

Syntactic Description of Fulfulde Nominal Negation in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Negation is an important grammatical phenomenon through which languages express the denial, absence or non-existence of entities, events and states of affairs. While considerable attention has been given to verbal negation in Fulfulde, the syntactic behaviour of nominal negation, particularly in the Fulfulde varieties spoken in Nigeria, requires further description. This study therefore examines the syntactic structure, position and distribution of nominal negative markers in Fulfulde, with particular attention to the variety spoken in Taraba State. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach and draws on elicited and naturally occurring Fulfulde constructions, supported by oral interviews, observation, translation and the researcher's linguistic intuition. The analysis focuses on markers such as *walaa*, *wooda*, *maraa* and *naa*, examining their syntactic positions, constituent relationships, distribution and structural functions. The study is theoretically anchored in Chomsky's Minimalist Program, particularly the conception of syntax as a hierarchical system of phrase structure in which functional elements may project independently. The analysis shows that Fulfulde nominal negation is not represented by a single syntactic pattern. Existential negation is associated with forms such as *walaa* and *wooda*, possession-related nominal negation is represented by *maraa*, while *naa* and its related constructions participate in identificational and contrastive nominal negation. The findings further indicate that these markers do not simply negate nouns in isolation; rather, they participate in larger nominal or predication structures and take different syntactic positions according to construction type. The study contributes to the description and documentation of Taraba Fulfulde and provides a basis for further research on the interaction between nominal, verbal and clausal negation in Fulfulde.

Keywords: Fulfulde, nominal negation, syntax, negative markers, Taraba Fulfulde

1. introduction

Negation is a fundamental grammatical resource through which languages express the rejection, denial, contradiction or exclusion of a proposition, entity, state or situation. Although negation is commonly examined in relation to verbs and clauses, negative meaning may also be expressed through nominal constructions. Nominal negation is particularly important because languages employ different structures to express non-existence, absence, lack, non-possession, failed identification and contrast involving nominal constituents. A comprehensive account of negation therefore requires attention not only to negative verbs and clauses but also to the syntactic behaviour of negative elements associated with nouns and other nominal constituents.

From a syntactic perspective, languages differ in the position, distribution and scope of negative elements. Negative markers may occur before or after the verb, at the end of a clause, or within nominal and existential constructions. Their position is not necessarily determined by a language's basic word order. Sanusi and Oyewole (2019), for instance, demonstrate that although Idoma and Tiv have SVO basic word order, their negative markers occur in sentence-final position. Fulfulde provides an important context for examining such variation. It is a major West African language spoken across several countries, including Nigeria, and its varieties exhibit considerable grammatical diversity. Ziegelmeyer (2009) observes that negation in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri varies according to grammatical mood and construction, with negative markers occupying different positions. His discussion of eastern Fulfulde, including the Adamawa area, further suggests the need to examine individual varieties rather than assume uniformity across Fulfulde. Existing studies on Fulfulde have largely concentrated on verbal negation, tense-aspect-mood and other morphosyntactic phenomena. Recent research in Taraba has similarly examined verbal extensions and their interaction with negation. Siuto and Sani (2025), for example, focus on morpho-semantic aspects of verbal extensions in Fulfulde negation in Sardauna and Gashaka varieties. Consequently, the syntactic behaviour of nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde remains insufficiently described. In Taraba Fulfulde, forms such as *walaa*, *wooda*, *maraa* and *naa* occur in constructions associated with non-existence, absence, lack, non-possession, identification and contrast. These forms do not necessarily perform identical syntactic functions, as they occur in different positions and interact with different constituents. For example, *walaa* may occur in existential constructions, while *maraa* is associated with non-possession, and *naa* may occur in constructions involving rejection or contrast of identification. The problem, therefore, is the limited systematic description of how these nominal negative markers are distributed and how they relate syntactically to nouns and other constituents in Taraba Fulfulde.

The general aim of this study is to provide a syntactic description of nominal negation in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State. Specifically, the study seeks to: (i) identify the nominal negation markers used in Taraba Fulfulde; and (ii) describe the identified markers in terms of their syntactic positions and distribution. The study is significant because it contributes to the documentation and description of Taraba Fulfulde and provides evidence of grammatical variation within Fulfulde. It may also enrich comparative research on negation in Nigerian languages by providing data on nominal negative constructions from a relatively under-described variety. Furthermore, the findings may provide useful linguistic data for researchers interested in Fulfulde syntax, language documentation, comparative linguistics and the development of educational and language-resource materials.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Syntax

Syntax is the branch of linguistics concerned with the organization of words into larger grammatical units and with the relationships that exist among constituents in a sentence. It examines how words combine to form phrases, clauses and sentences and how these constituents are hierarchically organized. Syntax therefore goes beyond the identification of individual words and asks how linguistic elements are structurally related.

A syntactic analysis normally considers constituent structure, grammatical relations, word order and the distribution of grammatical elements. Givón (2001), for example, emphasizes the importance of constituency, hierarchy and grammatical relations in syntactic analysis. His work

treats syntax as both a formal and functional system and gives considerable attention to word order and phrase structure. For the present study, syntax is understood primarily as the study of how Fulfulde nominal negative markers combine with nouns and other constituents to form grammatical constructions. The focus is therefore on questions such as whether a negative marker precedes or follows a noun, whether it functions as the head of an existential construction, whether it occurs in a predicate position, and whether the resulting construction forms a phrase or a clause.

2.1.2 The Concept of Negation

Negation refers to a grammatical and semantic operation through which a language expresses the denial or rejection of a proposition, constituent or state of affairs. Languages employ different strategies for marking negation. These may include independent particles, affixes, auxiliary verbs, negative predicates, changes in verbal morphology and combinations of more than one marker. Negation may operate at different structural levels. At the clause level, it may deny an entire proposition. At the constituent level, it may restrict or reject a particular constituent.

The distinction is particularly relevant to the present study because nominal negation may involve a nominal constituent without necessarily having the same structure as ordinary verbal or clausal negation. The syntactic position of a negative marker varies across languages. Greenberg and later typological research examined the relationship between word order and the position of negative markers. However, the behaviour of individual languages frequently demonstrates that such tendencies are not absolute. Sanusi and Oyewole (2019), for example, demonstrate that Idoma and Tiv place their negative markers at the end of negative constructions, despite their SVO word order.

2.1.3 Nominal Negation

Nominal negation refers broadly to constructions in which negative meaning is associated with a nominal expression or nominal predication. It may express such meanings as non-existence, absence, lack, non-possession, exclusion or rejection of identification. The exact structural form of nominal negation varies from language to language. Nominal negation should not be confused with the simple occurrence of a negative word near a noun. The crucial issue is the syntactic relation between the negative element and the nominal constituent. A language may use a negative determiner, a negative existential predicate, a negative copula, a negative particle or a special nominal construction. This distinction is relevant to Fulfulde because *walaa* and *maraa*, for example, cannot simply be treated as alternative forms of one general negative particle. Their syntactic distributions differ. *Walaa* participates especially in existential constructions, while *maraa* is associated with possession and lack. The syntactic description must therefore account for the construction in which each marker occurs.

2.1.4 Fulfulde Nominal Negation

Fulfulde is spoken across a broad geographical area of West Africa, and the Nigerian varieties form part of the eastern Fulfulde area. Ziegelmeyer (2009) specifically discusses eastern Fulfulde varieties in relation to the negation of non-indicative mood and notes that Fulfulde, Hausa and Kanuri exhibit differences between indicative and non-indicative negation. In the Taraba variety examined in this study, nominal negation is represented by several forms. The principal forms considered here are *walaa*, *wooda*, *maraa* and *naa*. The forms do not have identical syntactic behaviour. *Walaa* is used in existential constructions expressing non-existence or absence. *Wooda* is also associated with existential constructions, but the distributional relationship between *wooda*

and *walaa* must be established from the local data rather than assumed from forms found in other Fulfulde varieties. *Maraa* is associated with lack or non-possession, while *naa* participates in negative identification and contrastive nominal constructions. The existence of multiple nominal negative strategies is consistent with the broader typological observation that languages may distinguish different types of negation according to grammatical construction. Givón (2001) treats negation as an important component of grammatical organization and shows that negative strategies vary across languages and construction types.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Studies on Fulfulde Negation

Ziegelmeier (2009) investigated negation of non-indicative mood in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri. The study demonstrates that negative marking may differ according to grammatical mood and that the position of negative markers may change across constructions. The study is important to the present research because it establishes that Fulfulde negation is syntactically sensitive to construction type. However, its principal concern is non-indicative verbal negation rather than nominal negation. The present study extends the descriptive concern by focusing specifically on nominal structures. Siuto (2025) examined the morpho-semantic behaviour of verbal extensions in Fulfulde negation in Sardauna and Gashaka Local Government Areas of Taraba State. Their study shows that current research on Fulfulde in Taraba continues to document the relationship between grammatical structure and negation. Its relevance to the present study lies particularly in its attention to local Taraba varieties. Nevertheless, because its focus is verbal extensions and morpho-semantic interpretation, it leaves room for a dedicated investigation of nominal negative constructions. The gap between these studies and the present work is therefore primarily one of syntactic focus. Existing work establishes important facts about Fulfulde negation, but the syntactic organization of nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde remains insufficiently described.

2.2.2 Negation in Igbo

Ishaku (2020) examines the syntax of negative markers in Igbo and English. The study adopts a transformational-generative framework and a descriptive method. For Igbo, the study identifies negative morphemic elements such as *-ghi* and *beghi* and argues that the grammatical environment influences the negative form. The study also observes discontinuous properties in negative marking. The relevance of Ishaku's study to the present research lies in its demonstration that negative marking is closely connected to syntactic environment. The present study similarly examines the environments in which Fulfulde nominal negative markers occur. However, whereas Ishaku focuses significantly on verbal negative morphology, the present study concentrates on nominal constructions.

2.2.3 Negation in Idoma and Tiv

Sanusi and Oyewole (2019) examined the syntactic position of negative markers in Idoma and Tiv. Their study is particularly relevant because it focuses directly on syntax. They report that both languages place their negative markers in sentence-final position, even though both have SVO basic word order. Their findings demonstrate that the position of negative markers cannot be assumed from general word-order tendencies alone. The study provides an important methodological lesson for Fulfulde. Instead of assuming that a nominal negative marker must occur immediately before a noun because it is "negative," the researcher must establish its actual

syntactic distribution from data. The present study therefore examines each Fulfulde marker in its constructional environment.

2.2.4 Negation in Yoruba

Yoruba provides another useful point of comparison. Sanusi and Oyewole (2019) report that the Yoruba negative marker *kò* occurs preverbally, before the main verb, in contrast with the sentence-final negative markers of Idoma and Tiv. More specifically, Ilori (2020) examined *kó*-negative constructions in Yoruba and questioned the assumption that the negative element simply negates the immediately preceding nominal constituent. His analysis shows that the construction can have wider syntactic and semantic scope than the surface position of the marker might initially suggest. This is relevant to Fulfulde because it demonstrates the importance of distinguishing linear position from syntactic scope. Ajiboye's work on Yoruba *àì*-derived nominals is also relevant because it applies a Minimalist analysis to negative nominalization. The study proposes a structure in which a negative morpheme contributes to the formation of a Negative Phrase, which subsequently combines with a nominalizer to form a nominal expression. This supports the usefulness of functional projections such as NegP in analysing negative nominal structures.

2.2.5 Negation in Kanuri

Cyffer (2009) describes several patterns of negation in Kanuri and shows that negation is influenced by grammatical and areal factors. His discussion includes interactions between negation, tense-aspect-mood, focus and indefinite pronouns. The study also demonstrates that different grammatical environments may require different negative strategies. The relevance to the present study lies in the broader principle that negation should be analysed construction by construction. Although Kanuri and Fulfulde are not genetically identical languages, both occur within a region characterized by extensive linguistic contact. Ziegelmeyer (2009) similarly points out that patterns of negation found in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri may reflect wider West African and Sahelian tendencies.

2.2.6 Negation in Igala

Research on Igala demonstrates another type of syntactic complexity. Recent work describes Igala negation as involving a bipartite system in certain constructions, with a negative element associated with the subject and a sentence-final particle. This type of structure illustrates that a negative construction may involve more than one syntactic position and more than one overt element. This observation is relevant because the Taraba Fulfulde forms related to *naa* may also require analysis beyond the assumption that each form is a simple negative particle. Their structural interpretation should be determined by their distribution and constituent relationships.

2.2.7 Research Gap

The empirical literature demonstrates that negative marking is syntactically diverse across Nigerian languages. Studies have examined verbal negation, negative morphology, negative-marker position, negative scope and interactions with focus and grammatical mood. However, a clear gap remains in the systematic description of nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde. The present study addresses this gap by identifying nominal negative markers and examining their syntactic position, distribution, constituent relationships and phrase structures. The study therefore complements existing work rather than reproducing it.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 The Minimalist Program

The study adopts the Minimalist Program, principally associated with Noam Chomsky and formally presented in The Minimalist Program in 1995. Chomsky's work develops a generative approach in which linguistic expressions are generated through a computational system subject to economy and interface requirements. The Minimalist Program is useful for the present study because it treats syntactic structures as hierarchical rather than simply linear. A sentence or phrase is therefore understood as a configuration of constituents in which heads combine with complements and functional projections may host grammatical features. This makes the framework appropriate for examining whether a Fulfulde negative marker functions as a head, a predicate or another functional element. A particularly relevant concept is Merge, through which syntactic objects are combined to form larger structures. Under a simplified analysis, a nominal constituent may combine with a negative head to form a negative phrase. The precise structure depends on the properties of the language under investigation. For example, a simplified negative structure may be represented as: $\text{NegP} \rightarrow \text{Neg} + \text{NP}$ where Neg represents the negative element and NP represents the nominal constituent. However, this structure should not be imposed mechanically on Fulfulde. The actual position of the negative element must be determined from the data. Where a negative form behaves as a predicate rather than a simple functional head, the analysis should reflect that fact.

2.3.2 Relevance of the Minimalist Program to the Study

The Minimalist Program is appropriate for three major reasons. First, the study is concerned with constituent structure. Second, it investigates the syntactic position of negative markers. Third, it seeks to represent the relationship between negative markers and nominal constituents using phrase-structure representations. The theory has also been applied to African-language negation. For example, the Yoruba study of *àì*-derived nominals explicitly adopts the Minimalist Program and analyses the negative morpheme as projecting a Negative Phrase before nominalization occurs. Research on Igala has likewise used Minimalist tools to analyse negative clause structure. The present study therefore uses the Minimalist Program not to assume that all Fulfulde negation must have a universal NegP structure, but to provide a formal method for representing the hierarchical relations revealed by the data.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive linguistic design to examine the forms, distribution and syntactic structures of nominal negative constructions in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study focuses on Fulfulde-speaking communities in Taraba State, taking the Taraba variety as the primary object of analysis while recognizing possible internal variation among speakers. The data for the study are obtained primarily from native speakers through oral interviews, structured elicitation, observation, translation tasks and researcher intuition, with naturally occurring expressions used where available to supplement the elicited data. During elicitation, speakers are presented with positive nominal constructions and asked to provide their corresponding negative forms in order to identify the structural changes associated with nominal negation. The collected data are transcribed, organised and analysed qualitatively by examining the syntactic position and distribution of each negative marker, the constituents occurring before and after the marker, the types of nominal constituents involved, and the relationship between positive and negative constructions. The analysis also considers the structural interpretation of the

constructions and uses phrase-structure rules and simple syntactic tree representations where necessary to illustrate the constituent structure and position of the negative markers. This approach enables the study to provide a systematic description of the syntactic behaviour of nominal negative constructions in Taraba Fulfulde.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Present Nominal Negation In Taraba Fulfulde Variety.

S/N	Negation Markers	Gloss	Category
1	<i>walaa</i>	there is none	nominal
2	<i>wooda</i>	there is none	nominal
3	<i>maraa</i>	don't have	nominal
4	<i>naa</i>	not	nominal
5	<i>na non non</i>	not like that	nominal

***Walaa* “there is none”**

The negative marker *walaa* expresses the absence or non-existence of a nominal entity. Syntactically, it functions as the negative predicate and takes the relevant nominal constituent within its scope, negating its existence rather than a verbal action. Consider the following examples:

- (a) *woodi toggol nder akootiiru* (b) *walaa toggol nder akkootiiru*
 EXIS N.(shirt) PP N.(box) NEG.EXIT N.(shirt) PP.(in) N.(box)
 (there-is shirt in the box) (there is no shirt in the box)
- (c) *toggol woni walaa nder akootiiru*
 N.(shirt) DET NEG.EXIST PP.(in) N.(box)
 (its shirt that is not in the box)

Example (a) is an affirmative construction in which *woodi* occurs in the predicate position before the nominal constituent *toggol* (shirt), followed by the locative phrase *nder akootiiru*. In (b), the negative marker *walaa* replaces *woodi* in the same predicate position, with no movement of the nominal constituent. In (c), *toggol* moves to the sentence-initial position, while *walaa* occurs after *woni* in the negative predicate position, negating the presence of *toggol* in *nder akootiiru*.

***Wooda* “there is none”**

The negative marker *wooda* expresses the absence of a nominal entity. Syntactically, it occurs in the predicate position and negates the existence of the nominal constituent within its scope rather than a verbal action. Consider the below examples:

- (a) *woodi ceede nder sigirdu* (b) *nder sigirdu ndu woodi ceede*
 EXIS N.(money) PP.(in) N.(bank) PP N.(bank) CM.(class marker) EXIST N.(money)
 (there is money in the bank) (its money that is in the bank)
- (c) *wooda ceede nder sigirdu* (d) *ceede woni wooda nder sigirdu ndu*
 NEG.EXIST N.(money) PP.(in) N.(bank) N.(money) DET NEG.EXIST PP.(in) N.(bank) CM
 (there is no money in the bank) (its money that is not available in the bank)

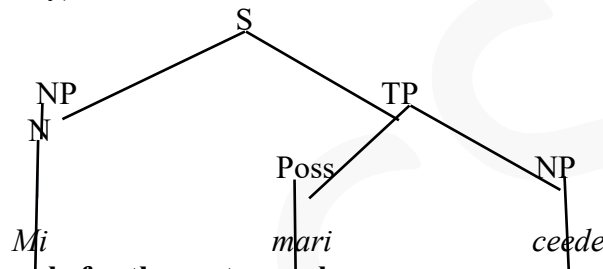
Example (a) is an affirmative construction where *woodi* occurs before *ceede* (money), followed by the locative phrase *nder sigirdu*. In (b), the locative phrase is fronted, while *woodi* remains before *ceede*. In (c), *wooda* replaces *woodi* in the same position, negating the existence of *ceede*. In (d),

ceede is fronted, while *wooda* follows *woni* in the negative predicate position and negates its availability in *nder sigirdu*.

***Maraa* “don’t have”**

Maraa means “do not have” or “does not have” and expresses lack of possession. Syntactically, it occurs in a nominal possessive construction and negates the possession of the relevant nominal constituent rather than a verbal action. As in examples

12. (a) *Mi marii ceede*
1ST SG POSS N.(money)
(I have money)



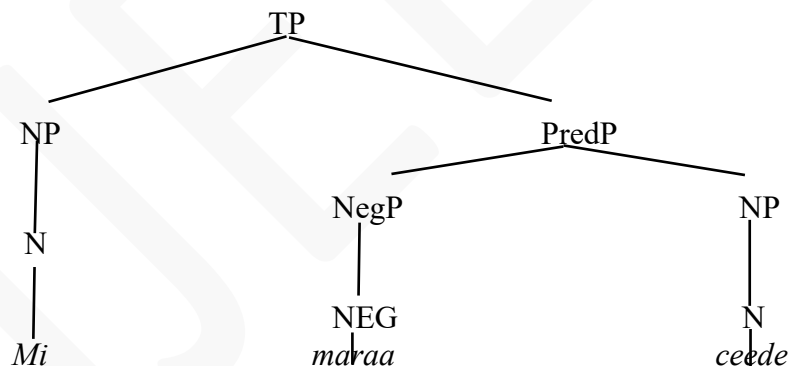
Phrase structure rule for the sentence above

S → NP + TP

TP → POSS + NP

NP → N

Mi maraa ceede
1ST SG NEG.Poss N.(money)
(I don’t have money)



Phrase structure rule for the above sentence

TP → NP + PredP

NP → Pron

Pron → *Mi*

PredP → NegP + NP

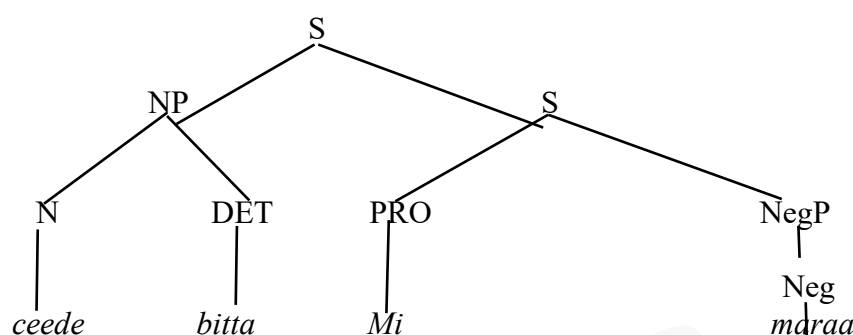
NegP → Neg

Neg → *maraa*

NP → N

N → *ceede*

- (b) *ceede bitta Mi maraa*
N.(money) DET 1ST SG NEG.(Poss)
(its money that I don’t have)



Phrase structure rule for the above sentence

$S \rightarrow NP + NegP$

$NP \rightarrow N + DET + PRO$

$NegP \rightarrow Neg$

The examples show that *maraa* functions as the negative possessive marker in the construction. In the affirmative sentence, *marii* occurs in the predicate position before *ceede*. In the negative construction, *maraa* replaces *marii* and occupies the same predicate position, with no movement of the negative marker. In the construction *ceede bitta Mi maraa*, the nominal constituent *ceede* is fronted to the sentence-initial position, while *maraa* remains in the negative predicate position after the subject *Mi*. Thus, the syntactic change involves the movement of the nominal constituent, while *maraa* remains in its negative predicate position and negates the possessive relationship.

Naa “don’t”

Naa means “not” and is used to negate a nominal identification or description. Syntactically, *naa* occurs before the nominal constituent that it negates, placing that constituent within its syntactic scope. It functions as the negative element of the nominal construction and negates the identification, classification or nominal relation expressed by the constituent that follows it.

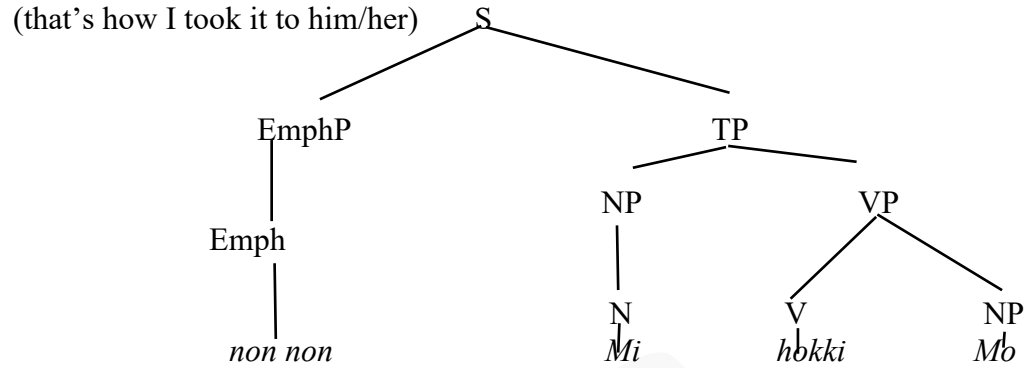
- | | |
|--|--|
| (a) <i>Alim soodi nagge</i>
N V.(bought) N.(cow)
(Alim bought a cow) | (c) <i>Naa Alim soodi Nagge</i>
NEG N V.(bought) N.(cow)
(not Alim who bought a cow) |
| (b) <i>Nagge Alim soodi</i>
N.(cow) N V.(bought)
(it was a cow that Alim bought) | (d) <i>Ali naa Nagge soodi</i>
N NEG N.(cow) V.(bought)
(not a cow that Alim bought) |

The examples show that *naa* functions as a nominal negative marker whose position varies according to the constituent being negated. In (c), *naa* occurs before the subject *Alim* and negates the identification of the subject. In (d), *naa* occurs between *Ali* and the nominal constituent *nagge*, thereby negating the identification of *nagge*. Thus, *naa* is positioned immediately before the constituent within its syntactic scope, while the verb *soodi* remains unaffected.

Na non non “not like that”

Na non non means “not like that” and is used to reject or negate a particular nominal identification or reference. Syntactically, the expression occurs before the constituent to which the negative reference applies. The constituent following the marker falls within its syntactic scope, and the expression negates that particular nominal reference or identification. It does not function to negate the verbal predicate of the sentence.

- (a) *non non Mi yaarani Mo*
EMP 1ST sg V.(took to) 3RD SG



$S \rightarrow \text{EmphP} + \text{TP}$

$\text{EmphP} \rightarrow \text{Emph}$

$\text{Emph} \rightarrow \text{non non}$

$\text{TP} \rightarrow \text{NP} + \text{VP}$

$\text{NP} \rightarrow \text{N}$

$\text{N} \rightarrow \text{Mi}$

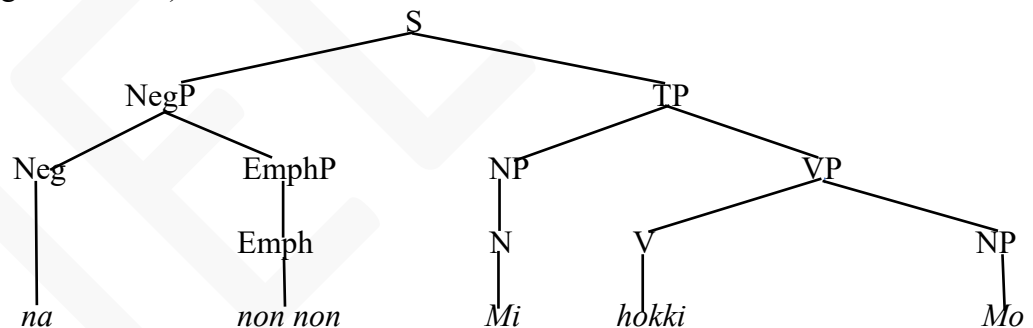
$\text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V} + \text{NP}$

$\text{V} \rightarrow \text{hokkii}$

$\text{NP} \rightarrow \text{N}$

$\text{N} \rightarrow \text{Mo}$

- (b) *na non non Mi hokkii Mo*
 NEG 1ST SG V.(gave) 3RD SG sg
 (that's not how I gave him/her)



Phrase structure rule for the above sentence

$S \rightarrow \text{NegP} + \text{TP}$

$\text{NegP} \rightarrow \text{Neg} + \text{EmphP}$

$\text{EmphP} \rightarrow \text{Emph}$

$\text{TP} \rightarrow \text{NP} + \text{VP}$

$\text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V} + \text{NP}$

The constructions show that, *non non* functions as an emphatic element, while *na non non* functions as a negative-emphatic construction. In (a), *non non* occurs in EmphP before the subject *Mi* and verb phrase *hokkii Mo*. In (b), *na* precedes *non non* to form NegP, giving the meaning “not like that.” The structures follow $S \rightarrow \text{NegP} + \text{TP}$, $\text{NegP} \rightarrow \text{Neg} + \text{EmphP}$, $\text{TP} \rightarrow \text{NP} + \text{VP}$, and $\text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V} + \text{NP}$. Thus, *na non non* negates the emphatic reference rather than the verbal predicate.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde is syntactically heterogeneous. The negative markers examined do not occur in one fixed position or form one uniform syntactic category. Instead, their distribution is closely related to the construction in which they occur. The first major finding is that *walaa* is associated with negative existential constructions. Its syntactic function is not simply to modify a noun but to establish the negative polarity of an existential predication. This distinguishes *walaa* from an ordinary negative determiner. The structure can consequently be represented through a negative functional projection whose complement contains the existential nominal constituent.

The second finding concerns *wooda*. The form is associated with positive existential predication and provides an important structural contrast with *walaa*. The relationship between the two forms shows that existence and non-existence are grammatically organized as contrasting predications rather than merely as positive and negative forms of the noun.

The third finding is that *maraa* has a possessive syntactic function. Unlike *walaa*, it does not primarily express the absence of an entity from a location. Rather, it denies a possession relationship. Its occurrence between the subject and the possessed noun provides evidence that it operates at the predicate level. The fourth finding concerns *naa*. The marker occurs in identificational and contrastive constructions. Its position between nominal elements indicates that nominal negation may involve predication rather than simple modification. This is consistent with broader findings in African languages that negative elements may have syntactic scope extending beyond the constituent closest to them. Ilori's (2020) analysis of Yoruba *kó* is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that the interpretation of a negative construction cannot always be determined from the linear position of the negative element alone.

The findings also support the position that syntactic description must be sensitive to individual language structure. Sanusi and Oyewole (2019) demonstrate this point clearly in Idoma and Tiv, where sentence-final negation occurs despite SVO word order. Similarly, Ishaku (2020) demonstrates that Igbo negative forms are sensitive to their grammatical environment. (Jolledu) These studies reinforce the methodological principle adopted here: the syntactic position of a negative element must be established from actual data rather than predicted from assumptions about negation. The findings also have implications for the theoretical framework. The Minimalist Program provides a useful means of representing the hierarchical relations among constituents. The use of NegP is particularly helpful for representing structures in which a negative element occupies a functional position over a nominal or predication constituent. Chomsky's Minimalist framework emphasizes hierarchical structure and efficient syntactic derivation, making it suitable for representing these relationships. (MIT Press) However, the analysis also shows that the same structural template should not be mechanically applied to all Fulfulde nominal negative constructions. *Walaa*, *maraa* and *naa* differ in distribution and constructional function. Consequently, a language-specific analysis is necessary.

The findings are also consistent with the broader typological observation that West African languages possess diverse negative strategies. Ziegelmeyer (2009) observes differences between negative strategies according to mood in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri, while the broader volume edited by Cyffer, Ebermann and Ziegelmeyer documents variation involving focus, tense-aspect-mood, negative indefinites and multiple negative marking strategies across West African languages. (Benjamins) Finally, the study demonstrates the importance of studying Fulfulde varieties individually. Existing research on Fulfulde often provides information from eastern Fulfulde or broader Fulfulde contexts. The present focus on Taraba contributes additional local

evidence. The recent Taraba study by Siuto and Sani (2025) confirms that varieties spoken in Sardauna and Gashaka continue to exhibit distinctive patterns of negation worthy of independent description.

Therefore, this study examines the syntactic description of nominal negation in Fulfulde, focusing on the Taraba Fulfulde variety. The study begins by establishing that negation is not restricted to verbal constructions but may also operate in nominal, existential, possessive and identificational structures. The conceptual review distinguishes syntax, negation and nominal negation and established the relevance of examining the structural position and distribution of negative markers. The empirical review demonstrates that negation has been studied extensively in Nigerian languages, including Fulfulde, Igbo, Yoruba, Idoma, Tiv, Igala and Kanuri. However, the majority of these studies have focused on verbal negation, general negative marking or sentence-level negation. The review therefore identified a need for a more focused description of nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde. The study adopts the Minimalist Program associated with Chomsky (1995) as its theoretical framework. The framework was considered appropriate because it provides a means of analysing hierarchical constituent structure and functional projections such as NegP. The methodology adopted a qualitative descriptive approach based on elicited and naturally occurring data. The analysis focuses on four major nominal negative forms: *walaa*, *wooda*, *maraa* and *naa*. The findings indicate that *walaa* participates primarily in negative existential constructions, *wooda* in positive existential constructions, *maraa* in negative possessive constructions, and *naa* in negative identificational and contrastive constructions. The markers consequently occupy different syntactic positions and enter into different constituent relationships.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that nominal negation in Taraba Fulfulde is a structurally diverse grammatical phenomenon rather than a single construction involving one general negative marker. The markers *walaa*, *maraa* and *naa* demonstrate distinct syntactic behaviours corresponding to existential, possessive and identificational structures, respectively, while *wooda* provides an important positive existential counterpart to negative existential constructions. The findings demonstrate that Fulfulde nominal negation operates through different syntactic configurations in which negative elements may function at the level of existential predication, possession or nominal identification. The study therefore establishes that a satisfactory description of Fulfulde negation must recognize the structural distinctions among nominal negative constructions rather than treating all negative forms as members of one undifferentiated category.

5.Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- i. further research should investigate the syntactic relationship between nominal and verbal negation in Fulfulde;
- ii. researchers should document additional nominal negative constructions across Taraba Fulfulde communities;
- iii. comparative studies may be undertaken to determine the extent of variation among Taraba, Adamawa, Gombe and other Fulfulde varieties;
- iv. future studies should investigate the interaction between negation and focus in Fulfulde nominal constructions;
- v. further research should examine the historical development of existential and possessive negative markers in Fulfulde; and

vi. researchers should combine syntactic, semantic and discourse-based approaches to provide a fuller account of Fulfulde negation.

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