound. The first element of these compound adverbs may be an adverb, a nominal phrase or, only in one case (*ɲém-ná*), a verb which is followed by the negative morpheme, see Table 6 for a full listing of these expressions.

Most of the forms cited in Table 6 keep a negative semantic feature that contributes to their literal meaning but the reading is a positive one, as mentioned previously. For three of them the negative semantic feature is no longer present (94–95) and, in addition, two of these have a variant without the negative morpheme with the same meaning.

- (94) *ʔéé dèé tòṁ dèkná*
 2PL PFV:do:TM work a_lot
 'We worked hard.'
- (95) *há kési bémóná*
 so_that IPFV:dry a_little
 '[He puts locusts next to the fire] so that they dry a little.'

Table 6: The compound quantifier adverbs

Adverbs	Component stems	Literal meaning	Meaning
<i>gèdèk-ná/dék-ná</i>	(a little-NEG)	‘not a little’	‘a lot’, ‘very’
<i>sór-mò-ná</i>	(DIM-thing-NEG)	‘not a very small thing’	‘very little’
<i>zǒm-mò-ná</i>	(AUG.TM-thing-NEG)	‘not that big’	‘very much’
<i>ɲém-ná</i>	(IPFV.suit-NEG)	‘not suitable’	‘very much’, ‘too much’
<i>bé-mò-ná</i>	(small-thing-NEG)	no negative meaning	‘a little’
<i>bé-dàŋ-ná/bé-dàŋ</i>	(small-bad-NEG/small-bad)	no negative meaning	‘a little’
<i>bé-nàŋ-ná/bé-nàŋ</i>	(small-?-NEG/small-?)	no negative meaning	‘a little’

In this section, I presented the non-negative uses of the negative morpheme. They illustrate a common syntactic and pragmatic feature of Gbaya that highlights the polyfunctionality of the negative morpheme.

4.6.4 Elements that can follow the negative marker

There are seven sentence particles which, in affirmative as in negative clauses, are placed clause-finally, just after the negative morpheme and the adverbs *ʔéá* or *ʔóé* when appropriate (88). These particles show the point of view of the speaker, or of the actor of the event (96–98).

- (96) *ʔá tǔ ná wá*
 3SG IPFV:say NEG unfortunately
 ‘Unfortunately, she does not say anything.’

- (97) *mà mò bé kútùà hǐ ná wó*
 INDF thing IPFV:can_be house LOC.ANAPH NEG really
 ‘There is really nothing in that house.’

- (98) *ʔéí tɛ̀-dè tùà ná yè*
 LOG.SG VRT.IPFV-do house NEG finally
 ‘[Since there is a cave] finally I will not build a house.’

In negative clauses too, sentence particles can combine like they usually do in affirmative clauses (99).

- (99) *sàdī mɔ́ ʔɛ́ ʔéné ɲón ná ʔòé wó yè*
 animal APPOS this_one 2PL IPFV:eat NEG also really indeed
 ‘Indeed, this animal you do not actually eat either.’

The interrogative marker *ndé* glossed ‘Q’ is always at the last position of a clause; nothing can follow it. In negative clauses too, it is placed after the negative morpheme and put at the last position, clause-finally (100–101). For negative interrogatives, see §2.2.

- (100) *ʔéné zókáà ná ndé?*
 2PL IPFV:see:3SG NEG Q
 ‘Have you not seen him?’
- (101) *zúà tɛ̀-gbà ná ndé?*
 head:TM:3SG VRT.IPFV-split NEG Q
 ‘Won’t he have a headache?’

Two other interrogative adverbs *hégè* ‘how’ (102) and *wɛ̀n-gè* ‘why’ have the same clause-final position.

- (102) *ʔám tɛ̀-tɔ́ bɔ̀ɔ̀ ná hégè?*
 1SG VRT.IPFV-say thus NEG how
 ‘Why would I not say it?’

There are some cases of right detachment when an adjunct is placed outside the boundaries of the clause, i.e. after the negative morpheme. It may be an adjective (104), an adverb (103) or a NP that adds *a posteriori* some clarifications to the content of the clause (105). In Gbaya, this is not a device for topicalization (Creissels 2006: 120).

- (103) *mé ʔín ʔòò mɔ́ ná ỳkàiỳkài géè*
 2SG IPFV:know remainder:TM thing NEG silly simply
 ‘You do not know anything, you are simply silly.’

- (104) *kánánjáà bá ndīn ná pálpál*
 ankle:TM:3SG IPFV:take dirty NEG clean
 ‘His ankles are not dirty, they are clean.’
- (105) *?á gbó kǔà zān b̄ò ná mó-dè tòm kó wányé*
 SG IPFV:go_out as_for:3SG bush again NEG INF.VRT-do work of chief
 ‘He no longer goes to the bush to work for the chief.’

5 Summary

In Gbaya, only verbs can be negated by the negative morpheme *ná*. Most often the constructions are symmetric, but there is an asymmetry in the paradigm in the realis and command moods, as all perfective forms are blocked in the negative. There are different forms in non-declaratives, i.e. the command mood. In order to negate stative predications, the potential verb *be* ‘can be’ has to be used. There is a constituent negator that negates any element except a predicate. The systematic clause-final position of the negative morpheme and its last position in the verbal phrase characterizes the negation system in Gbaya. The negation strategies of this language are summarized in Table 7.

Abbreviations

1	first person	CTG	contingent
2	second person	DEF	definite
3	third person	DIM	diminutive
∅	empty place	DISC	discourse marker
AA	adjective-adverb	EX	existential
ADD	additive	H	high tone
ADJ	adjective	HYPO	hypothetical
ADRE	addressee	ID	identificator
ADV	adverb	IJT	injunctive
AM	aspect-mood	IMN	imminent
ANAPH	anaphoric	IMP	imperative
APPOS	appositive preposition	IMPS	impersonal pronoun
AUG	augmentative	INCH	inchoative
CIRC	circumstantial	INDF	indefinite
COM	comitative	INF	infinitive
COND	condition	IPFV	imperfective
CONS	consecutive	KNOWN	known

Table 7: Summary of negative strategies in Gbaya

Negation strategy	Function	Chapter	Examples
negative morpheme <i>ná</i> in clause-final position	realis mood 2 forms (IPFV, PERM) Virtual mood 2 forms (VRT) HYPO-NEG Command mood (IMP-IPFV) <i>Vétitive</i> IJT-NEG <i>Prohibitive</i> PROH Stative verb ?ɔ (IPFV, VRT)	\$2.1.1 \$2.1.2 \$2.1.2 \$2.2 \$2.2 \$2.2 \$2.2	(1), (5), (7), (9) (10), (12) (9) (20) (22) (24), (25), (26) (17), (19)
verb <i>be</i> add to the predicate	nè ID ?áá PRST-LOC, ?á-hij PRST-CONS	\$2.3.1	(28), (30)
potential verb <i>be</i> + negative morpheme <i>ná</i> in clause-final position	verb <i>be</i> replace the predicate verb <i>be</i> between the two juxtaposed elements	Presentatives Locative Existential Possessive Attributive Simulative Numeral	(32), (33), (34) (36) (38) (39), (42) (41), (44) (46) (48), (50)
holophrastic use	ADV (= hǒgǒ)	\$2.3.2	(55)
P1 + verb potential <i>be</i> <i>kà</i> P2 + negative morpheme <i>ná</i>	Impossibility	\$2.6	(69–72)
fixed set: <i>béè C ná</i>	targeting any constituent (C) except the verb	\$4.1	(75–81)
Negative lexicalizations <i>mbosi</i> <i>ndaŋ</i> conjunction <i>tá ~ té</i> <i>wóyóyé ~ ?óyóyé, ?uú?u</i>	'be absent, be missing' 'miss, lack' 'so as not to' or 'lest' negative replies 'no'	\$2.5 \$2.4 \$3.1	(65) (67) (58), (59)

L	low tone	PRST	presentative
LH	low-high tone	Q	interrogative particle
LOC	locative	RC	relative clause
LOG	logophoric	RECP	reciprocal
NEG	negation, negative	REL	relative
NMLZ	nominalizer, nominalization	RPT	repetitive
PN	proper name	SC	subordinate clause
NUM	numeral	SG	singular
PERM	permanent	SIMV	similitive
PERS	personal pronoun	SVC	serial verb construction
PFV	perfective	TM	tonal marker
PL	plural	TOP	topic
POL	polite form	V	vowel
PROG	progressive	VB	verbal base
PROH	prohibitive	VRT	virtual
PROX	proximal		

References

- Creissels, Denis. 2006. *Syntaxe générale: Introduction typologique 2: La phrase*. Paris: Hermes Sciences Lavoisier.
- Miestamo, Matti. 2025. Questionnaire for describing the negation system of a language. In Matti Miestamo & Ljuba Veselinova (eds.), *Negation in the world's languages I: Africa*, 21–36. Berlin: Language Science Press. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17788121.
- Moñino, Yves. 1995. *Le Proto-Gbaya: Essai de linguistique comparative sur vingt-et-une langues d'Afrique centrale*. Paris.
- Noss, Philip A. 1981. *Gbaya, phonologie et grammaire, dialecte yaayuwee*. Meiganga: Centre de traduction Gbaya.
- Roulon, Paulette. 1975. *Le verbe gbaya, étude syntaxique et sémantique (R.C.A.)*. Paris: Bibliothèque de la SELAF n°51-52. <https://hal.science/hal-00256602>.
- Roulon-Doko, Paulette. 1993. La négation en gbaya 'bodoé. In Salikoko S. Mufwene & Lioba Moshi (eds.), *Topics in African linguistics*, 103–115. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. DOI: 10.1075/cilt.100.08rou.
- Roulon-Doko, Paulette. 2008. Les marqueurs de discours en gbaya. In Caron Bernard (ed.), *Subordination, dépendance et parataxe dans les langues africaines*, 63–81. Louvain-Paris: Peeters. <https://hal.science/hal-00280026>.