

Chapter 8

Negation in Ngoreme

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This chapter is an overview of various aspects of negation in Ngoreme, a Lacustrine Bantu language spoken in the Mara Region of Tanzania. Ngoreme marks standard negation via verbal morphology, either with the prefix *ta-* following the subject marker (termed post-initial) or the prefix *te-* preceding the subject marker (termed pre-initial). These forms are in free variation in standard negation, reflecting an ongoing process of change from the original post-initial marking to the pre-initial one, likely due to the influence of related languages to the north. We also describe negation in non-main clauses, where only the older post-initial marking can be used, and the use of various negative auxiliaries in certain contexts, such as prohibitives and the *nondum* ('not yet'). We also cover non-verbal negation as well as various other related phenomena such as negative indefinites and reinforcement of negation. Finally, the chapter includes a separate discussion of diachrony.

Keywords: Mara, Bantu, negation, variation, language change.

1 The language

Ngoreme (ISO: ngq, Glottocode: ngur1263), known as *ekéngoreme* in the language, is a Lacustrine Bantu language spoken in the Mara Region of Tanzania by some 55,000 speakers (Hill et al. 2007, LoT 2009). The Mara Region covers an area between Lake Victoria and the Serengeti National Park, and the Ngoreme speakers are found in the central part of the area, neighbouring Kuria in the north, west and east, and the more closely related languages Ikizu, Ishenyi and Nata to the south. There is also a concentration of Ngoreme speakers found in the small town of Mugumu on the eastern edge of the region.

The Mara Region is an area of high linguistic diversity. Some twenty Bantu varieties are spoken in the area, along with the Nilotic languages Datooga (South



Nilotic), Luo (West Nilotic) and Maasai (East Nilotic) (Hill et al. 2007). There are also claims of a historical presence of Cushitic languages in the region (Ehret 1971; Schoenbrun 1994, 1997).

Bantu languages, grouped in the Benue-Congo branch of the Atlantic-Congo phylum, are commonly referred to using a system of alphanumeric codes following Guthrie (1948, 1967–71) and updated by Maho (2003, 2009).¹ Under this system, Ngoreme is classified as JE401 although it is also often thought to constitute a subgroup with other languages under the title of the Mara languages (Nurse 1999: 9; Nurse & Muzale 1999: 519; Nurse & Philippson 2003: 170), specifically along with Ikizu (ikz; JE402), Ikoma Ishenyi, Nata (with shared codes ntk; JE45) and Zanaki (zak; JE44), with which it forms the South Mara branch. The other branch of Mara languages is the North Mara group of Gusii (guz; JE42), Kabwa (cwa; JE405), Kuria (kuj; JE43) and Simbiti (ssc; JE431) (Aunio et al. 2019); the Suguti languages are also spoken in the Mara Region. All of these languages, with the exception of Gusii and Kuria in Kenya, are spoken within the Mara Region. While all of the Mara Bantu languages are classified in the Lacustrine (or Great Lakes) branch of Bantu (Schoenbrun 1994, 1997), it is not clear that they constitute a genealogical grouping (Walker 2013; Roth 2018). However, the unity of the South Mara branch seems to be confirmed, along with Ngoreme's inclusion therein, despite a relatively strong influence from neighbouring Kuria (Roth & Gibson 2019).

Despite it being a relatively small language in terms of the number of speakers, the language is vibrant and spoken by people of all ages. At the latest by the time they reach primary school, Ngoreme-speakers are exposed to Swahili – the official and national language in Tanzania, as well as the medium of instruction in all government primary schools. Swahili is the *lingua franca* used in all official dealings and in inter-ethnic communication. Although Ngoreme is a language of the home and of the village, Swahili may still be preferred as the medium of communication in towns and cities. There is no official Ngoreme language education at any level, nor is the language afforded any formal status in the country.

Two main dialects of Ngoreme have been identified, a southern dialect (Mwi-bara) and a northern dialect (Rogoro)², which are mutually intelligible. For the

¹This system is based on the division of language into 16 geographic zones, each of which is assigned a letter. This descriptive classification is geographic rather than genetic in nature. In this paper, we make reference to both the Guthrie codes and the ISO coding systems to facilitate use both by those familiar with the Guthrie classification system and those who are used to the ISO system.

²Although *royóro* actually means 'east' in Ngoreme.

most part, dialectal variation is not central to this paper and is only marked when this adds something to the broader discussion.

In phonological terms, Ngoreme is a fairly typical Bantu language. It exhibits a syllable structure in which the most common syllable is the open syllable CV(V) where the vowels are of the same quality (i.e., a long vowel). The consonant inventory is typical for the area and Bantu more generally; a dissimilation process called Dahl's Law (Davy & Nurse 1982) is active, whereby voiceless stops are voiced when the following syllable also has a voiceless consonant (Aunio et al. 2019: 507). The voiced counterpart of /k/ in the system is the fricative /ɣ/, and the reflexes of Bantu **b* and **d* are /β/ and /ɾ/, respectively, unless prenasalized (resulting in /mb/ and /nd/, respectively). There is no /p/. Ngoreme is a tonal language and exhibits a privative tone system, i.e., one with an opposition between H, marked with an acute accent throughout this paper,³ and Ø, left unmarked; the tone bearing unit is the syllable (Aunio 2017: 196).

Ngoreme has a 7-vowel system /i e ε a u o ɔ/, with an ATR distinction in the mid-vowels (Aunio et al. 2019: 503). However, the system seems to be in a state of transition towards a 5-vowel one /i e a u ɔ/, with all mid-vowels being recategorized as –ATR. This can be seen synchronically in the split in the lexicon in which only five vowels are used in verbs, while nouns have seven vowels, reflecting the earlier historic vowel system. There are also inconsistencies in ATR-based vowel harmony processes (Aunio et al. 2019: 506).

Ngoreme exhibits a dominant SVO constituent order and head-marking morphology. Bantu languages are known for their systems of noun classes which function as grammatical genders. Ngoreme is no exception to this and has 19 noun classes. By convention, these noun classes are numbered. In the typical Bantu fashion, classes 1–10 in Ngoreme represent singular-plural pairs. Classes above this include those that form their plurals in other distinct classes (e.g., class 11 which has most of its plurals in class 10, but also a handful in classes 6 and 14; cf. Laine 2023: 61–62). There are also two diminutive classes (classes 12 and 19) and an augmentative class (class 20). Class 15 contains verbal nouns – or infinitives – which similarly have no singular versus plural distinction. Another widespread Bantu feature is the use of locative classes. Ngoreme has three locative classes (16,17,18) which represent specific, general and internal location, respectively.

Nominal forms typically comprise of the noun stem, a nominal prefix (as determined by the noun class) and a pre-prefix. This pre-prefix is also termed the

³There is some variation and fluctuation in the tones in Ngoreme, and the system is not yet fully analysed. The examples in this paper are tone marked according to our best current understanding, but this should be considered a preliminary analysis. We are thankful to Lotta Aunio for her help with the tones.

augment in the wider literature on Bantu – a term that we too will employ here. The augment is glossed AUG, but there is no connection to an augmentative function. Across the language family, the presence of the augment is dependent on a number of factors which often seem to relate to specificity, topicality and definiteness either synchronically or at least diachronically (De Blois 1970; Van de Velde 2019). The augment is also sensitive to negative polarity and focus. Since the augment does not typically appear in negative contexts, it is absent from many of the examples in the current paper (see further discussion in §4.3). The nominal prefix is often phonologically determined with variant forms appearing in different contexts. Nominal dependents such as adjectives, numerals, demonstratives and adnominals also exhibit agreement with the noun class of the nominal they modify.

The Ngoreme verb is constructed in the usual Bantu manner in which not all elements of the verb are obligatorily present, but those that are must appear in a specific order. The verbal complex is agglutinative, and prefixes and suffixes combine with an obligatory verb stem to encode a range of grammatical distinctions such as tense-aspect-mood, polarity and associated motion. The structure of the verb is outlined in Figure 1 below.

Pre-initial – Initial – Post-initial – Pre-radical – Radical – Pre-final – Final – Post-final

Figure 1: Structure of the Ngoreme verb

This structure is exemplified in (1) where the pre-initial marker appears as *te-* and encodes negation, the initial position contains the subject marker *βa-* (which although indexing third person plural, also belongs to noun class 2 – hence the “2” in the glossing) and the pre-radical appears as the past tense marker *á-*. The radical is *-yi* ‘go’ and the final positive hosts the perfective marker *-ire*. Similarly, in (2) the prefix *βa-* appears in the initial position and the imperfective aspectual prefix appears in the pre-radical position. However, in this example, the applicative marker *-er* also appears in the pre-final position.

- (1) *te-βá-á-yi-ire*
NEG-SBJ2-PST-go-PFV
‘They did not go.’
- (2) *βa-ra-sáám-er-a*
SBJ2-IPFV-move-APPL-FV
‘They are moving [to somewhere].’

The language also employs auxiliary forms to encode a range of tense-aspect-mood distinctions (see also §2.2). In auxiliary constructions, an auxiliary form is typically followed (although see also §4.6.4) by a lexical main verb with temporal and aspectual information distributed across the two forms.

Unless otherwise indicated, data from this paper come from original field-based data collection by the three authors in the Mara Region of Tanzania, or by other members of the Mara Project carried out at the University of Helsinki during 2016–2021. The description of negation in Ngoreme in this chapter is based on the questionnaire provided by the editors (Miestamo 2025 [this volume]) and mirrors its structure.

2 Clausal negation

2.1 Standard negation

Standard negation in Ngoreme is achieved by adding a negative prefix to the verb. The prefix is most typically *te-* which appears before all other markers in the verbal complex, preceding the subject marker in the so-called pre-initial position (see Figure 1 above). While affirmative main clause verb forms are commonly – albeit far from necessarily – marked with the focus marker *N-*, this does not appear in negative constructions.⁴ Compare the affirmative and negative examples in (3) and (4) below.

- (3) *m-ba-a-yí-íre* *mwanza*
 FOC-SBJ2-PST-go-PFV Mwanza
 ‘They went to Mwanza.’

- (4) *te-βá-á-yi-ire* *mwanza*
 NEG-SBJ2-PST-go-PFV Mwanza
 ‘They did not go to Mwanza.’

⁴In Ngoreme, the pre-initial prefix *N-* is typically used to convey verb focus or assertion about the event depicted in the (predicate) verb and may be omitted when such criteria are not met. However, there are some affirmative contexts where pre-initial *N-* is obligatorily omitted. These include focus construction where focus is placed on some constituent other than the (predicate) verb (e.g., in content questions and answers), as well as relative and other subordinate constructions (i.e., in non-main clauses). Absence of a focus nasal may also be used to convey modal readings of uncertainty. See Aunio et al. (2019), Roth (2018: 35–36), Bernander & Laine (2020) for more elaboration on pre-initial *N-* and its function(s) in Ngoreme and its closest relatives.

There is, however, an alternative negative marker: a prefix *ta-*, which can occur between the subject and TAM markers in the *post-initial* slot of the verbal complex. Thus, example (4) above can also be formed as in (5):

- (5) *βa-tá-á-yi-ire* *mwanza*
 SBJ2-NEG-PST-go-PFV Mwanza
 ‘They did not go to Mwanza.’

The strategy involving the post-initial marker is the only available means of negating verbs in other South Mara languages, while the pre-initial *te-* (or a related form) is used in the North Mara languages, including Kuria, with which Ngoreme has been in contact. The pre-initial marker thus appears to be an innovation in Ngoreme. The choice of marker in Ngoreme seems to be a matter of free variation: there is no difference in meaning, and the same speakers will alternate between the two forms in similar environments. While speakers are aware of dialectal differences and recognize certain grammatical variations as dialectal, they do not consider the choice of the negative prefix to represent such a variation, and speakers accept both forms.

The idea that the post-initial negation marker in Ngoreme is the older form and the pre-initial one an innovation is further supported by the fact that, of the two prefixes, in negated subordinate clauses, only the post-initial marker may be used (see also §2.2, §2.4 and the discussion in §4.6.3). This is also true of copula verbs (see also §2.3). An additional twist in the position of the pre-initial negative marker in relation to the subject prefix arises when the subject is either 2SG or noun class 1, 3 or 9. In these cases, the subject prefix is a single vowel (*o-*, *a-*, *o-* and *e-*, respectively), and in negative verbs, this fuses with the negative marker resulting in the forms *to-*, *ta-*, *to-* and *te-*. In negative main clauses, these are the only forms available with these subjects. However, in subordinate clauses, these forms will obligatorily separate into a subject marker followed by the post-initial negative *-ta-*: *o-ta-* (SBJ2SG-NEG), etc. (see also §2.4).

The affirmative imperfective prefix is *ra-*,⁵ as in (6). However, in negated forms, an alternative imperfective marker (*V*)*ko*-⁶ is used together with the negative prefix, as in (7).

⁵The /r/ is strengthened to /d/ when prenasalized.

⁶<V> here stands for an unspecified vowel, that is, a vowel which merely lengthens the preceding vowel and lacks a vowel quality of its own. The marker *Vko-* is used for both affirmative and negative imperfectives in Ngoreme’s closest relatives Ikoma, Ishenyi and Nata. The affirmative *ra-* seems to be a Ngoreme innovation, and most likely derived from the progressive *ra-* still found in the other languages. See §2.3 on negative copulas for another instance where Ngoreme preserves an older form in negation.

- (6) *rééro n-dá-yi ku-rem-a*
 today SBJ1SG-IPFV-go INF-farm-FV
 ‘Today I am going farming.’
- (7) *rééro té-η-ko-yi ku-rem-a*
 today NEG-SBJ1SG-IPFV-go INF-farm-FV
 ‘Today I am not going farming.’

Unlike many of its neighbouring languages and the Bantu languages more generally, Ngoreme lacks a morphological progressive form. Instead, a periphrastic progressive with a copular auxiliary is commonly used in the affirmative as in (8). The negated equivalent of this form is most often a negated imperfective as in (9), but it is also possible to negate the auxiliary, in which case auxiliary inversion does not occur (see §4.6.4 for more on inverted auxiliary constructions). There is thus an asymmetric tendency here, but the alternation is not fully grammaticalized; see Table 1 below, along with the accompanying note on paradigmatic asymmetry.

- (8) *η-ko-rjer-a βa-aní*
 FOC-INF-run-FV SBJ2-PRS.COP
 ‘They are running.’
- (9) *te-βá-áko-rjer-a*
 NEG-SBJ2-IPFV-run-FV
 ‘They are not running.’

Perfective aspect in Ngoreme is coded with the marker *-ire/-iri*, a reflex of a common Bantu suffix and the Proto-Bantu form **-ide*. The TAM prefix slot is left empty. The variation in the translation of (10) shows that change-of-state verb like ‘sleep’ (~ ‘fall asleep’) conjugated in this verb form may either gain a perfect(ive) or a (present) resultative reading, depending on clause-external issues of viewpoint or the general context in which the propositions are uttered. See Botne (2025) on this common behaviour of the Bantu perfect(ive) and Roth (2018: 54–70) on Western Serengeti specifically. In negation, either the pre- or post-initial negative prefix may be used, as illustrated in example (11a) and (11b), respectively.

- (10) *m-bá-mis-iri*
 FOC-SBJ2-sleep-PFV
 ‘They have slept.’ (‘They are asleep.’ / ‘They slept.’)

- (11) a. *βa-tá-mis-iri*
 SBJ2-NEG-sleep-PFV
 ‘They have not slept.’
 b. *te-βá-mis-iri*
 NEG-SBJ2-sleep-PFV
 ‘They have not slept.’

The past tense is formed by combining a tense prefix *a-* with the perfective form, as illustrated in examples (12) and (13). The past tense is thus only differentiated from the perfective by vowel length preceding the macrostem: *βatámisiri* ‘they have not slept’, as in (11a), or *βatáámisiri* ‘they did not sleep’.

- (12) *n-a-a-rúy-ire* *e-βj-ákori* *ítfo*
 FOC-SBJ1-PST-cook-PFV AUG-8-food yesterday
 ‘He cooked food yesterday.’
 (13) *tá-á-ruy-ire* *βj-ákori* *ítfo*
 NEG.SBJ1-PST-cook-PFV 8-food yesterday
 ‘I did not cook food yesterday.’

Other morphological TAM categories in Ngoreme include the habitual (*háa-/ráa-*),⁷ the (counterfactive) conditional (*nga-*), the narrative (*Vka-*) and the situative (*ko-*).⁸ Of these, only habitual forms, as in (14) and (15), are found negated in our data: All instances make use of the post-initial marker.

- (14) *βa-ta-ráá-rjer-a*
 SBJ2-NEG-HAB-run-FV
 ‘They don’t run (regularly).’
 (15) *tu-rá-β-a* *tu-ta-ráá-βin-a*
 SBJ1PL-IPFV-be-FV SBJ1PL-NEG-HAB-sing-FV
 ‘We will not be singing (regularly).’

In narrative and situative contexts, other negated forms, mainly the past and imperfective, respectively, are used instead. In conditionals, a negated auxiliary formally similar to the periphrastic progressive is used as in example (16) below.

⁷Ngoreme has two habitual markers, *háa-* and *ráa-*, apparently in free variation. Roth (2018: 73) mentions the possibility that the latter is an emergent form analogically related to the habitual *háa-* and the imperfective *ra-*.

⁸Ngoreme is analysed as having a situative formed with the prefix *ko-* by Roth (2018). See, however, Laine (2023: 171–174) for a critical discussion.

- (16) *ti-n-ááre ko-yí musoma hata kama o-mu-nene*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-PST.COP INF-go Musoma even if AUG-1-fat
a-nga-n-tɔm-íre
 SBJ1-COND-OM1SG-send-PFV
 ‘I would not have gone to Musoma even if the boss had sent me.’

The morphological negatability of Ngoreme TAM categories is summarized in Table 1. As shown, there is quite a bit of paradigmatic asymmetry in Ngoreme (see Miestamo 2005, 2013), particularly in the imperfective domain, where only the habitual and the imperfective proper are regularly negated as such. The periphrastic progressive exhibits some variability; as discussed above, it is typically negated using the morphological imperfective, but the auxiliary verb can be negated instead, retaining the progressive construction. The asymmetry in Ngoreme seems to be a fairly clear case of neutralization of TAM distinctions, the most common situation in asymmetric paradigms (e.g., Miestamo 2005: 54ff).

Table 1: TAM forms that can be morphologically negated in Ngoreme

Category	Marker	Negatability	Most common negative category
Perfective	<i>-ire</i>	yes	Perfective
Past	<i>a-...-ire</i>	yes	Past
Narrative	<i>ka-</i>	-	
Habitual	<i>háá-</i>	yes	Habitual
Imperfective	<i>ra-/Vko-</i>	yes	Imperfective
Situative	<i>ko-</i>	-	
Progressive	<i>N-ko- + COP</i>	(yes)	
Imperative	-	-	Subjunctive
Subjunctive	<i>-e</i>	yes	
Conditional	<i>nga-</i>	-	

As will be returned to in §4.6.4, negation of the present progressive and past progressive is also associated with a change in word order. While the present progressive is formed through an infinitive-based verb-auxiliary construction (17), its negative counterpart exhibits the more typologically expected auxiliary-verb order albeit with the addition to the negative morphology on the auxiliary form (18).

- (17) *rééro ŋ-ko-yi to-oni tarisaraamu*
 today FOC-INF-go SBJ1PL-PRS.COP Dar es Salaam
 ‘Today we are going to Dar es Salaam.’
- (18) *rééro tu-tá-re ko-yi tarisaraamu*
 today SBJ1PL-NEG-PRS.COP INF-go Dar es Salaam
 ‘Today we are not going to Dar es Salaam.’

2.2 Negation in non-declaratives

Ngoreme speakers employ different strategies for expressing negative imperatives, here also referred to as prohibitives. In accordance with a common trait across Bantu (cf. Devos & Van Olmen 2013; Nurse 2008: 191–193; Güldemann 1999), prohibitives are most commonly expressed in Ngoreme with a complex construction consisting of an auxiliary and a full verb occurring in the infinitive form.

As illustrated in (19–21), two different verbs are employed as prohibitive auxiliaries, viz. *-tiy-*, with the source meaning ‘stop, leave off, avoid’, and *-Vĩ-* with the source meaning ‘come’.⁹ When functioning as a prohibitive auxiliary, *-Vĩ-* furthermore contains the standard negative prefix *ta-*.

- (19) *o-tiy-ε ko-rút-a e-siyára*
 SBJ2SG-stop-SBJV INF-pull-FV AUG-9.cigarette
 ‘Don’t smoke (the cigarette)!’
- (20) *tíy-a yw-ikára há-no*
 stop-FV INF-become_seated 16-DEM
 ‘Don’t sit here!’
- (21) *u-tá-átĩ-a ko-r-a e-ńáma*
 SBJ2SG-NEG-come-FV INF-eat-FV AUG-9.meat
 ‘Don’t eat meat!’

Notice that these constructions also differ with regard to the final vowel, the construction with *-tiy-* being variably inflected with the final subjunctive *-ε* (19) or the vowel *-a* of the basic imperative verb form (20), in which case it also lacks

⁹Recall that the <V> here stands for an unspecified vowel, that is, a vowel which merely lengthens the preceding vowel and lacks a vowel quality of its own. Note that the diacritic on /tʃ/ follows IPA convention for an affricate consonant and does not span over the <V>.

subject marking. Whereas the former is typically used for milder and more polite commands and may be used for directives which include performers other than the second person, the latter is used only for second person singular directives and typically conveys a stronger command. This systematization is in accordance with the common division of labour within the affirmative imperative-hortative system in Bantu (cf. Devos & Van Olmen 2013; Nurse & Devos 2019), as illustrated in (22) and (23) below.

- (22) *tuk-á*
dig-FV
'Dig!'

- (23) *βa-tuk-ε*
SBJ2-dig-SBJV
'They should dig.'

The construction with $-V\widehat{t\acute{f}}-$, which employs a morphological construction with the post-initial negator and a final vowel *-a*, formally adheres to what is the basic, negative-imperative verb form SBJ-*ta*-B-verb in Ngoreme's closest Western Serengeti relatives. As further discussed in §4.6.3, however, this is not the case in Ngoreme, where the reflex of this synthetic non-declarative negative verb form has been reinterpreted with "ironic" non-negative readings.

There is a strong tendency of a functional division of labour between the two auxiliaries which revolves around the notion of "retrospective" versus "prospective" negation (cf. van der Auwera 2010). This functional partition is connected to the lexical semantics of the respective etymons of these negative auxiliaries, in line with Hopper's (1991) theory of persistence in grammaticalized (or grammaticalizing) elements. Thus, whereas *-tiy-* typically is used retrospectively for commanding the addressee to stop the continuation of an already initiated activity, as represented in the second infinitive verb, the construction with $-V\widehat{t\acute{f}}-$, with its de-venitive (cf. Dahl 2000), prospective reading, more readily denotes that the addressee should not commence in the event depicted in the full verb altogether. This fact may be illustrated with the minimal pairs shown in (24) and (25) below.

- (24) *o-tíy-ε* *ku-γər-a*
SBJ2sg-stop-SBJV INF-buy-FV
'Don't buy!'
(the addressee is in the shop and s/he has already started buying items)

- (25) *u-tá-átǃ-a* *ku-γɔr-a*
 2sg-NEG-come-FV INF-buy-FV
 ‘Don’t buy!’
 (the addressee has not started the act of buying but is still on his/her way to the shop)

The two negative auxiliaries described in this section are additionally used in other non-standard, or marked clause types, where it would seem that this retrospective-prospective division continue to hold and influence their usage patterns to some extent. This fact is further discussed in §2.4.

As mentioned, it is possible to form a directive construction by the use of the (standard) post-initial negative morpheme *ta-* plus the basic affirmative imperative verb form, a construction which, however, has been reinterpreted with non-negative senses. Notice however, that some Ngoreme speakers contrast this essentially affirmative expression with an actual negative imperative verb form, which includes an additional formative *ka(a)-* attached in a position between the negative prefix and the verb stem (26).

- (26) *u-ta-káá-yi* *na* *a-βá-nto* *a-βa-sinéénu*
 SBJ2SG-NEG-POT-go COM AUG-2-people AUG-2-bad
 ‘Don’t go (~get acquainted) with bad people.’

This prefix does not appear in non-negative constructions in Ngoreme. However, as further discussed in §4.6.3, it is used in several of the languages of the Northern Mara Bantu subgroup as a more general modal ~ irrealis ~ non-indicative marker (hence the glossing as POT = potential).

For some speakers of Ngoreme (possibly exclusively speakers of the northern Rogoro dialect), the prohibitive construction with *-Vtǃ-* once again has to include the additional prefix of the form *ka(a)-*, as in (27). Notice however, that due to Dahl’s Law, a type of voicing dissimilation synchronically productive in Ngoreme (cf. §1 above), the velar plosive of the formative *ka(a)-* becomes a voiced /y/ in this construction. Additionally, the underlying sequence of three vowels yielded by the combination of this form with this verb stem, viz. *°/kaa-Vtǃ-/*, is reduced to a sequence of two vowels in actual speech.

- (27) *u-ta-yá-átǃ-a* *ko-rút-a* *e-siyára*
 SBJ2SG-NEG-POT-come-FV INF-pull-FV AUG-9.cigarette
 ‘Don’t smoke the cigarette.’

Note finally that no special negators exist for interrogative clauses. It may be mentioned, however, that the post-initial strategy is preferred in content interrogation as the predicate is extra-focal in such contexts (see the discussion around example (80) in §4.3).

2.3 Negation in stative predications

Affirmative constructions in the present tense involving equation, proper inclusion and attribution (which have, along with locatives, existentials and possessives, been labeled “stative predications” by e.g. Payne 1997: 111ff; see also Veselina 2014) are all formed the same way in Ngoreme, with the copula *nV=/N-*, as in (28).

- (28) *e-yi-yeso ki-no η=kj-éye*
 AUG-7-knife 7-PROX.DEM COP=7-sharp
 ‘This knife is sharp.’

Locative predication on the other hand requires a fully inflected copula verb agreeing with the subject. There are three copula verbs lending their forms to different temporal reference points: *-Vre*, *-Vni* and *-raβa*¹⁰ for past, present and future, respectively (see Bernander & Laine 2020 for more on the copula verbs in Western Serengeti). The copula verbs take a subject marker, often preceded, like other verbs, by a focus marker. With copula constructions, however, the focus marker (formally similar and historically related to the ascriptive copula) is somewhat more productive, and may often appear on a different constituent as in (29), exemplifying a present tense locative predication.

- (29) *jaáwa η=kó-mo-te a-aní*
 1a.cat FOC=LOC17-3-tree 1-PRS.COP
 ‘The cat is in the tree.’¹¹

¹⁰The “future copula” is quite transparently the verb ‘to be(come)’ in the imperfective, but it functions as part of the copula paradigm, always has a future reading, and must be used for future stative predications. Incidentally, Ngoreme has no morphological future tense for other verbs. For more on the cross-linguistically common grammaticalization of become-verbs into future markers (see Dahl 2000 and Kuteva et al. 2019: 86–87).

¹¹‘1a’ in this and other glossed examples refers to the so called noun class 1a, comprising a set of nouns “that lack a prefix in the singular [but] trigger class 1 agreement. It typically contains proper names, some kinship terms, personified animals and borrowings.” (Van de Velde 2019: 240).

Other types of stative predications also require a copula verb in the past and future tense. Copula verbs are also used for all stative predications when negated, in which case a negative prefix is added. As with other verbs, either the pre- or post-final negator may be used with copula verbs, and there is no distinction in meaning between, say, *te-ya-re* or *ya-ta-re* ‘it (CL6) is not’. In present and future forms, the copula verb itself changes when negated. The present tense *-Vni* becomes *-re*, as in (30) below, reflecting the fact that the affirmative present tense copula is an innovation in the Western Serengeti languages, and the older *-re* form, reconstructed for Proto-Bantu as **di* (Bastin et al. 2002), is preserved in negatives. In the future form, *-raβa* becomes *-kuβa*, with the affirmative imperfective prefix changing to the corresponding negative marker – again an older one – as with other verbs.

Examples of negated stative predications can be seen in the examples below which show equation (30–31), proper inclusion (32) and attribution (33–34).

- (30) *tʃóóni ta-ré* *mra* *waito*
 John SBJ1.NEG-PRS.COP brother our
 ‘John is not my brother.’ (lit. ‘our brother’)
- (31) *yá-no* *te-yá-re* *ma-hemba*
 6-PROX.DEM NEG-SBJ6-PRS.COP 6-millet
 ‘This is not millet.’
- (32) *eeni té-n-de* *mwánafunzi*
 I NEG-SBJ1SG-PRS.COP student
 ‘I am not a student.’
- (33) *eeni té-n-de* *m-támbe*
 I NEG-SBJ1SG-PRS.COP 1-tall
 ‘I am not tall.’
- (34) *e-yi-yesɔ* *kí-no* *te-ké-re* *kj-éye*
 AUG-7-knife 7-PROX.DEM NEG-7-PRS.COP 7-sharp
 ‘This knife is not sharp.’

Negative locative predications are seen in (35–37) below.

- (35) *e-yi-táβ* *te-ké-re* *ko-méza*
 AUG-7-book NEG-7-PRS.COP LOC17-table
 ‘The book is not on the table.’

- (36) *te-βá-re sokoni*
 NEG-2-PRS.COP at_the_market
 ‘They [people] are not at the market.’
- (37) *ɲááwa tá-re ko-mó-te*
 1a.cat SBJ1.NEG-PRS.COP LOC17-3-tree
 ‘The cat is not in the tree.’

In present tense third person singular contexts, subject marking may be left out in favour of the invariable negative copula *tere* (or occasionally *tare*). There is some variation as to whether the form *tere* is deemed acceptable also with human subjects, with some speakers preferring *tare*, marked for noun class 1.¹²

Existentials in Ngoreme are formed and negated with a dedicated existential construction involving the same copula verbs as other stative predications (cf. Bernander & Laine 2020). A type of locative existential is formed by adding a locative pro-form (in the terminology of Bentley et al. 2013 and Bentley 2017) to a plain locational clause, namely the locative verbal clitic *=ho* (class 16) or *=mu* (class 18). These are added to the copula verb, as exemplified in the affirmative existential in (38) and the negated one in (39). Note that the word order in existentials is flexible and plays no role in negation (see Bernander & Laine 2020 for more).

- (38) *βa-ani=hó a-βá-nto a-βa-néne a-βá-áru*
 SBJ2-PRS.COP=LOC16 AUG-2-person AUG-2-fat AUG-2-many
 ‘There are many fat people.’
- (39) *a-má-ntífe ya-tá-re=mu mó-ndoa*
 AUG-6-water SBJ6-NEG-PRS.COP=LOC18 LOC18-bucket.9
 ‘There is no water in the bucket.’

Possessive predication most typically utilizes a specific possessive verb *-ɣɔɔte* (from *kuyɔɔta*, ‘to catch, to hold’). This can be seen in the examples below where *-ɣɔɔte* appears with the first person singular marker in (40) and can be negated as shown in (41) where the negative prefix *tée-* also appears. The possessive verb *-ɣɔɔte* can also be used for inanimate possessors, as in (42) and (43).

¹²There is some obscurity with these forms, since *tare* is both a form unmarked for subject with the post-initial negator, and the class 1 form, where the negative prefix (either *te-* or *ta-*) and the subject marker *a-* coalesce into an indivisible whole. On the other hand, *tere*, the non-agreeing form with the pre-initial negator, is homonymous with the form marking a class 9 subject.

- (40) *né-ŋ-gɔɔtɛ e-séése*
 SBJ1SG-have AUG-9.dog
 ‘I have a dog.’
- (41) *té-ŋ-gɔɔtɛ séése*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-have 9.dog
 ‘I don’t have a dog.’
- (42) *e-númba é-no n-é-yɔɔtɛ e-ye-séku*
 AUG-9.house 9-PROX.DEM FOC-SBJ9-have AUG-7-door
 ‘This house has a door.’
- (43) *e-númba é-no te-yɔɔtɛ ye-séku*
 AUG-9.house 9-PROX.DEM SBJ9.NEG-have 7-door
 ‘This house doesn’t have a door.’

Alternatively, a comitative construction with the comitative element *nV*, prefixed with the subject marker, can be used. Both this and the *-yɔɔtɛ* form can be negated with either a pre- or post-final negator. Note the absence of the augment in the negative construction in example (45), in contrast to example (44).

- (44) *níí-ne e-séése*
 1SG-COM AUG-9.dog
 ‘I have a dog.’
- (45) *n-tá-na séése*
 1SG-NEG-COM 9.dog
 ‘I don’t have a dog.’

2.4 Negation in non-main clauses

Different strategies of non-main clause negation can be found in Ngoreme. The first strategy is simply to use standard morphological negation. For almost all non-main clauses, however, only the post-initial prefix may be employed. For example, the relative clause in (46) contrasts with the negated main clause in (47) where either a pre- or post-initial prefix may be used. (The relativizer originates from a demonstrative as can be seen in example (46) where the identical element occurs twice, representing both meanings.)

- (46) *βí-no ne=e-βj-ákori βí-no n-tá-áyo-tun-a*
 8-DEM COP=AUG-8-food 8-REL SBJ1SG-NEG-IPFV-want-FV
 ‘This is food that I don’t want.’
- (47) *e-βj-ákori βí-no té-η-ko-βe-tun-a*
 AUG-8-food 8-DEM NEG-SBJ1SG-IPFV-OM8-want-FV
 ‘This food, I don’t want (it).’

Relative clauses are in general construed with the post-initial negative prefix. Furthermore, several types of adverbial clause constructions are derived from a relative construction with the locative noun class 16 relativizer *háno*. Consider example (48) which relativizes a locative head noun subject – viz. the generic *ahase* ‘place’, but which could also be analysed as functioning as a locative clause.

- (48) *tu-ra-yí musóma a-há-se há-no tu-ta-mep-ire*
 SBJ1PL-IPFV-go Musoma AUG-16-place 16-REL SBJ1PL-NEG-live-PFV
 ‘We are going to Musoma, a place where (~at which) we don’t live.’

The construction with the locative relativizer recurs in several negated adverbial clause constructions, not only in negative locative clauses or temporal clauses like (52). It also occurs in “anti-circumstantial” clauses – viz., abessive-like ‘without’-constructions (cf. §3.3), but where the absentee is not a nominal referent but an event coded in a dependent clause (cf. Mauri & Sansò 2019; Bernander et al. 2023a) as in (49), as well as (at least some types of) negative conditional clauses, as evident in (50). Being formally equal to relative constructions, these types of adverbial clauses are also negated with the post-initial prefix.

- (49) *te-mú-n-saiy-ire ha-no mu-tá-map-ire*
 NEG-SBJ2PL-OBJ1SG-like-PFV 16-REL SBJ2PL-NEG-know-PFV
 ‘You detest me (lit. don’t like me) without knowing me.’
- (50) *há-no a-ta-n-deh-iire e-náuri*
 16-REL SBJ1-NEG-OBJ1SG-pay-APPL:PFV AUG-9.ticket
te-η-ku-yárək-a ká
 NEG-SBJ1-IPFV-return-FV home
 ‘If he does not pay me for my ticket, I will not go back home.’

As mentioned in §2.1, the subject markers for 2SG and noun classes 1, 3 and 9 fuse with the negative prefix, yielding the opaque forms *to-*, *ta-*, *to-* and *te-*, and in these cases there is no distinction between post- and pre-initial negators.

In relative clauses as well as in other subordinate clauses derived from relatives, however, these fused forms become separated, reflecting the use of post-initial *ta-* in all non-main clause cases, with which it is clearly connected. In example (51), this is illustrated with a canonical verb for class 9, while (52) shows the 2SG prefix separated from the negative prefix on a copula verb.

- (51) *ha-no n=a-há-sɛ ha-no é-ŋ-ka i-tá-áko-ɣwɛm-a*
 16-DEM COP=AUG-16-place 16-REL AUG-9-lion SBJ9-NEG-IPFV-hunt-FV
 ‘This is an area where the lion doesn’t hunt.’
- (52) *n-aa-ɣí-íre wáátʃo ká ha-no u-ta-aré=ho*
 SBJ1SG-PST-go-PFV yours home 16-REL SBJ2SG-NEG-PST.COP-16.LOC
 ‘I went to your place when you weren’t there.’

Negated reason clauses, indicated with the subordinator *yo kuɓa* not by a relativizer, are an exception to the hegemony of post-initial negative morphology in non-main clauses. As seen in (53), a reason clause may instead be negated with pre-initial negation, probably as it is not derived from a relative clause but more likely is paratactic in origin.

- (53) *ta-a-yu-tór-a kw-ánde-k-a yó kuɓa ta-a-na e-karámu*
 NEG-SBJ1-IPFV-can-FV INF-write-FV for that NEG-SBJ1-COM AUG-9.pencil
 ‘She cannot write because she has no (lit. is not with a) pencil.’

In addition to these instances of morphological negation, the two negative auxiliary verbs (discussed in detail in §2.2) also have an extended use in non-main clauses beyond being prohibitives. The functional retrospective-prospective division between them, as described around examples (24) and (25) in §2.2 above, seems to continue to influence the choice of a particular negative verb here as well. This fact may be illustrated with the following two purpose clauses, where the choice of auxiliary verb depends on the context, i.e., whether the full verb in the dependent clause refers to a prospective or retrospective event. Thus, the proposition in (54) would not be felicitous with *-tiy-* as that would suggest that the participants have already been captured. Following a similar line of reasoning, the construction with *-Vtʃ-* is dispreferred in (55) as the proposition is meant to highlight the termination of a situation which has already started and continues to hold.

- (54) *βa-γá-átŋ-a há-no βa-tá-átŋ-a ku-γɔt-ú na*
 SBJ2-NARR-come-FV 16-DEM 2-NEG-come-FV INF-catch-PASS COM
a-βa-sírikare
 AUG-2-police
 ‘They came here so that they would not get caught by the police.’
- (55) *βa-ra-sáám-er-a há-no musoma βa-tíγ-ε ku-náŋki-βu*
 SBJ2-IPFV-move-APPL-FV 16-DEM Musoma SBJ2-stop-SBJV INF-annoy-PASS
na a-βa-táŋki
 COM AUG-2-state
 ‘They are moving here to Musoma so that they will not be harassed by the state (anymore).’

Affirmative purpose clauses are inflected in the subjunctive form in Ngoreme, as is common across Bantu (see Nurse & Devos 2019; Devos 2008). This is particularly the case when the main clause and the subordinate clause do not refer to the same participant(s), as in (56). The use of non-declarative strategies for the negation of purpose clauses could thus be seen as a direct reflection of the affirmative situation, where the subjunctive is used both for milder commands in the imperative-hortative domain as well as for subordination.

- (56) *n-tw-a-tánw-ire ɔkɔrí taata a-kɔr-ε kw-εγ-i*
 FOC-SBJ1PL-PST-leave-PFV COMP 1a.father SBJ1-do-SBJV INF-sweep-CAUS
 ‘We left so that father could tidy up.’

Note however, that when there is co-referentiality between the subject participant(s) of the main and dependent clause, affirmative purpose clauses may be expressed with the infinitive in Ngoreme. In this sense, examples (54) and (55) above could just as well be argued to illustrate negated non-finite dependent clauses. Compare (54) with the affirmative reason clause in (57) below.

- (57) *βa-γá-átŋ-a há-no ko-níβ-a*
 SBJ2-NARR-come-FV 16-DEM INF-create-FV
 ‘They came here to create a new life (for themselves).’

Thus, non-finite clauses may be negated, but only through the negative (auxiliary) verb strategy (that is, morphological negation is not accepted here). An infinitive functioning as a nominal head of a clause may also be negated, again with negative verbs, as illustrated in (58) and (59). In this case, both verbs occur in the infinitive form. Notice that there is an augment prefix on the negative verb

oyutíya ‘to stop’ and *okwánga* ‘to refuse’ but not on the lexical verbs (cf. §4.3) and furthermore that the adjective agrees with the verbs. Because of the distinct nominal components of the infinitive in these particular constructions, they are here glossed as (noun class) 15, i.e., the noun class that infinitives are associated with.¹³ Interestingly, it seems that the construction with *-Vt̃f̃* cannot be used in this context. Instead, another inherently negative verb, namely *-ang-* ‘refuse’, is used along with *-tiy-*.¹⁴

- (58) *o-yu-tíy-a ko-jó a-ma-ro η=gu-t̃f̃ómu*
 AUG-15-stop-FV INF-drink AUG-6-homebrew COP=15-good
 ‘Not to drink (~not drinking) (locally brewed) beer is good.’

- (59) *o-kw-áng-a yu-sám-a a-má-ro η=gu-t̃f̃ómu*
 AUG-15-refuse-FV INF-try-FV AUG-6-homebrew COP=15-good
 ‘Not to taste (~not tasting) (locally brewed) beer is good.’

A final category of non-main clause negation strategies that occur in Ngoreme is Swahili borrowings (~code-switching). These include *badala (ya)* ‘instead of’ + infinitive verb for the expression of substitutive clauses and *bila (ya)* ‘without’ + infinitive verb which constitute an alternative negative strategy for (anti-) circumstantial clauses (cf. the further discussion on abessive-like constructions in §3.3).¹⁵

Table 2 summarizes the different negative strategies discussed in this section in relation to clause type. Although this list of non-main clause types is non-exhaustive (see, e.g., Thompson et al.’s (2007) typological taxonomy which mentions no less than 12 different subtypes of adverbial clauses alone), it most likely covers the range of variation in negative strategies that are to be found in this domain in Ngoreme. Recall from §2.1 that some morphological TAM categories in Ngoreme associated with subordinate clauses, such as the conditional and the situative, may not be negated.

¹³For more on this dual nature of the Bantu infinitives, see e.g., Schadeberg (2003).

¹⁴The marker *-ang* is also used by some speakers even for expressing negative imperatives (§2.2) and negative subordinates (this section). Its usage in these domains appears to be much more widespread in the other Western Serengeti languages, however.

¹⁵Note that these subordinators have been borrowed into Ngoreme from Swahili which itself had borrowed them from Arabic. It has been argued for Swahili (Lodhi 1994, Wald 2001, Schadeberg 2009) that their incorporation came with a more profound structural re-configuration where more analytic structures consisting of subordinators and nominalized verbs came to replace synthetic structures with negative verbal morphology. These Swahili loans are relatively marginal clause types in Ngoreme but we include them here and in Table 2 in the interests of completeness.

Table 2: Non-main clauses negation strategies (non-exhaustive, generalized overview)

Formal clause type	Functional clause sub-types	Negation strategy
Relatives	relative > locational, temporal, circumstantial, conditional	post-initial prefix <i>ta-</i>
Coordination with <i>yo kuβa</i>	reason	pre-initial prefix <i>ti-/te-</i>
Subjunctive	purpose	negative verbs <i>-tíy-</i> ‘stop’, <i>-Vtí-</i> ‘come’ (+ NEG)
Non-finite clauses	co-referential purpose, as nominalized heads	negative verbs <i>-tíy-</i> ‘stop’, <i>-áŋg-</i> ‘refuse’
Swahili loans	substitutive, circumstantial	negative prepositions <i>badala</i> ‘instead’, <i>bila</i> ‘without’

Before closing this section on negative non-main clauses, it should be pointed out that in §4.6.2 we describe the use of the *nondum* (further discussed in §2.6) for expressing successional ‘before’-clauses, viz. the use of a negative construction for a *non-negative* non-main clausal function.

2.5 Negative lexicalizations

We have no examples of lexically idiosyncratic negatives in Ngoreme.

2.6 Other clausal negation constructions – the *nondum*

The conceptual category of ‘not yet’, sometimes referred to as a *nondum* (e.g., Veselinova & Devos 2021) is included in the onomasiological grid of phasal polarity, i.e., “structured means of expressing polarity in a sequential perspective” (van Baar 1997: 40; cf. Kramer 2017). Two different constructions may be used (interchangeably, as far as we have been able to tell) to mark this concept in Ngoreme. The constructions are formally linked to the conceptually related positive phasal polarity expressions of ‘still’ and ‘already’ respectively (cf. Kramer 2017, Veselinova & Devos 2021).

As illustrated in (60), one kind of *nondum*-construction in Ngoreme consists of the copula-like form *SBJ-kéére* ‘still’ (consisting of a subject marker and most

likely the persistive prefix **kí-* + copula **-dì*, all parts reconstructible for Proto-Bantu, e.g., Nurse 2008: 246–249) and a full verb occurring in the infinitival form.

- (60) *a-má-ándasi ya-kéére yu-terek-u*
 AUG-6-doughnut SBJ6-still INF-cook-PASS
 ‘The maandazis (~doughnuts) have not been prepared yet.’

Note that there is no explicit negative material used in this nondum-construction, intriguing from a typological perspective as negatives without negators are a rare trait cross-linguistically (cf. Miestamo 2010). It is not clear whether ‘not yet’ is a conventionalized meaning or whether such a negative reading is (still) only inferred from the combination of *kéére* ‘still’ with an infinitive verb, viz. ‘be still to X’ > ‘be not yet X’ (cf. Güldemann 1998; Nurse 2008: 147–148; Veselinova & Devos 2021). One indication that the meaning of SBJ-*keere* is not just compositional is the fact that it conveys a negative interpretation when occurring alone as in the negative answer in (61).¹⁶

- (61) Q: *w-iyoti-ire*
 SBJ2SG-become_satiated-PFV
 ‘Are you full?’
 A: *η-kéére*
 SBJ1SG-still
 ‘Not yet.’

Another kind of nondum-construction in Ngoreme consists of the negated verb *-mar-* ‘finish’ – also used in the conceptually related expression of ‘already’ (see Bernander et al. 2023b), as well as marking ‘before’ (example (90), §4.5) – plus a second verb expressing the main event of the proposition.¹⁷ As shown in examples (62) and (63), both the pre-initial and the post-initial negative prefix may be employed in forming this type of nondum-expression.

- (62) *tu-tá-á-mar-a tu-ȳɔr-a e-ŋɔmbɛ je-re*
 SBJ1PL-NEG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ1PL-buy-FV AUG-9.cow 9-DEM
 ‘We haven’t bought this cow yet.’

¹⁶The form *-keere* denotes the positive meaning ‘still’ when operating on finite verbs or non-verbal predicates. The reading of negative or positive continuation thus depends on the constructional context (viz. infinite vs finite) and not the internal phase structure of the predicate (verb), as in some Malayo-Polynesian languages (see Veselinova et al. 2024).

¹⁷Both verb forms in this construction are odd. Most likely they are retentions of synchronically obsolete TA conjugations. SBJ-a-B-a is most likely a remnant of a perfect aspect verb form (and hence tentatively glossed as such) and SBJ-Ø-B-a a (dependent) present tense, found in other Mara languages (e.g. neighbouring Kuria; Cammenga 2004: 286–287).

- (63) *ti-ná-á-mar-a* *m-máɲ-a* *ku-yámb-a*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ1SG-(come_to)know-FV INF-speak-FV
e-kí-ingeresa
 AUG-7-English
 ‘I don’t know (lit. haven’t come to know) (how) to speak English yet.’

Finally, it should be mentioned that both markers associated with the expression of ‘not yet’ may be combined, yielding a more emphatic reading of disbelief, irritation and counter-expectation, similar to that of ‘still not’ in English (cf. van Baar 1997: 2). Example (64) is a case in point.

- (64) *róóbi kana o-kéére* *u-tá-á-mar-a*
 Rhobi oh SBJ2SG-still SBJ2SG-NEG-PRF-finish-FV
o-swár-a
 SBJ2SG-wear_clothes-FV
 ‘Oh Rhobi, are you STILL NOT dressed?!’ (I have told you three times already)

3 Non-clausal negation

3.1 Negative replies

While affirmation *ee* and denial *a-a* are used by Ngoreme-speakers, the language does not have dedicated one-word affirmative or negative replies. As such, answers to polar questions typically require a full sentence in response, as in (65) below.

- (65) Q: *βóóno é-ɲ-ka* *te-eku-ɲɔɔn-a* *he*
 now AUG-9-lion NEG.9-IPFV-roar-FV NEG
 ‘Is the lion not roaring?’
 A: *n-ku-ɲɔɔn-a* *j-eni*
 FOC-INF-roar-FV SBJ9-PRS.COP
 ‘[Yes,] it is roaring.’

As regards replies to negative questions, answering the question in (65) above with *a-a* means that the lion is indeed not roaring; answering with *ee* contrasts the negation in the question, meaning that the lion *is* roaring.

3.2 Negative indefinites and quantifiers

In line with the broader cross-Bantu pattern, Ngoreme does not have indefinite pronouns; instead, words such as *omónto* ‘person’, *eyénto* ‘thing’ or *aháse* ‘place’ can be used to mean ‘someone’, ‘something’ and ‘somewhere’. The word best translated as ‘somebody’ is *ḡáni*, which refers to a particular, known somebody, as seen in (66). Most likely, this is a borrowing originally from Luo, a West Nilotic language (cf. Tucker 1994: 529).

- (66) *ḡáni a-aní há-áre*
 someone SBJ1-PRS.COP 16-DIST.DEM
 ‘Someone (particular) is there.’

The word *ḡáni* can also be used in a negative context as in (67), but the meaning remains that of a particular someone, and not ‘nobody’.

- (67) *há-áre ḡáni tá-re=ho*
 16-DIST.DEM someone NEG-PRS.COP=LOC16
 ‘(A certain) someone is not there.’

For expressing ‘nobody’, the aforementioned word *omónto* ‘person’ is used with a negative verb, as in (68).

- (68) *mó-nto tá-á-tǝ-ire*
 1-person NEG.SBJ1-PST-come-PFV
 ‘Nobody came.’

Similarly, the word *eyénto* ‘thing’ can be used to mean both ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ as in (69) and (70–71), depending on the polarity of the verb.

- (69) *né-ḡ-gɔɔtɛ e-ye-nto*
 FOC-SBJ1SG-have AUG-7-thing
 ‘I have something ~ I have a/the thing.’
- (70) *té-ḡ-gɔɔtɛ ye-nto*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-have 7-thing
 ‘I don’t have anything.’
- (71) *té-ḡ-gu-tɔɔr-a ku-rɔɔr-a ye-nto*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-IPFV-be_able-FV INF-see-FV 7-thing
 ‘I can’t see anything.’

Finally, in (72), the word *aháse* ‘place’ is used to convey the meaning ‘nowhere’. Note that in all of these negated contexts, the augment vowel disappears. It may, however, be used to mark specificity or referentiality even under negation, as in (73), where a reading of ‘nowhere’ is not available. For more on the augment and the scope of negation, see §4.3.

- (72) *tááta tá-á-yi-ire ha-se*
 1a.father NEG.SBJ1-PST-go-PFV 16-place
 ‘My father didn’t go anywhere.’

- (73) *éwe tá-á-yi-ire a-há-se*
 3SG NEG.SBJ1-PST-go-PFV AUG-16-place
 ‘(S)he didn’t go to a (certain) place.’

In §4.4, the reinforcing negative particle *he* is examined. Among its other meanings, it can also have a reading of ‘never’, as shown in (74).

- (74) *e-saariyɔɔkɔ té-éku-rayɔr-a he*
 AUG-9.cock SBJ9.NEG-IPFV-CROW-FV NEG
 ‘The cock never crows.’

3.3 Negative derivation and case marking

Ngoreme does not have special means for achieving negative derivation or abessive-like morphemes. Instead, other phrases or full clauses may be employed. For example, to express an abessive meaning of ‘without something’ a juxtaposed negative possessive clause is used, as in (75).

- (75) *a-βá-nto βa-no βa-ra-rááyɛr-a βa-tá-ána βi-tʃíiko*
 AUG-2-person 2-PROX.DEM SBJ2-IPFV-eat-FV SBJ2-NEG-COM 8-spoon
 ‘These people eat without spoons.’ (lit. ‘These people eat, they do not have spoons.’)

Alternatively, the Swahili preposition *bila* (originally from Arabic *bilā*) is often used for ‘without’: *bila ~ bira βi-tʃíiko* ‘without spoons’. See also §4.5 on negative coordination of the type *neither...nor*.

4 Other aspects of negation

4.1 The scope of negation

In Eastern Bantu languages the pre-initial prefix is often portrayed as having scope over the whole proposition whereas the post-initial prefix and negative auxiliaries have scope over the verbal (macro-)stem / lexical complement, marking different types of non-standard negation (Nurse 2008: 193–194; Güldemann 1999). This division is not clear-cut in Ngoreme as the post-initial prefix may also be used in standard negation where it has scope over the whole proposition. The diachronic factors at play that further explains this synchronic situation in Ngoreme are discussed in §4.6.3. See also §4.3 for marking of NPs in the scope of negation. As far as we are aware, prosodic prominence is not employed in the marking of negative scope in Ngoreme.

4.2 Negative polarity

We have not come across any specialized negative polarity items in Ngoreme. The presence versus absence of the augment is a polarity phenomenon discussed in §4.3.

As discussed in §3.2, Ngoreme has no specific indefinite pronouns. Instead, meanings such as ‘someone’, ‘something’ and ‘somewhere’, and their negative counterparts, are expressed through appropriate nouns (‘person’, ‘thing’, ‘place’). While Ngoreme also doesn’t necessarily distinguish between English examples such as ‘we don’t have food’ and ‘we don’t have *any* food (at all)’, a similar reading can be achieved by the reinforcing particle *he* as described in §4.4 below.

4.3 Marking of NPs in the scope of negation

As touched upon already in §1, §3.2 and §4.2, augments – i.e., pre-prefixes attached to nominal class prefixes on nouns – are typically omitted when the nouns appear within the scope of negation. Compare (76) with (77) (see also (69) vs. (70)).

- (76) *o-ra-βúsúr-a* *a-ma-hemba*
 SBJ2SG-IPFV-plant-FV AUG-6-millet
 ‘You plant (the) millet.’

- (77) *te-tó-óko-ruy-a* *ma-hemba*
 NEG-SBJ1PL-IPFV-cook-FV 6-millet
 ‘We are not cooking millet.’

However, as has been described for several other Bantu languages (see e.g. Givón 1978, Van de Velde 2019, Miestamo 2014), the augment may be attached to a noun phrase also under negative scope to signal specificity (or referentiality). Consider the two examples below, seen also above in §3.2. While the augment is not normally present under negation as in (78), in (79) it is used for specificity; a reading of ‘anywhere/nowhere’ is not possible here.

- (78) *tááta ta-a-yi-ire ha-se*
 1a.father NEG-PST-go-PFV 16-place
 ‘My father didn’t go anywhere.’
- (79) *éwe tá-á-yi-ire a-há-se*
 3SG NEG.SBJ1-PST-go-PFV AUG-16-place
 ‘(S)he didn’t go to a (certain) place.’

There does not seem to be such strong incompatibility effects between negation and focus in Ngoreme, as described for other (West) African languages, such as Saharan Kanuri (Cyffer 2009; see also Miestamo 2014). The focus nasal marker cannot occur in the pre-initial position of the verb when negated (cf. §2.1). However, a negated verb does seem to be able to co-occur with the nasal when it is used for (term) focus on a (fronted) noun phrase. This is shown in (80a), where ‘father’ is an answer to an information question (and hence inherently focused; cf. e.g. Lambrecht 1994: 282–286). As seen in (80b), negation may also co-occur with a type of alternative focus formation where the nasal is attached to a resumptive pronoun. Notice also that the negation of the verb is conveyed by the post-initial prefix.

- (80) a. *n=tááta a-tá-á-mar-a a-m-tóóri*
 FOC=1.father SBJ1-NEG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ1-OBJ1-help
 ‘Father has not helped her yet.’
- b. *tááta n=éwe a-tá-á-mar-a a-m-tóóri*
 1.father FOC=3SG SBJ1-NEG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ1-OBJ1-help
 ‘Father has not helped her yet.’
- (Both a and b answer the question: ‘Who has not helped her cleaning yet?’)

4.4 Reinforcing negation

The main element used for reinforcing negation is the particle *he*. It is only used in main clauses where it appears in a clause-final position. At least for some

Ngoreme speakers, it may also have a more specific reading of ‘completeness’. This would link to the etymology proposed by Rose (2001) for a corresponding particle in neighbouring Kuria as being a borrowed Luo completive ideophone. For example, the addition of *he* to the negative existential example (38) – here re-stated as (81) – would imply that there is not a single drop left in the bucket.

- (81) *a-má-ntŕe ya-tá-re=mu mo-ndóá he*
 AUG-6-water SBJ6-NEG-PRS.COP=LOC18 LOC18-bucket NEG
 ‘There is no (~ complete absence of) water in the bucket.’

We have also already seen in (74) (§3.2 above), that *he* may be used to convey ‘never’ – a stronger or more emphatic denial in more general terms. As further discussed in §4.6.3, it appears that *he* in this role as an emphatic negative reinforcer has been enrolled in an ongoing Jespersen’s Cycle-like grammaticalization process.

4.5 Negation, coordination and complex clauses

The most common coordination strategy in Ngoreme is the use of a coordinator *na* (formally identical to the comitative marker). This coordinator is used with both affirmative (82) and negative clauses (83). While the coordinator remains the same regardless of the polarity of the clauses, both verbs in coordinated negative clauses need to be fully inflected. This contrasts with the situation in affirmative cases as in (82), where the latter clause may have an infinitive verb form when the subject and tense-aspect-mood information is shared across in the two clauses.

- (82) *n-tw-a-rí-íre e-βj-ákori no kó-ŋo a-má-ro*
 FOC-SBJ1PL-PST-eat-PFV AUG-8-food and INF-drink AUG-6-alcohol
 ‘We ate food and drank alcohol.’

- (83) *tu-tá-á-raay-ire na tu-tá-á-ŋw-ere*
 SBJ1PL-NEG-PST-eat-PFV and SBJ1PL-NEG-PST-drink-PFV
 ‘We did not eat or drink.’

In (84) two negated clauses with different subjects are coordinated. Example (85) has an affirmative clause followed by a negative one. The coordinator *na* is used in both cases, as above.

- (84) *te-n-áá-mar-a n-duy-a βj-ákori*
 NEG-SBJ1SG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ1SG-cook-FV 8-food
 ‘I have not cooked food’

na a-βá-ána te-βá-á-mar-a βa-raayer-a
 and AUG-2-child NEG-SBJ2-PRF-finish-FV SBJ2-eat-FV
 ‘and the children have not eaten.’

- (85) *n-aa-rú-úre musoma na tááta tá-á-yi-ire ha-se*
 SBJ1SG-PST-leave-PFV Musoma and 1a.father NEG-PST-go-PFV 16-place
 ‘I left Musoma and my father didn’t go anywhere.’

Often, a disjunctive coordinator *au*, borrowed from Swahili, is used instead of the more general coordination marker *na*. Another loanword, *waara* ‘neither’ (from Sw. *wala*, originally from Arabic *wa-lā* ‘and not’) can be used for coordinating negative clauses coordinator (86), although the same meaning could be communicated with *na*.

- (86) *tá-á-hontǝk-ire ika waara tá-á-tem-ire e-síimu*
 NEG.SBJ1-PST-return-PFV home neither NEG.SBJ1-PST-hit-PFV AUG-9.phone
 ‘He didn’t come home, nor did he call.’

4.6 Miscellaneous aspects of negation

4.6.1 Metalinguistic negation

In (87), we see an example of metalinguistic negation. As can be seen on the basis of this example, it is possible to say that Amani does not have three children when stressing the fact that, in fact, he has more.

- (87) *amááni tá-re βá-ána βa-tato a-γɔɔte, m=ba-ne*
 Amani NEG-PRS.COP 2-child 2-three SBJ1-have COP=2-four
 ‘Amani doesn’t have three children, but four.’

The example is formally interesting. The subject is followed by a negated copula, in turn followed by an affirmative clause (*βáána βatato aγɔɔte* ‘he has three children’) falling under the scope of negation; the entire sentence is literally something along the lines of “Amani, it is not [that] he has three children, it is four”. Note that the ‘affirmative’ clause shows behaviour typical of negated contexts (see §2.1): the object, *βáána* ‘children’, has no augment vowel, and there is no focus marker on the possessive verb. The negative copula is glossed as having a pre-initial negator alone, but, as mentioned in §2.3, there is an alternative analysis of agreement with the subject, since a form unmarked for subject is homonymous with class 1 agreement.

While interesting, this is an isolated example in our data, and should not be considered definitively indicative of all metalinguistic negation in Ngoreme.

4.6.2 Non-negative uses of negatives and expletive negation

As mentioned briefly in §2.2 on negation in non-declaratives, the use of the (standard) post-initial negative morpheme *ta-* plus the basic affirmative imperative verb form does not convey negation in Ngoreme (unlike its Western Serengeti relatives) but has developed a specialized reading. Rather, it functions as a polar, affirmative directive (together with a sense of urging or imploring), roughly translatable as ‘why don’t you X’ ~ ‘do X’. This is illustrated in examples (88) and (89).

- (88) *u-tá-ȳɔr-a* *n-go-ku-ȳáŋ-a* *to-oní*
 SBJ2SG-NEG-buy-FV FOC-INF-OBJ2SG-wait-FV SBJ1PL-PRS.COP
 ‘Go ahead and buy (now), we are waiting for you!’
- (89) *n-da-ku-sáβ-a* *u-ta-tánɔr-a* *o-ru* *há-no*
 SBJ1SG-IPFV-OBJ2SG-beg-FV SBJ2SG-NEG-leave-FV SBJ2SG-go_away 16-DEM
 ‘Please, why don’t you just leave!’

Another case of a non-negative use of a negative construction in Ngoreme relates to temporal-adverbial ‘before’-clauses. As illustrated in (90), these are not expressed with a conjunction but rather an auxiliary construction consisting of the verb *-mar-* (‘finish’) and the post-initial negative prefix, *tá-* in the example below.

- (90) *w-i-ku-ȳɔr-a* *tʃi-ŋaapa* *e-ke-rúútu*
 SBJ2sg-ITV-INF-buy-FV AUG-10.tomatoes AUG-7-darkness
ȳi-tá-á-mar-a *ke-hík-a*
 SBJ7-NEG-PRF-finish-FV SBJ7-arrive-FV
 ‘(You should) go and buy tomatoes before it gets dark.’

Notice that this construction of temporal subordination is in essence formally identical and hence most likely metonymically related to one of the ‘not yet’/nondum-constructions discussed in §2.6, which adheres to a cross-linguistically common pattern of polysemy (van Baar 1997: 275–276, 291) which has also been observed to occur in Bantu (Veselinova & Devos 2021).

4.6.3 Diachronic observations

From a historical-comparative point of view it would seem that the negation system of Ngoreme is in a state of flux relative to its more conservative Western

Serengeti relatives. As indicated above, there are signs of ongoing change in negation strategies associated with both standard and non-standard clauses in Ngoreme.

To begin with, in relation to the pre-initial negator in the standard negation domain, Ngoreme seems to be moving away from its relatives and is instead employing a more canonical Bantu pattern of negation. This pattern can, in a simplified manner, be characterized as consisting of a functional division of labour between a pre-initial negator used for standard clauses and a post-initial negator used for non-standard clauses (cf. Güldemann 1996, 1999; Nurse 2008: 179–201; cf. also the interrelated note on scope in §4.1).¹⁸ Güldemann (1999) distinguishes four specific “distribution patterns” of pre-initial and post-initial negation:

1. Post-initial only, in all clause types
2. Post-initial in all clauses & pre-initial alternations in main clauses
3. Post-initial in non-declaratives + non-main clauses & pre-initial in main clauses
4. Pre-initial only (or at least pre-dominantly)

Note that these four “patterns” are not categorically suggested as (diachronic) stages, but rather as synchronically attested tendencies across the Bantu speaking area. However, given the comparative data from the Lacustrine languages (Güldemann 1996: 288–294, Güldemann 1999: fn. 43), it is clear that pre-initial negation is a newer development in this genealogical group with the variation of distributional patterns detected between the different languages instantiating different stages of maturation. Thus, whereas the Western Serengeti relatives are all still in Stage 1, Ngoreme is to be categorized somewhere between Stage 2 and 3. The in-between status in this language emanates from the facts provided in this paper. That is, on the one hand, the post-initial clearly is the default choice for standard negation in Ngoreme without any pragmatic overtones. On the other, however, there are still cases in the language where the post-initial negative prefix is used for standard negation. One example of this is the use of the post-initial with the auxiliary *-mar-* ‘finish’ for expressing ‘not yet’ (cf. §2.6). Compare Rose (2001) who suggests a similar ‘not-yet’-construction with a post-initial negator

¹⁸Güldemann (1999) suggests that the pre-initial negator is introduced for explicit correction or contradiction of a previous utterance. However, no specific evidence for this has been found for Ngoreme.

in neighbouring Kuria to be a relic exactly along this line of reasoning. In this respect, it is also interesting to note that the nondum-expression with a post-initial negative prefix cannot be used together with the emphatic post-verbal particle *he*. Conversely, the construction with pre-initial negation may not be used in subordinate (temporal adverbial) clauses where *-mar-* + NEG is used for expressing ‘before’ (cf. §4.6.2).

Along with the innovation of pre-initial negation, Ngoreme also seems to have been enrolled in a Jespersen’s Cycle-like process, i.e., the grammaticalization scenario where an element initially introduced for reinforcing negative expressions turns into the negative marker itself (see e.g., van der Auwera 2010, Devos & van der Auwera 2013). Interestingly, this development in Ngoreme adheres to an areal phenomenon, being a shared trait with its North Mara neighbours and even varieties of the Greater Luhya cluster spoken further north in Kenya (cf. Devos & van der Auwera 2013). The strategy of negation with the particle *he* (cf. §4.4) in main clauses in Ngoreme is reminiscent of the inceptive stages of Jespersen’s Cycle where the post-verbal particle is neither obligatory nor neutral but is still used to add a sense of emphasis to the proposition. Ngoreme thus contrasts with its northern neighbours Simbiti (Walker & Overton 2018) and Kuria (e.g., Rose 2001) which have moved further along the cycle of obligatorification and bleaching. For Kuria, Rose (2001) even mentions contexts where the pre-initial negative prefix rather than the negative post-verbal particle is the optional component. An additional indication of the less grammaticalized status of this negative construction in Ngoreme relative to its northern neighbours is the fact that the use of *he* has not spread (i.e., generalized) to non-declarative and non-main clauses.

There are ongoing changes that also seem to take place in the domain(s) of non-standard negation. As seen in §2.2 and §2.4, inherently negative verbs have been recruited into auxiliaries, increasingly replacing the original post-initial negator. This is not surprising from a Bantu perspective as negation in non-declaratives is “a major conduit through which innovation occurs” (Nurse 2008: 191). In this regard, it may further be noticed that as auxiliary constructions of the form found in Ngoreme – i.e., with a finite auxiliary and infinite full verb – move further along the pathway of verb-to-affix grammaticalization, the erstwhile auxiliary tends to end up as a post-initial prefix, and thus re-initiate the same patterns described above (cf. Güldemann 1996: 261–284, 1999; see also Nurse 2008: 194–196).

There is some semantic evidence that the mentioned auxiliaries are dedicated prohibitives and not merely “indirect prohibitive speech acts” (van der Auwera 2010: 89). To begin with, they are back-translated as prohibitives into Swahili (the meta-language during elicitation sessions) by the consultants and thus they are

arguably “harmonic” with a simplex prohibitive verb form. Furthermore, there are indications that these verbs have undergone semantic bleaching/relaxation relative to their etymons. Hence, as negators they may describe non-agentive events and operate on second verbs in direct opposition to their original lexical semantics (e.g. *-Vtɪ-* + ‘go’ or *-tiy-* + a resultative achievement verb like ‘sit’) as well as co-occur with their own lexical etymons, e.g. *tíya kotíya* ‘don’t stop’ (cf. Heine 1993: 60–61, 2002). However, we have encountered little if any formal evidence for these auxiliaries having a more grammatical(ized) status in relation to their lexical sources. Hence, following Heine (1993: 61), they can be seen as (still) being in a “budding stage”.

With regard to etymology, the use of the verb *-tiy-* ‘stop, leave off’ as a prohibitive is not surprising from a typological point of view, given its “inherently negative” cessative lexical meaning (cf. Aikhenvald 2010: 358–359; van der Auwera 2010). The reflex of this specific verb is also a typical source for a prohibitive across the Bantu family (see e.g., Nurse 2008: 183 who lists **-tíg-* as “one of the auxiliaries most involved in negation”), including for several languages closely related to Ngoreme, e.g., Kwaya (kya; JE251; Sillery 1932; Odom 2016). The strategy of forming a prohibitive auxiliary by combining (morphological) negation plus ‘come’ is much rarer, but not unheard of for Bantu (cf. Myene (mye; B11) mentioned by Devos & Van Olmen (2013)) and can be taken to adhere to a general cross-linguistic trend of ‘come (to)’ being recruited to express affirmative directives as well as various grammatical expressions with prospective readings (cf. Kuteva et al. 2019: 92–94, 101–107 and references therein). Examples from Ngoreme’s closest relatives include the cognate ‘come’-verb being recruited into a ‘when’-subordinator in Ikoma (Robinson 2015), and as a future tense marker in Nata (cf. Osa-Gomez del Campo 2014).

It may further be hypothesized that the introduction of prohibitive auxiliary verbs into Ngoreme was connected to the functional lacuna which the reinterpretation of the synthetic negative imperative form as expressing an affirmative proposition gave rise to in the language. In their cross-Bantu study of imperatives and prohibitives, Devos & Van Olmen (2013) note a similar phenomenon in Ngoreme’s neighbour Kuria (kuj; JE43) (see also Cammenga 2004: 293). They also report a similar pattern in Gikuyu (kik; E51) and Kamba (kam; E55), two languages spoken in proximity to the Mara languages. These authors suggest that the polar, affirmative expression can be derived from the conventionalization of an “ironic” use of the negative imperative, an explanation that is plausible also for this feature in Ngoreme.

The bi-morphemic construction combining the negative prefix *-ta-* and the formative *ka(a)-* (derived from a verb meaning ‘can’ according to Rose 2001: 90; cit-

ing Cammenga 1994: 230) seems to be an innovation in the neighbouring North Mara subgroup which most likely spread from there to the adjacent Ngoreme speakers. Ngoreme's two closest neighbours to the north, viz. Kuria and Simbiti, both use the potential in affirmative verb forms. They also regularly form negative imperatives with this prefix included (see Sillery 1936: 23; Walker & Overton 2018: 17). Examples (91) and (91b) below are from Simbiti (ssc; JE431).

(91) Simbiti (North Mara, Tanzania) (Walker & Overton 2018: 17)

a. *to-ta-kaa-bhin-a*

SBJ1PL-NEG-POT-dance-FV

'We shouldn't dance.'

b. Simbiti (North Mara, Tanzania) (Walker & Overton 2018: 17)

n-to-kaa-bhin-a

FOC-SBJ1PL-HYP-dance-FV

'We might dance.'

Notice that a similar construction is, once again, also attested in Gikuyu and Kamba. Devos & Van Olmen (2013: 27) note for these languages that "the [...] basic prohibitive strategy is used not in its regular form but in combination with the andative (or motional) prefix **ka-* (cf. Meeussen 1962: 109)". They go on to suggest that this conventionalization of a bi-morphemic construction gave way to the dedicated ironic-affirmative use of the original prohibitive form (Devos & Van Olmen 2013: 47–48). It may be suspected that these "andative" prefixes are in some way reflexes of the same non-indicative marker presented here for the Northern Mara languages and Ngoreme. Thus, this chain of reanalysis of prohibitive constructions might represent a larger areal trait. More comparative research would be needed, however, in order to draw any firm conclusions on whether these formatives are cognates or not and how to account for the functional and formal (vowel length) discrepancies.

4.6.4 A note on word order

Ngoreme exhibits a typologically and comparatively unusual word order in compound constructions in which the main verb appears before the auxiliary. This is unusual both from a typological perspective where SVO languages are expected to exhibit auxiliary-verb order (Dryer 1992; Greenberg 1966) and from a comparative perspective since Bantu languages overwhelmingly exhibit auxiliary-verb order (Gibson 2019, 2025). This has been observed in the Bantu language Simbiti also spoken in the Mara Region, neighbouring languages Gusii and Kuria, as

well as the central Tanzanian languages Rangi and Mbugwe (Gibson & Marten 2019, Gibson 2019, Roth & Gibson 2019). Of interest for the current discussion is the observation that in Ngoreme, while declarative main clauses exhibit verb-auxiliary order in specific tense-aspect contexts, this word order is reversed in the negative counterparts of these clauses, yielding auxiliary-verb order.

This can be seen on comparison of the examples below which show verb-auxiliary order in the affirmative in example (92) and auxiliary-verb order in its negative counterpart in example (93) (repeated from (17) and (18) above).

- (92) *rééro η-ko-yi too-ni tarisaraamu*
 today FOC-INF-go SBJ1PL-PRS.COP Dar es Salaam
 ‘Today we are going to Dar es Salaam.’ (Gibson 2019: 278)

- (93) *rééro tu-tá-re ko-yi tarisaraamu*
 today SBJ1PL-NEG-PRS.COP INF-go Dar es Salaam
 ‘Today we are not going to Dar es Salaam.’

5 Summary

The negative constructions in Ngoreme, and their functions, are shown in Table 3, along with the relevant sections of this article. Etymologies or source meanings of non-negative elements are shown in parentheses.

As described above, Ngoreme shows interesting variation in its marking of standard negation on the verb, with a pre-initial marker (before the subject marker) *te-* and a post-initial marker (following the subject marker) *ta-*, in free variation. In subordinate clauses, however, only post-initial *ta-* may be used, contributing to a body of evidence for this being the older form. Along with the post-initial prefix, different negative verbs with inherent negative semantics occur as negators in both subordinate as well as non-declarative contexts. Similar patterns are well known across Bantu languages (see especially Güldemann 1996, 1999). Along with these developments and other diachronic phenomena, such as Jespersen’s Cycle, Ngoreme is an interesting language within the Mara subgroup, and features prominently in other present and future work on the variation and development of negation strategies across the Mara Bantu languages (e.g. Laine 2023, Bernander et al. 2023b).

Table 3: Ngoreme negative constructions

Construction	Function	Section
<i>te</i> -SBJ-TAM-verb	Standard negation	§2.1
SBJ- <i>ta</i> -TAM-verb	Negation of dependent clauses	§2.4
(SBJ-) <i>tiy-a/ε</i> ('stop, avoid')	(Retrospective) prohibitive	§2.2
SBJ- <i>ta-atŷa</i> ('come')	Negation of dependent clauses	§2.4
	(Prospective) prohibitive	§2.2
SBJ- <i>ta-ka(a)</i> -verb	Negative imperative	§2.2
<i>oyutíya</i> + INF-verb ('stop, avoid')	Negation of infinitives	§2.4
<i>okwángga</i> + INF-verb ('refuse')		
<i>te</i> -SBJ-COP	Negation of stative predications	§2.3
SBJ- <i>ta</i> -COP		
<i>tere/tare</i> (COP unmarked for person)	Negation of present tense 3rd person stative predications	§2.3
SBJ- <i>ta</i> -COP=LOC	Negative existential	§2.3
<i>te</i> -SBJ- <i>γɔɔte</i> ('catch')	Negative possessive	§2.3
SBJ- <i>ta-na</i> (COP)		
SBJ- <i>kéére</i> (PERS)	Nondum; negative answer 'not yet'	§2.6
SBJ- <i>ta-mar-a</i> ('finish')	Nondum	§2.6
<i>ti</i> -SBJ- <i>mar-a</i> ('finish')		
<i>he</i>	'never'	§3.2
	Reinforcing negation	§4.4
NEG + <i>monto</i> ('person')	'no one'	§3.2
NEG + <i>yento</i> ('thing')	'nothing'	§3.2
NEG + <i>hase</i> ('place')	'nowhere'	§3.2
<i>badala</i> (Sw.)	'instead of'	§2.4
<i>βira</i> (Sw.)	'without'	§2.4, §3.3
<i>waara</i> (Sw.)	'neither ... nor'	§4.5

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Abbreviations

1	first person	IPFV	imperfective
2	second person	ITV	itive
3	third person	LOC	locative
1, 2, 3, etc	noun class	NARR	narrative
1a	subclass of class 1	NEG	negation
APPL	applicative	OBJ	object marker
ATR	attributive	PASS	passive
AUG	augment	PFV	perfective
CAUS	causative	PL	plural
CL	noun class	POT	potential
COM	comitative	PRS	present
COMP	complementizer	PRF	perfect
COP	copula	PROX	proximal
DEM	demonstrative	PST	past
DIST	distal	REL	relativizer
FOC	focus	SBJ	subject marker
FV	final vowel	SBJV	subjunctive
HAB	habitual	SG	singular
HYP	hypothetical	TAM	tense, aspect, mood
INF	infinitive		

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