# Semantic Functions of Verbal Negation in Fulfulde Spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria

**[1] Zulkiflu Usman, [2&3] Prof Isa A. Haliru & Prof Aboki M. Sani**
[1] Fulfulde Department, Federal College of Education, Yola
[2&3] Department of Languages and Linguistics, Taraba State University, Jalingo
https://doi.org/10.56201/ijelcs.vol.11.no7.2026.pg159.172

***Abstract***
*This study examines the semantic functions of verbal negation in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study aims to identify the verbal negative markers used in the variety and describe their contextual semantic functions. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted data were obtained through oral interviews, observation, elicitation and the researcher's linguistic intuition, and the collected data were analysed by comparing affirmative and negative constructions. The study is anchored on Functional-Typological Theory, developed principally by Talmy Givón, which relates grammatical structures to their semantic, pragmatic, discourse, and communicative functions. The findings identify four principal verbal negative markers: akul, taa, taata, and taako. The analysis shows that, these markers do not merely indicate the non-occurrence of an action; their interpretation extends to several communicative functions. Akul expresses prohibition, prevention, warning, and negative instruction. Taa expresses prohibition, negative command, restriction, and warning, taata expresses emphatic prohibition, warning, and restriction, while taako expresses prohibition, advice or recommendation, and warning. The findings further revealed that, semantic interpretation is strongly influenced by the communicative context in which each marker occurs. Thus, the same negative form may convey different shades of directive meaning depending on the speaker's intention and the situation of use. The study concludes that, verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde constitutes a semantically functional system in which negative markers encode non-performance as well as context-dependent directive meanings. The study contributes to the documentation and understanding of Fulfulde negation in Nigeria. It shows how context shapes meaning in use.*

***Keywords:*** *Semantics; Semantic functions; Verbal negation; Negative markers.*

## 1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental means through which human beings communicate ideas, express intentions, describe events, and negotiate meaning in different social and cultural contexts. Across the world's languages, speakers employ grammatical structures to express affirmation, negation, possibility, obligation, prohibition, and other meanings that shape how utterances are interpreted. Negation is particularly important because it enables speakers to reject propositions, deny the occurrence of events, prohibit actions, and communicate restrictions or warnings. Verbal negation, specifically, involves the use of linguistic markers to modify the meaning of verbal constructions by indicating that an action does not occur, should not occur, or must not be performed. Depending on the language and communicative context, negative constructions may express meanings beyond simple denial, including prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, advice, and negative

instruction. Understanding these functions is therefore essential to explaining how grammatical forms convey meaning in actual communication.

Fulfulde is a major West African language spoken by Fulɓe communities across several countries, including Nigeria. Like other languages, Fulfulde employs linguistic structures to express negation, although the forms, distributions, and semantic interpretations of negative markers may differ across its varieties. Such variation makes the investigation of negation important for understanding the relationship between grammatical structure and communicative meaning. In the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria, verbal negative markers occur in constructions whose interpretations may depend on the speaker's intention and the circumstances of communication. Examining these markers provides an opportunity to establish how speakers distinguish between the non-occurrence of an action and directive meanings such as prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, and advice.

From a semantic perspective, verbal negation involves more than the addition of a negative marker to an affirmative construction. Although an affirmative construction presents an action or event without negating it, a negative construction may reject its occurrence, discourage its performance, or prohibit it altogether. The interpretation of a negative construction may also vary according to the relationship between the speaker, the hearer, and the communicative situation. A negative marker may consequently perform different functions in different contexts. A systematic description of these functions is necessary to explain how negative forms contribute to meaning in Taraba Fulfulde.

Despite the importance of negation in linguistic communication, the forms and communicative functions of negative markers are not necessarily identical across languages and language varieties. A negative marker may express straightforward denial in one construction but convey prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, or advice in another. Consequently, identifying negative forms alone does not provide a complete explanation of their semantic contributions. Their interpretation must also be examined in relation to the verbal constructions in which they occur and the communicative contexts in which speakers use them. In Fulfulde, an examination of these relationships is necessary to establish how negative markers function within particular varieties rather than assuming that descriptions of one variety adequately represent others.

The problem addressed by this study is the need for a systematic description of the semantic functions of verbal negative markers in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria. Without such a description, the distinctions between ordinary negation and context-dependent directive meanings may remain insufficiently explained. This limits understanding of how speakers use negative constructions to communicate different intentions. Findings from studies of negation in other languages or Fulfulde varieties cannot automatically account for the semantic patterns of Taraba Fulfulde. There is therefore a need to identify the negative markers used in this variety and examine the meanings they express in their communicative contexts.

Against this background, the study aims to examine the semantic functions of verbal negation in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, it seeks (i) to identify the verbal negative markers used in the variety and (ii) to describe the semantic functions of the identified markers in their communicative contexts. The study is guided by two research questions: What verbal negative markers are used in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State? What semantic functions do the identified verbal negative markers express in their communicative contexts?

The study is significant because it contributes to the documentation and linguistic description of Fulfulde by providing an account of verbal negative markers in the variety spoken in Taraba State. By identifying these markers and describing their semantic functions, it expands understanding of

how negation operates within this variety. It also contributes to semantic research by demonstrating the importance of communicative context in interpreting negative constructions, particularly where negative forms express directive meanings beyond the denial of an action or event. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a useful resource for researchers in semantics, descriptive linguistics, and Fulfulde language studies. They may also support comparative investigations of negation across Fulfulde varieties and other Nigerian languages. For language documentation and teaching, the description may provide relevant information about the forms and meanings used by Fulfulde speakers to communicate prohibition, warning, restriction, advice, and related intentions. Ultimately, the study enhances understanding of the relationship between grammatical forms, contextual interpretation, and communicative functions in Taraba Fulfulde.

## 2. Literature Review

This section of the study reviewed literatures related to the ongoing study. The section deals with the following such as conceptual review, empirical review as well as theoretical review.

### 2.1 Conceptual Review

This section of the study reviewed concept such as; semantics, verbal negation on what the previous researchers have said.

#### 2.1.1 Semantics

Anderson et al. (2022) define semantics as the study of linguistic meaning and how meanings combine to form larger expressions. Similarly, the University of Sheffield (2022) views semantics as the study of meaning in linguistic expressions and how such meaning is constructed and interpreted. The relationship between linguistic form and meaning is also central to semantic analysis. The INLP Linguistic Glossary (2021) describes semantics as the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and their meanings, while Paradis (2024) emphasizes the study of the meanings of linguistic expressions and how such meanings are represented and interpreted.

In the present study, semantics refers to the meanings and communicative functions expressed by negative markers in Taraba Fulfulde. A negative marker may express meanings such as denial, rejection, prohibition, warning, prevention, absence, or non-existence, depending on its context. Therefore, semantic analysis helps explain how Taraba Fulfulde speakers use different negative markers to express different types of negative meaning.

#### 2.1.2 Semantic Functions

Leech (1981) explains meaning in language through several dimensions, including conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning. His perspective demonstrates that linguistic expressions may communicate different meanings depending on their linguistic and communicative environments. Similarly, Cruse (2000) examines meaning as a central aspect of linguistic analysis and explains how words and expressions derive interpretations through their relationships with other linguistic elements and their contexts of use. While Leech emphasises the different dimensions of meaning, Cruse highlights the relationships between linguistic expressions and their interpretations. Both perspectives establish that meaning extends beyond the grammatical forms of language. In this study, semantic functions refer to the specific meanings communicated by verbal negative markers in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State, including prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, advice, and negative instruction, as interpreted within their communicative contexts.

### 2.1.3 Verbal Negation

Zaradzki (2020) describes verbal negation as negation that operates on the verbal constituent, while Morante and Blanco (2020) explain negation as an operation that produces a meaning opposed to the original expression. These views establish verbal negation as a grammatical means of indicating that an action or event does not occur.

Cross-linguistic studies show that verbal negation can take different forms and positions. Krasnoukhova et al. (2021) observe that negative markers commonly occur before verbs, although postverbal patterns also occur. Krasnoukhova (2020) further identifies standard and prohibitive negation as important types of verbal negation. Alotaibi (2024) shows that verbal negation may be expressed through preverbal and discontinuous patterns and can vary according to grammatical context. Therefore, verbal negation refers to the linguistic process through which an action, event, or state expressed by a verb is denied. These studies provide a basis for examining the forms, distribution and semantic functions of verbal negative markers in Taraba Fulfulde.

### 2.1.4 Negative Markers

Crystal (2008) defines negation as a grammatical and semantic process through which the truth or validity of a proposition is denied. From this perspective, negative markers are linguistic elements that indicate negation within a construction. Similarly, Payne (1997) explains that negation is expressed through grammatical devices whose forms and positions vary across languages, allowing speakers to negate propositions or parts of clauses. While Crystal emphasises the grammatical and semantic function of negation, Payne focuses on the structural mechanisms through which languages express it. Both perspectives demonstrate that negative markers are important linguistic devices for communicating negative meanings. In this study, negative markers refer to the specific verbal forms used in the Fulfulde variety spoken in Taraba State to express negation and context-dependent meanings such as prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, advice, and negative instruction.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

This section reviews previous empirical studies on negation in related Nigerian languages and their relevance to the semantic functions of verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde.

Sanusi and Oyewole (2019) investigated negative markers in Idoma and Tiv and found that they occur mainly in sentence-final position. The study is relevant because it shows that negative markers have language-specific distributions, providing a basis for examining the forms and functions of verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde.

Sanusi and Aminu (2022) examined negation in Yoruba incantations and found that *kii* and *kọ́* are used with different frequencies. The study is relevant to the present research because it shows that the use of negative markers varies according to context, which helps in identifying the semantic functions of Taraba Fulfulde verbal negation.

Ilori and Oyebade (2012) studied Igala negation and found that two negative elements may occur together in a construction. The study is relevant because it demonstrates that negative expressions may consist of more than one element, an aspect useful for analysing the structure and meaning of verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde.

Cyffer (2009) examined Kanuri negation and found that negative strategies vary according to tense, aspect and mood. The study is relevant to the present research because it shows that the interpretation of verbal negation can depend on its grammatical context, which is important for analysing the semantic functions of Taraba Fulfulde negative markers.

Bulama and Hussaini (2023) investigated negative imperfective forms in *Nyariwa* Kanuri and identified *ba* and *bawo* as negative markers. The study is relevant because it demonstrates the importance of identifying negative markers in their actual grammatical environments, which assists the present study in describing Taraba Fulfulde verbal negation.

Storch (2009) investigated negation in Jukun and found that different negative strategies are associated with different grammatical constructions and focus. The study is relevant because it shows that, the meaning of negation may depend on the construction in which it occurs, supporting the present study's examination of the semantic functions of Taraba Fulfulde verbal negation.

Therefore, the reviewed studies examine negation in related Nigerian languages, focusing mainly on marker distribution, frequency, grammatical structure, tense, aspect, mood, and focus. However, they provide limited explanation of the contextual semantic functions of verbal negative markers in Taraba Fulfulde. This study fills the gap by identifying these markers and describing their context-dependent meanings.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Functional-Typological Theory, principally developed by Talmy Givón (1979) in On Understanding Grammar and further developed in Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction (1984). The theory views language as a system in which grammatical structures are closely related to the communicative functions they perform. It therefore emphasizes the analysis of linguistic forms in relation to their meaning, context, discourse, and communicative use. Givón's work gives particular attention to the relationship between syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse, including the study of negation.

The theory has also influenced previous linguistic studies. For example, Givón (1978, 1984) applied the functional approach directly to negation and its semantic and pragmatic functions. Contini-Morava (1989) applied a discourse-pragmatic and functional approach in studying negation and tense-aspect in Swahili, while Sosa (2015) explicitly employed discourse-based functionalism associated with Givón (1984) in analysing negation in Eastern Khanty narratives. These studies demonstrate the usefulness of the functional-typological perspective for examining negative constructions not merely as grammatical forms but also in relation to their discourse and communicative functions.

The theory is relevant to the present study because Fulfulde verbal negative markers perform different semantic and communicative functions depending on their contexts of use. Thus, in the Taraba Fulfulde variety, markers are examined in relation to functions such as prohibition, warning, prevention, restriction, advice, and negative command. Functional-Typological Theory therefore provides an appropriate basis for relating the grammatical forms of verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde to the meanings and communicative functions they express. This makes the theory particularly suitable for the study of the semantic functions of Fulfulde verbal negation.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. Data are obtained through oral interviews, observation, elicitation and the researcher's linguistic intuition. The study focuses specifically on verbal negative markers. The collected data are transcribed and analysed according to their semantic and communicative functions. Positive and negative constructions are compared, and speakers' explanations are used where necessary to validate interpretations. The findings are presented marker by marker, using Fulfulde examples, glosses, English interpretations, and contextual explanations.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented in accordance with the two objectives and research questions of the study. Four major verbal negative markers are identified in the data: *akul, taa, taata*, and *taako*. Their semantic functions are described below.

Table 1: Present Verbal Negative Markers in the Taraba Fulfulde Variety

| S/N | Negative markers | Gloss | Grammatical category |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *akul* | don't | verbal |
| 2 | *taa* | do not | verbal |
| 3 | *taata* | should not | verbal |
| 4 | *taako* | should not | verbal |

### *i. Akul* "do not"

In the Taraba Fulfulde variety, the marker functions as a verbal negative marker, particularly in negative directives. Its major semantic functions identified in the data are prohibition, prevention, and warning. In these uses, the marker directs the addressee towards the non-performance of a specified action. The functions identified are discussed below.

#### (a) Expression of prohibition

One of the major semantic functions of negative marker *akul* is the expression of prohibition. In this function, the marker indicates that, an action is not permitted and that the addressee must refrain from performing it. The marker therefore changes an ordinary action into a prohibited action. The semantic opposition can be observed by comparing the positive and negative forms. Consider the below example in (1a&b);

1. (a) *nastu moota*
V.(enter) N.(car)
(enter the car)

(b) *akul a nasti moota*
NEG.V 2ND SG V.(enter) N.(car)
(do not enter the car)

In the positive construction, the verbal phrase *nastu moota* 'enter the car' presents an action that, the addressee may perform, with the introduction of negative marker *akul* changes its meaning by directing the addressee to refrain from the action. Thus, the verbal phrase *akul a nasti moota* meaning 'do not enter the car' does not simply state that the action does not occur; rather, it explicitly prohibits the addressee from entering the car. Therefore, the semantic function of the marker in this context is described as prohibition.

#### (b) Expresses prevention

Another semantic function of the marker is the expression of prevention. Here, the speaker uses the marker to prevent an action that, the addressee is expected to perform. The negative construction consequently has the semantic effect of stopping the action before it occurs. This is exemplified in (2a&b);

2. (a) *Mi yahan luumo Yola*
1ST SG V.(go) "future" N.(market) N.(place)
(I will go Yola market)

(b) *akul a yehi luumo Yola*
NEG.V 2ND SG V.(go) N.(market N. (place)
(do not go to Yola market)

The positive sentence in the above examples presents the verbal action, for which it indicates the performance of something that is intended to occur. The negative construction however, blocks

that, the anticipated action when the negative marker is introduced, the semantic value changes from performing the verbal action. The semantic function of the marker is therefore preventive because the speaker seeks to ensure that, the verbal action does not occur.

**(c) Expresses warning**

Another semantic function of the marker is the expression of warning. The marker may be used when the speaker considers an action potentially dangerous, undesirable, or capable of producing an unwanted consequence. The negative construction consequently serves to caution the addressee against performing the action. The below examples illustrate that as in (3a&b)

3. (a) *hawru "hiite lanntarki"* (b) *akul a hawri hiite lantarki*
V.(connect) N.(electric light) NEG.V 2ND SG V.(connect) N.(electric light
(connect electric light) (do not connect electric light)

Here, it has been observed that, semantically, in a context where connecting the electric light may cause danger or another undesirable consequence, the marker functions as a warning, the negative construction therefore carries both negative and cautionary force.

***ii. Taa "don't "***

*Taa* functions as an independent verbal negative marker in constructions in which the speaker disallows an action. The data show that it expresses prohibition, negative command, restriction, and warning. Its major semantic functions can be described as follows.

**(d) Expression of prohibition**

The marker *taa* semantically functions to express prohibition, indicating that, an action must not be performed; the speaker uses the marker to prevent the addressee from carrying out a particular negative verbal action. Consider examples (4a&b) below;

4. (a) *winndu innde Adamu* (b) *taa winndu innde Adamau*
V.(write) N.(name) N.(person) NEG.V V.(write) N.(name) N.(person)
(Write Adamu's name.) (do not write Adamu's name.)

Example (4a) expresses an instruction to perform the action of writing. Semantically, the speaker presents writing Adamu's name as an action that, the addressee is expected to carry out. There is no negative element restricting the action; therefore, the proposition is interpreted positively as an instruction or command to perform the specified activity. In (4b), the introduction of negative marker taa changes the semantic interpretation of the utterance, rather than directing the addressee to perform the action of writing, *taa* places a prohibition on that action. The construction taa *winndu innde Adamu* therefore means that, the addressee is required to refrain from writing Adamu's name. The marker does not merely indicate that, the writing has not occurred, rather, it communicates that, the action should not be allowed.

**(e) Expression of negative command**

The marker also performs the semantic function of expressing a negative command. In this use, taa is employed to instruct the addressee not to perform an action that could otherwise be expressed through an affirmative command. The marker therefore changes the directive force of the utterance from requiring an action to prohibiting that action. Semantically, taa signals that the action denoted by the following verb is not to be carried out by the addressee. It consequently establishes a restriction on the addressee's behaviour and communicates the speaker's intention to prevent a particular action. Consider the following examples in (5a&b):

5. (a) *meemu hiitere Ma* (b) *taa meemu hiitere Ma*

V.(touch) N.(eye) POSS.(your) NEG.V V.(touch) N.(eye) POSS.(your)
(touch your eye) (do not touch your eye)

Example (5a) is an affirmative command. The speaker directly instructs the addressee to perform the action expressed by verb *meemu* (touch). The object of the action is noun *hiitere* (eye), while (POSS) *Ma* (your) indicates possession, giving the meaning "your eye". Semantically, the utterance requires the addressee to carry out the specified action, namely, touching their eye. There is no negative element restricting the action; instead, the speaker presents the action as one that should be performed.

Example (5b) contains the verbal negative marker taa preceding the verb *meemu* 'touch'. The presence of taa changes the semantic interpretation of the affirmative command in (5a). Instead of instructing the addressee to touch the eye, the speaker explicitly instructs the addressee to refrain from touching it. Thus, the marker, reverses the directive force of verbal expression *meemu hiitere Ma* meaning (touch your eye) from an instruction to perform an action, to an instruction not to perform that action. The semantic contrast between the two examples can therefore be represented as follows:

| | Construction | Semantic interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| (5a) | *meemu hiitere Ma* | The addressee is instructed to touch their eye. |
| (5b) | *taa meemu hiitere Ma* | The addressee is instructed not to touch their eye. |

The contrast demonstrates that, the negative marker *taa* is responsible for the negative directive meaning in (5b). While the affirmative command in (5a) indicates an obligation to perform the action, the negative command in (5b) establishes an instruction to refrain from performing the same action. Therefore, in the Taraba variety of Fulfulde, taa semantically functions as a marker of negative command, whereby the speaker directs the addressee towards non-performance of the action expressed by the verb.

**(f) Expression of restriction**

Another important semantic function of the marker in the Taraba variety of Fulfulde is the expression of restriction. In this function, taa places a semantic constraint on the performance of an action by indicating that the action is not permitted within a particular contextual, spatial, or situational domain. The marker therefore does not merely indicate the non-occurrence of an event; rather, it restricts the addressee's range of permissible actions by excluding a particular activity from what may appropriately be performed in the given situation. Consider examples (6a&b):

6. (a) *yeccu Idrisa nasta nder suudu* (b) *taa Idrisa nasta nder suudu*
V.(tell) N.(person) V.(enter) PP.(in) N.(room) NEG.V N.(person) V.(enter) PP.(in) N,(room)
(tell Idrisa to come inside the room) (Idrisa do not enter the room)

Semantically, example (6a) expresses a situation in which the action of entering the room is presented as a permitted or desired activity. The verb *nasta* (enter) denotes the relevant action, while the preposition *nder suudu* (in the room) specifies the spatial domain in which the action is to take place. Idrisa is consequently presented as the participant expected to carry out the action.

In contrast, example (6b) introduces the negative verbal marker *taa,* which changes the semantic status of the action expressed by the verb *nasta* (enter*),* rather than presenting entering the room as an expected activity, the marker semantically places a restriction on noun Idrisa's performance of the action. The construction consequently means that, Idrisa is not permitted to enter the room in the context under consideration.

**(g) Expression of warning**

Semantically, the marker express warning when it is used to caution an addressee against performing an action that, the speaker considers potentially harmful, undesirable, risky, or likely to result in an unwanted consequence. In this function, the marker carries not only negative meaning but also a pragmatic cautionary force. The speaker uses the marker to alert the addressee that, carrying out the specified action may result in a consequence that should be avoided. The warning therefore involves an implicit relationship between the prohibited action and a potential undesirable consequence, even when the consequence is not explicitly stated in the utterance. Consider example (7a&b);

7. (a) *Meetu soodugo maaroori*
V.(repeat) V.(buy) N.(rice)
(buy the rice again)

(b) *taa meetu soodugo maaroori*
NEG.V V.(repeat) V,(buy) N.(rice)
(do not buy rice again)

Example (7a) presents the verbal affirmative construction, whereby the addressee is permitted to perform the verbal action *meetu* (repeat) which indicates that, the action has occurred previously and is to be performed once more, while verb *soodugo* (buying) identifies another verbal action and noun *maaroori* (rice) as the nominal object. Semantically, the construction indicates the following relationship: Addressee → repeat the verbal action of buying → nominal entity rice. There is no negative element in the construction that prevent the action. Consequently, the act of buying the rice again remains within the range of actions that, the addressee may perform. Semantically, the utterance therefore has an affirmative directive interpretation in which the speaker instructs the addressee to repeat the verbal action.

In example (7b), the introduction of negative marker *taa* changes the semantic status of the action, where the negative marker occurs before the verbal phrase, *meetu soodugo maaroori* and prevents the action expressed by the verbal sequence from being carried out. The construction therefore indicates that, the addressee should not repeat the verbal action. However, the semantic meaning of the construction goes beyond a simple negative command because, in an appropriate communicative context, the speaker's use of the marker *taa* as a warning that, repeating the verbal action could result in an undesirable outcome. The speaker therefore cautions the addressee against repeating the action because there is some contextual reason for avoiding it.

***iii. Taata* "should not"**

The semantic functions of the negative marker *taata* in this context, refer to the different meanings and communicative effects that, the marker expresses in verbal negative constructions. The semantically, the description of the marker shows that, it does not merely mark the non-occurrence of an event, rather it occurs in the contexts in which the speaker seeks to strongly prevent, prohibit, restrict, or discourage an action. The following semantic functions are particularly relevant to the analysis of the marker.

**(h) Expression of emphatic prohibition**

The primary semantic function of the marker is the expression of emphatic prohibition. In this function, the marker is used to forbid an addressee from carrying out a particular action. It presents the action as one that, the addressee must avoid. Consider (8a&b);

8. (a) *nastu saare Adamu*
V. enter N. house N. Adamu
(enter Adamu's house)

(b) *taata nastu saare Adamu*
NEG.V V. (enter) N. (house) N. (person)
(do not enter Adamu's house)

Example (8a) presents affirmative construction, where the verb *nastu* (enter) denotes the action, while noun *saare* (house), Adamu (person) specifies the particular location associated with the person. In (8b), the negative marker *taata* is introduced at the sentence initial position which reverses the semantic focus of the sentence. The marker excludes the verbal action of entering Adamu's house from the addressee's permissible behaviour. The speaker does not merely describe a situation in which the addressee does not enter the house; rather, instructs the addressee not to perform the action. The semantic representation is: *taata* + enter Adamu's house→ addressee must not enter Adamu's house.

**(i) Expression of warning**

Another semantic function of the marker is the expression of warning. In this function, the marker is used to caution the addressee against performing an action that may result in danger or undesirable consequence. Consider (9a&b):

9. (a) *meetu soodugo maaroori* (b) *taata meetu soodugo maaroori*
V.(repeat) V.(buying) N. (rice) NEG.V V.(buy) N.(rice)
(buy rice again) (do not buy rice again)

The affirmative construction in (9a) presents a repeated verbal action which, the addressee should perform. The verb *meetu* (repeat) contributes the meaning of repetition, while the verb *soodugo (*buying) identifies the action of buying and *maaro-ori* identifies the object. In (9b), *taata* prevents the repetition of the buying action. In a context where the speaker knows that, act of buying rice again lead to an undesirable result, the construction receives a warning interpretation.

**(j) Expression of restriction**

Taata can also function to express restriction. In this use, the marker limits the range of actions that an addressee is permitted to perform in a particular context. The action itself may be physically possible, but the speaker establishes that it is not permissible under the circumstances. Consider (10a&b):

10. (a) *nasta nder suudu* *(b) taata a nasta nder suudu*
V. (enter) PP.(in) N. room NEG.V 2$^{ND}$ SG V.(enter) PP.(in) N.(room)
(enter the room) (do not enter the room)

Example (10a) presents entering the room as an allowable or expected action. The verb *nasta* 'enter' identifies the event, while *nder suudu* specifies its spatial domain. The semantic interpretation is entered + room → possible action. In (10b), *taata* indicates a restriction on the action of entering the room. The speaker establishes a boundary around the addressee's behaviour by excluding entry into the room. The semantic interpretation followed the pattern: *taata* + enter room → entry into the room is not permitted. The construction therefore does not necessarily mean that the addressee is physically unable to enter. Instead, the addressee can perform the action physically but is not allowed to do so in the particular context.

***V. Taako "should not"***

The field data indicate that, the marker is more specific than a general verbal negator, semantically, it is associated with prohibition, advice, and warning, and it may also convey negative obligation. Its semantic interpretation is strongly influenced by the communicative context. The below semantic functions have been identified during field survey for the marker.

**(k) Expression of prohibition**

One major semantic function of the marker is the expression of prohibition. In this function, the marker indicates that, an action is not permitted and therefore must not be performed. The marker does more than simply negate the proposition; it places a restriction on the performance of the

action expressed by the verb. The speaker uses the marker to prevent the addressee from carrying out an action that is considered inappropriate, unacceptable, or forbidden in the particular context. The prohibitive interpretation is particularly clear when the marker occurs with an action that, the addressee might otherwise be expected to perform. The semantic relationship can therefore be represented as: *taako* + verb → the action must not be carried out. Consider the following examples in (11a&b)

11. *(a) yah ladde* *(b) taako a yaha ladde*
V.(go) N.(bush) NEG.V 2ND SG V.(go) N.(bush)
(go to the bush) (do not go to the bush)

The sentence prohibits the addressee from going to the bush as in (11b). The speaker is not merely stating that, the addressee does not go to the bush; rather, the speaker places a restriction on the action. The intended interpretation is that, as in (11b), going to the bush is not permitted. The corresponding affirmative construction as in (11a) can be contrasted with the negative construction. Here, the affirmative construction in (11a) presents going to the bush as an event without any negative restriction. In contrast, the marker *taako* in (11a) prevents the performance of that event.

**(l) Expression of advice**

The marker can also function semantically to express advice or strong recommendation against an action. In this use, the speaker does not necessarily possess institutional authority to prohibit the action. Instead, the speaker advises the addressee to refrain from performing it because doing so may result in an undesirable outcome. Consider (12a&b):

12. *(a) hootu janngirde jaango* (b) *taako hootu Janngirde jaango*
V.(go back) N.(school) ADV.(tomorrow) NEG.V V.(go back) N.(school) ADV.(tomorrow)
(go back to school tomorrow) (you should not go back to school tomorrow)

Example (12a), is an affirmative construction that, directs the addressee to return to school tomorrow. In (12b), the insertion of the negative marker *taako* changes the meaning to "you should not go back to school tomorrow." Thus, the marker does not negate the action of returning to school, it rather conveys the speaker's recommendation that, the addressee refrain from carrying out the negative verbal action, because the speaker considers it undesirable. The marker therefore expresses advisory negation, where the negative marker combines with the verb to discourage an intended action without necessarily implying an authoritative prohibition.

**(m) Expression of warning**

Another semantic function of the marker is the expression of warning. In this function, the speaker uses the marker to caution the addressee against performing an action that may result in danger, harm, punishment, loss, or another undesirable consequence. The warning interpretation arises from the relationship between the prohibited action and an anticipated negative consequence. The speaker presents the action as something that should be avoided because its occurrence could lead to unwanted result. Consider (13a&b):

13. (a) *Manu janngitan habaruwol ngol*
N.(a person) V.(repeat) N.(news) CM.(class marker)
(Manu will read this news again)
*(b) taako Manu janngita habaruwol ngol*
NEG.V N.(a person) V.(repeat) N.(news) CM.(class marker)
( Manu should not read this news again)

Here example (13a) presents future verbal action *"janngitan"* re-read the news again as an affirmative event. In (13b), the negative marker *taako* is introduced which changed the focus of the sentence by warning Manu against repeating of the verbal action. The negative marker therefore does more than simply negate the verb *janngita* (re-read) indicates that, the action should be avoided because the implication may be negative. Thus, semantically, the marker conveys a cautionary meaning, whereby the speaker draws attention to the negative result associated with performing the action.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings reveal that verbal negation in Taraba Fulfulde employs four major markers: akul, taa, taata, and taako. These markers express prohibition, prevention, negative command, restriction, warning, advice, and negative obligation, depending on the communicative context.

The findings support Sanusi and Oyewole (2019), who established that negative markers in Idoma and Tiv exhibit language-specific distributions. However, while their study focused on marker position, the present study examines semantic functions. Similarly, Sanusi and Aminu (2022) demonstrated variations in the use of Yoruba negative markers. The present findings extend this perspective by explaining the context-dependent meanings of Taraba Fulfulde negative markers.

The findings also relate to Ilori and Oyebade (2012), who identified constructions containing two negative elements in Igala. However, the present study emphasises semantic interpretation rather than multiple negative elements. Furthermore, the findings support Cyffer (2009) and Storch (2009), who demonstrated that grammatical environment and construction influence negation. While these studies emphasised tense, aspect, mood, and focus, the present study highlights communicative context and speaker intention. Similarly, Bulama and Hussaini (2023) identified negative markers in Nyariwa Kanuri, whereas this study additionally describes their semantic functions.

Therefore, the findings support previous research on language-specific negation while extending existing knowledge through a contextual semantic analysis of verbal negative markers in Taraba Fulfulde.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that, verbal negation in the Taraba Fulfulde variety is a semantically rich system in which negative markers perform functions that extend beyond denial of an action. The identified markers *akul, taa, taata*, and *taako* are systematically associated with directive and modal meanings such as prohibition, prevention, warning, restriction, advice, negative command, and negative obligation. Their interpretation is determined not only by the negative form itself but also by the verbal construction and communicative context in which it occurs. The study therefore establishes that, a satisfactory description of Taraba Fulfulde verbal negation must account for both its negative meaning and the communicative function associated with each marker.

**References**

Alotaibi, N. (2024). Variation in verbal negation in Jordanian Arabic: A corpus-based analysis. *Lingua, 297*, 103644.

Anderson, C., Bjorkman, B., Denis, D., Doner, J., Grant, M., Sanders, N., & Taniguchi, A. (2022). *Essentials of linguistics* (2nd ed.). eCampusOntario.

Bulama, M. H., & Hussaini, K. (2023). Negative imperfective verb form in Kanuri: A case study of Nyariwa Kanuribe. *Jurnal Arbitrer*.

Cruse, D. A. (2000). *Meaning in language:* An introduction to semantics and pragmatics. Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics (6th ed.)*. Blackwell Publishing.

Cyffer, N. (2009). Negation patterns in Kanuri. In N. Cyffer, E. Ebermann, & G. Ziegelmeyer (Eds.), *Negation patterns in West African languages and beyond* (pp. 71–92). John Benjamins.

Givón, T. (1979). *On understanding grammar*. Academic Press.

Givón, T. (1984). *Syntax: A functional-typological introduction*. John Benjamins.

Leech, G. N. (1981). *Semantics*: The study of meaning (2nd ed.). Penguin Books.

Ilori, F. J. (2020). The semantics of kọ́-negative constructions in Yoruba. *Nigerian Journal of the Humanities, 25*, 13–22.

Ilori, J. F., & Oyebade, F. O. (2012). Negation in Igálà. *Entrepalavras: Revista de Linguística, 2*(1), 25–40.

INLP Linguistic Glossary. (2021). *Semantics*. Indigenous and Northern Languages Program.

Ishaku, J. N. (2020). Syntax of negative markers in Igbo and English languages. *Journal of Language and Linguistics, 6*(3).

Krasnoukhova, O. (2020). The typology of negation. In V. Déprez & M. T. Espinal (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of negation* (pp. 91–116). Oxford University Press.

Krasnoukhova, O., van der Auwera, J., & Crevels, M. (2021). Postverbal negation: Typology, diachrony, areality. *Studies in Language, 45*(3), 499–519.

Morante, R., & Blanco, E. (2020). Recent advances in processing negation. *Natural Language Engineering*.

Onwuegbuchunam, M. O., & Onwuegbuchunam, R. O. (2021). The study of Igbo and Chinese negative markers. *Nigerian Journal of African Studies, 3*(2).

Paradis, C. (2024). Lexical semantics. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*.

Payne, T. E. (1997). *Describing morphosyntax: A guide for field linguists.* Cambridge University Press.

Salawu, O. O. (2011). *Aspects of Bura negation* [B.A. long essay, University of Ilorin].

Sanusi, I., & Aminu, A. (2022). Negation as a peculiar grammatical feature of Yoruba incantations. *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies, 13*(1).

Sanusi, I. O., & Oyewole, L. D. (2019). The syntactic position of negative markers in Idoma and Tiv: A deviation from language universal validity. *Journal of Universal Language, 20*(1), 77–98. https://doi.org/10.22425/jul.2019.20.1.77

Shimizu, K. (1983). *The Zing dialect of Mumuye: A descriptive grammar*. Helmut Buske Verlag.

Storch, A. (2009). Negation in Jukun. In N. Cyffer, E. Ebermann, & G. Ziegelmeyer (Eds.), *Negation patterns in West African languages and beyond* (pp. 107–120). John Benjamins.

Zaradzki, L. (2020). Verbal negation. *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung, 24*(2), 485–502.

Ziegelmeyer, G. (2009). Negation of non-indicative mood in Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri. In Cyffer, E. Ebermann, & G. Ziegelmeyer (Eds.), *Negation patterns in West African languages and beyond* (pp. 7–20). John Benjamins.

IJELCS