

# Negation patterns in Bengali

HANNE-RUTH THOMPSON

School of Oriental and African Studies

## I. Introduction

Negation is a challenging chapter in Bengali grammar which has so far attracted remarkably little attention. Bengali negation is complex: there are no negative pronouns and adverbs but there are negative verbs, and negation can be linked to tense. In this article I offer an overview of Bengali negation patterns as they exist in modern Standard Bengali, without going into great detail on etymological morphology or, for that matter, a complex debate on logical aspects or truth conditions.

Of all the negational features in Bengali, the status of *ni* as a tensed negative has attracted the most attention, but findings are far from conclusive and some very basic questions have remained unasked. A relatively recent essay by Gillian Ramchand ‘Two types of negation in Bengali’ (unpublished, 2001) gives a semantic analysis of the two forms *na* and *ni* and offers some interesting new perspectives.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji’s tentative claim that *ni* is a variation of *nai*, and his uncertain stance on the role of the incomplete verb *ach-* in the formation of perfect tense forms has been generally accepted but not examined. Chatterji deals with negative verbs in one short paragraph in the ‘Additions and corrections’ to his 1,300-page opus *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, and makes no meaningful distinctions between the different forms. Anderson, in his useful, if dated, *Manual of the Bengali Language* (Cambridge, 1920) devotes all of six lines to the negative in a paragraph entitled ‘The negative verb’, which I quote here in full:

Negation is expressed by putting *na* after the finite verb and before the non-finite verb, with one remarkable exception. It is not usual to say *korlam na*. The proper negative of the preterite is *korini nai*. This applies to all preterites except *chilam*. It is permissible to say *chilam na*. (p. 17).

Much of this is controversial for modern Bengali and I hope to show, among other things, how peacefully *korlam na* and *korini* (the equivalent of Anderson’s *korini nai*) can co-exist.

One thing that is immediately apparent in Bengali is that there are no negative adverbs or pronouns. How do Bengalis say ‘never’? They don’t—and this simple fact alone constitutes a significant difference between negation in Bengali and negation in English. Whereas in English we can say ‘Nobody came’, in Bengali we can only say *keu ase ni*, which literally means ‘anyone did not come’. The negative element is moved from word-level to sentence-level and it is logical to start with the tentative assumption that in Bengali all negation happens on the syntactic level. We do not encounter the ambiguity of double negatives such as ‘I won’t have none of that’, ‘I didn’t say nothing’ because negative adverbs and pronouns like nothing, nobody, none, nowhere or never do not exist.

There are double negatives of a different kind, however, involving lexical negation. This is a fairly simple morphological feature consisting of negative affixes and does not really concern us here. But for the sake of a well-rounded picture, these affixes should at least be mentioned. Most Bengali prefixes have two allophones, one for preceding vowels and one for preceding consonants. Milne (1913) gives a complex listing of Bengali affixes and their very varied

semantic impact. Of those that can be classed as having a negating quality *o-* (on) is the most common. Bengali morphology is dealt with in detail in many grammar text books, so here are just a few examples. Nouns (including verbal nouns) and adjectives take the same prefixes; suffixes are word-class specific. What I have given as the ‘nearest root word’ is in most cases not the basic form, but it is sufficient to show the building blocks (see Table 1).

Below are some sentences containing more than one negative element. These are mostly combinations of a negatively prefixed noun or adjective with a sentence negation, but occasionally (sentence ii) two negatively prefixed elements come together. The rhetoric element in these sentences is equivalent to English structures such as ‘it is not impossible...’, ‘it is not unheard of...’. All these sentences are from *Otol joler dike* by Prophanulo Ray.

- (i) *nijer odhikarer sīma kotodūr poryonto ṭana, seṭa tar ojana noy*<sup>1</sup>  
He was not unaware of how far he could stretch the limits of his privileges.
- (ii) *tār modhye emon ek probol bykṭitvo royeche, ya omanyō kora osombhob*  
Apart from this she had such a strong personality that it was impossible to ignore it.

Table 1.

	Nearest root word	→	Affixed negative form	
prefix <i>o</i> (before consonants)	<i>kṣomota</i>	power	<i>okṣom</i>	powerless
	<i>sombhob</i>	possible	<i>osombhob</i>	impossible
	<i>moron</i>	death	<i>omor</i>	immortal
	<i>pūrṇo</i>	full	<i>opūrṇo</i>	incomplete
	<i>sahajyo</i>	help	<i>osohai</i>	helpless
prefix <i>on</i> (before vowels)	<i>goṇona</i>	counting, reckoning	<i>ogonyo</i>	uncountable, innumerable
	<i>onto</i>	end, termination	<i>ononto</i>	endless, infinite
	<i>upoyukto</i>	suitable	<i>onupoyukto</i>	unsuitable
prefix <i>nir</i>	<i>odhikar</i>	right	<i>onodhikar</i>	interference
	<i>olos</i>	lazy	<i>nirolos</i>	unceasing, untiring
suffix <i>hīn</i> (adj.)	<i>aśa</i>	hope	<i>niraśa</i>	despair
	<i>ohonkar</i>	pride	<i>nirohonkarī</i>	unassuming, humble
	<i>polok</i>	wink, twinkling	<i>polokhīn</i>	unblinking
	<i>uddeśyo</i>	purpose	<i>uddeśohīn</i>	purposeless, aimless
	<i>ortho</i>	meaning	<i>orthohīn</i>	meaningless
	<i>svartho</i>	self-interest	<i>svarthohīn</i>	unselfish

<sup>1</sup> The transliteration used in this paper differs from the Standard Sanskrit transliteration in the following areas: (1) The Bengali inherent vowel is given as *o*, not as *a*. I consider this a correction of a longstanding problem. The inherent vowel in Bengali is pronounced *o* or *ō* but never *a*. (2) স্ব, ষ and yophola য are all given as *y*. (3) Bisorgo ঙ is given as *h*—this corresponds to the Library of Congress use. (4) No distinction is made between *donto* ত (ত) and *khoṇḍo* ত (ক)—both are given as *t*.

- (iii) *yodi onekdin kachakachi thaka yeto oke pheranō osombhob hoto na*  
If he had managed to stay close, it would not have been impossible to bring her back.
- (iv) *gari calate calate pranobesh onoboroto kotha bole yacchilen thiki, tobe ei ghōraghuriṭa nichok uddeśohin bhromonnoy*  
While he was driving, Pranobesh kept on talking incessantly, but this travelling around was not just an aimless journey.

The numbered example sentences in this article are taken from the Dhaka literary journal *kali o kolom* (Ink and Pen) Vol 7, August 2004, and from a range of contemporary novels. They are cited as primary literature. My term ‘real’ or ‘live’ examples excludes all sentences from grammars, courses or text books which serve to demonstrate particular structures.

## II. *A comparative detour*

### (1) Negative particles and speech acts

Before we look at the actual structures, let us take a quick comparative detour.

In English, apart from these negative adverbs and pronouns, we have the sentence negator ‘not’ and the lexical unit ‘no’, which can function as an adjective, as in ‘no bread’ and also forms the negative response to a question. When you look up the word ‘no’ in the dictionary, it is interesting to see that we are moved from the lexical to the speech act level. ‘No’ as a negative response has no word class assigned to it but comes under the category ‘formulaic expression’, ‘interjection’ or ‘speech convention’, as of course does the word ‘yes’.

In Bengali the word *na* is both the sentence negator and the negative answer to questions. Linguistic terminology is unsatisfactory here. Formulaic expressions are phrases such as excuse me, thank you, pardon, goodbye and hello in some definitions, other sources list phrases like by the way, as a matter of fact, if you will, more or less—interjections are words like ah, well, eh, hmm and oh. Should the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’ be considered equivalent to these?

It seems to me that what the above expressions have in common is that they are non-essential parts of speech, whereas the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’ can convey crucial information. The New Collins Dictionary classes the word ‘yes’ as ‘sentence substitute’—perhaps this is more appropriate, though it is still rather vague. I do, however, agree that in order to classify words like ‘yes’ and ‘no’ satisfactorily we have to step outside the lexical word class enclosure and recognize their illocutionary force.

Both ‘no’ in English and *na* in Bengali can stand as statements on their own. There are other ways of answering a question in the negative. In English we have phrases like *not at all*, *far from it*, in Bengali *mōṭei na* ‘not at all’, emotive expressions like *dūr*, which literally means distance but is used to strongly reject a suggestion, and words with negative prefixes such as *osombhob* ‘impossible’.

For the purpose of clarity I will make a distinction between what I will call the illocutionary *na*, which is used as a negative answer to questions, and an adverbial *na* in connection with verb forms.

### (2) negative potential

The fact that Bengali has no negative adverbs and pronouns seems at first sight to constitute a lack. In English we can make subtle distinctions, as between

'I've said nothing' and 'I haven't said anything', the first version of which is more definite. Bengali does not have this option. Nor does it employ emphatic negatives like not ever, never ever, none at all. Indefinite adverbs *kōthaō* 'somewhere', *kokhono* 'ever', and pronouns *keu* 'someone', *karō* 'someone's', *kichu* 'some', *kōno* 'any', etc., are used in conjunction with a sentence-final negation. Some simple examples with the English negatives and the Bengali indefinites underlined are given in Table 2.

From Table 2 it may seem that Bengali is more restricted than English in expressing negative concepts, but a closer analysis of Bengali patterns will show that through devices like flexible word order, negative verbs and non-finite structures a great range of expressions is available. But what about more complex sentences?

The sentence-final negative can serve to negate more than one indefinite adverb/pronoun, and the English translation of the sentence shows that, in spite of its greater lexical range, English does not, in standard speech, allow more than one negative element per sentence either, whether this be an adverb or a sentence negator. Instead the first negative adverb/pronoun causes all subsequent adverb/pronouns to appear in their indefinite form, as shown here:

*keu kokhono ei kotha janbe na*      No-one will ever know about this.  
*ōra kokhono kauke kichu bolbe na*      They will never tell anybody anything.

### III. Negation patterns in Bengali

As Anderson (1920) rightly says, the negative particle *na* is added after the verb. I will, for the moment, consider *ni* to be a tensed version of *na* and discuss the relationship between the two forms further on (see under III, 4). But we still have two other sentential negative elements whose uses need to be looked at.

Purely on the surface structure we have three basic syntactic patterns:

- sentences with the negative element *no-*;
- sentences with the negative element *nei*;
- sentences where *na* (or *ni*) is added to the verb.

Both *no-* and *nei* can be considered negative verbs, which means that they occur in sentences where no other verb form is present and can therefore be assumed to contain the verbal element. Bengali linguists, including Pabitra Sarkar, list *no-* and *nei* indiscriminately together as forms of negation. As far as I know, no one has attempted a proper differentiation and comparison of the two verbs. In order to make clear the syntactic nature of this study the verb *nara* 'be unable to' should be briefly mentioned. This verb is analogous to the verb *para* 'be able to' and is no longer in common use. In spite of its

Table 2.

English	Bengali	gloss
<u>Nobody</u> knows.	<i>keu jane na</i>	anyone does not know.
<u>Nothing</u> needs to be said.	<i>kichu bolar dorkar nei</i>	something of the saying need is not
They will <u>never</u> lose this.	<i>ōra seta kokhono harabe na</i>	they ever will not lose this
I have <u>no</u> doubts.	<i>amar kōnō sondeho nei</i>	my any doubt is not

negative meaning it is syntactically a regular verb and has no unusual features which concern the negation structures of Bengali.

(1) Sentences with the negative element *no-*

This is a negative verbal element; it is not used in connection with other verb forms and is the negative of the zero verb. The zero verb in Bengali has often been interpreted as the absence or omission of a verb form in the present tense. I disagree with this reading and have discussed it in detail in the chapter on verbs of being in my PhD thesis. The zero verb is the true copula in equational sentences. Neither *hoōya* with its semantic properties of ‘becoming’ nor *ach-* with its existential features can fulfil this role. The confusion which has existed around these structures for many years is perpetuated by Bengali scholars when they classify the *noi*, *noō*, *noy*, *non* forms as ‘the negative *na* with copula verb *hoōya* (Dakshi 1995: 137). This classification is wrong on both counts: the *noi*, *noō*, *noy*, *non* forms are not the negative forms of *hoi*, *hoō*, *hoy*, *hon*, and *hoōya* is used as a copula only in a very few specific cases. One of them is the use of third person present continuous *hocche* and simple past *holo* as a procopula, e.g. *aj holo budhbar* ‘today is Wednesday’. These forms are never negated. A detailed discussion of these can be found in my thesis. Another use is the definition of human relationships and this is the only case where the forms of *no-* can be interpreted as a direct negative to forms of *hoōya*, as for instance in:

*se tōmar ki hoy*, literally: ‘What is he to you?’  
to which the answer would be:  
*se amar bhai hoy* ‘He is my brother’.

The negative of this is *se amar bhai noy* ‘He is not my brother’, but there is a subtle shift in focus here. *se amar bhai hoy* makes a statement about a relationship, *se amar bhai noy* makes a statement about a person. The difference is, however, slight, and I have found no occurrences of *se amar bhai hoy na*.

I have no argument with Chatterji who says that etymologically the form *noy* is a contraction of *na hoy*. This is on the morphological level and sounds probable but in modern usage and from a syntactic point of view *noy* and *hoy na* are quite distinct.

*hoōya* like other verbs, negates with *na*

*ekhane gom hoy* Wheat grows here.  
→ *ekhane gom hoy na* Wheat doesn’t grow here.  
*kalke bṛṣṭi hobe* There will be rain tomorrow.  
→ *kalke bṛṣṭi hobe na* There will be no rain tomorrow.  
*tar osukh hoyeche* He has been ill.  
→ *tar osukh hoy ni* He has not been ill.

This is the only correct way of negating these sentences.

The verb *no-* has the present-tense conjugated forms only: *noi* (for first person), *noō* (for second person familiar), *noy* (for third person familiar), *non* (for honorific forms, second and third person). There are no non-finite verb forms, no imperatives and no other tenses. The stem *no-* as well as the verbal noun, which is given as *noha* in the Samsad Dictionary, are assumed dictionary creations with no existence in real language. The old forms *nohi* for *noi* and the equivalent forms for second and third person are now obsolete. There is a conditional participle *noile* which is used in alternation with *na hole* ‘if this is not so’, but its semantic features are not in line with the conjugated forms and I

would consider it a separate lexical entity. I will come back to this. Forms of *no-* appear in simple sentences such as:

- (1) *boiṭa amar noy* The book is not mine.
- (2) *aj budhbar noy* Today is not Wednesday.
- (3) *gachṭa beśi boṛo noy* The tree is not very big.
- (4) *baba nobī non* Father is not a prophet.

All these examples in their positive form would have the zero verb. Past tenses would be with *chilo na*, the negative past tense of *ach-*, the future tense is most likely with a form of *hoōya* ‘be, become’, the conditional also with *hoōya*. This touches on the complex issue of overlap among the Bengali verbs of being, and requires separate treatment.

But let us look at some real examples, moving from simple to more complex structures (all from *kali ō kolom*):

- (5) *amar tō niścito noi*. But we are not sure.
- (6) *ei ki yotheṣṭo noy?* Is this not enough?
- (7) *se poth amar noy*. This is not my way.
- (8) *amar kaje ami mōṭei ṭṛpto noi*. I am not at all satisfied with my work.
- (9) *kebol mukher kotha noy*. (They) are not just empty words.
- (10) *lekhok bōdh hoy prairbheṭ biśvobidyāloygulō somporke khub beśi obohito non*.  
The writer is perhaps not very familiar with private universities.
- (11) *eṭa komiṭir siddhanto, amar ekar noy*.  
This is the committee’s decision, not just mine alone.
- (12) *ekhan theke koto dūr apnar bari? beśi noy*.  
How far is your home from here? Not far.

It has to be kept in mind that the function of a copula is to link (or equate) two elements, the subject and its complement, though the subject can sometimes be omitted, as for instance in sentence (9). Even with more complex structures it is possible to reduce them to their essentials in order to see the logic. The basic positive structure is [Subject] equals [Complement], with the subject either a noun or a pronoun, the complement a noun, pronoun or an adjective. In sentence (12) we have an interesting example of a locative context, which is normally associated with *ach-* and therefore *nei*, but if we look more closely we see the equational element: *dūr beśi noy* ‘The distance is not great’. As we shall see in section IV there are a number of areas where the uses of *noy* and *nei* can indeed come very close, and careful thought or reliable intuition is needed to distinguish between the two.

In addition to this verbal role, *noy* has a modal sentence function expressing appropriateness or acceptability. This appears, though not frequently, in connection with certain non-finite verb forms. Two instances are as follows:

- (i) *noy* following a conditional participle: *ajke na gele noy*, which translates as ‘It won’t do if (we) don’t go today’.
- (ii) *noy* following a verbal noun in the genitive: *eṭa hoōyar noy*, ‘This is not supposed to happen’.

Both of these structures contain a modal element and go beyond mere negation. An overview of these and other modal structures involving non-finite verb forms is given at the end of section (2) but I have not yet found sufficient examples to come to any firm conclusions about their internal composition.



(2) Sentences with *nei*

This negative verbal form is unchangeable and is the negative of *ach-* 'to be, to exist, to be present'. On the surface this is very simple. *ach-* itself is an incomplete verb with only present-tense *achi* (first person), *acho* (second person, familiar), *ache* (third person, ordinary), *achen* (second and third person, honorific), and the equivalent simple past-tense forms *chilam*, *chile*, *chilo*, *chilen*, but no non-finite verb forms, no imperative and no other tenses. For these, the verb *thaka* 'stay, remain' is the substitute.

As learners of Bengali, our first acquaintance with the verb *ach* is in sentences such as *amar gari ache* 'I have a car' and its equivalent negative *amar gari nei* 'I don't have a car'. To translate *ach-* with 'have' is an approximation. There is no overtly possessive element in *ach-*; a more accurate translation of *amar gari ache* is 'my car exists' *nei* is also the negative for the locative use of *ach-* where the verb forms are conjugated. Thus we have:

<i>ami ekhane achi</i>	I am here.	<i>ami ekhane nei</i>	I am not here.
<i>tumi ekhane acho</i>	You are here.	<i>tumi ekhane nei</i>	You are not here.
<i>se ekhane ache</i>	He ( <i>ord</i> ) is here.	<i>se ekhane nei</i>	He ( <i>ord</i> ) is not here.
<i>tini ekhane achen</i>	He ( <i>hon</i> ) is here.	<i>tini ekhane nei</i>	He ( <i>hon</i> ) is not here.

*nei* is therefore the only verb in Bengali which treats me, you, ordinary and honorific, in the same way, and this does, of course, have a compelling logic behind it: absence does not distinguish gods, ghosts or specks of dust. This fairly straightforward semantic concept, expressed by *nei*, can be divided into two types of absence: absence from a particular place (specific absence (a)) and non-existence (general absence (b and c)). For the convenience of English speakers, sentences denoting general absence can again be divided into those which can be translated with 'have' (b) and those best translated with phrases like 'there is no' (c).

The presence of a logical subject in the genitive usually indicates that a translation with 'have' is appropriate. The following example sentences are divided into groups which show these differences clearly.

## (a) examples of specific absence, locative sentences:

- (13) *uni ajke basay nei*. He is not at home today.  
 (14) *keu tō ekhane nei*. There is no-one here.  
 (15) *uni emon svostite nei*. He is not in such great comfort.  
 (16) *nośto korar motō poryapto somoy tar hate nei*.  
 There is not a lot of time to waste on his hands. (a clumsy translation!)
- (17) *amader deśer praihbhet biśvobidyalyogulōte bamla bhaṣar kōnō sthan nei*.  
 In the private universities of this country there is no room for the Bengali language.

## (b) examples of general absence with a genitive 'logical' subject, 'have sentences':

- (18) *mayer apon rokter keu nei*  
 lit: of mother of own blood someone is not  
 Mother has no blood-relatives.
- (19) *amar ar kichu bolar nei*  
 lit: of me something more of saying is not  
 I have nothing more to say.

- (20) *er ninda korar bhaṣar amar jana nei*  
 lit: of this language of condemnation my knowing is not  
 I have no language with which to express (sufficient) condemnation  
 of this.
- (21) *tār soṅge amar biṣeṣ dviṃot nei*  
 lit: with him of me particular disagreement is not  
 I have no particular argument with him.

(c) examples of general absence without a possessive element, ‘there is not sentences’

- (22) *ar kōnō poth nei?*  
 Is there no other way?
- (23) *amake na cene emon lōk nei*  
 lit: me does not know such a person is not  
 There is no one who doesn’t know me.
- (24) *er sotyota osvikaṛ korar upay nei*  
 lit: of this truth of the denying way is not  
 There is no way of denying the truth in this.
- (25) *robīndronather sarbik bhabnar phosol i ye e melay*  
 lit: the harvest of all Rabindranath’s thinking that in this fair  
*rūpayoṅkorar ceṣṭa hoyechilo tate sondeho nei*  
 of the shaping there was the effort in this doubt is not.  
 There is no doubt that an effort was made to incorporate all of  
 Rabindranath’s thinking into the character of the fair.

My arrangement and interpretation of these sentences is meant to show that, whatever the degree of complexity or abstraction, we have in all of them the underlying simple concept of absence. Particularly in the category of general absence, there are a number of abstract nouns which are commonly used. In sentence (24) we have *upay* ‘way’, in sentence (25) *sondeho* ‘doubt’. Other such nouns are *dorkar* ‘need’, *kotha* ‘word’, *proyōjon* ‘necessity’, *somoy* ‘time’, *jayga* ‘place’, *karoṅ* ‘reason’, *sombhobona* ‘possibility’, *subidha* ‘convenience’. The phrase *osubidha nei* ‘there is no inconvenience’ is as common as the English equivalent stock phrase ‘no problem’. Syntactically *nei* almost always follows a noun. In sentences (19) and (20) we have two verbal nouns; *amar* ‘my’ (or any other possessive pronoun) *jana nei* ‘I have no knowing’ is a common phrase which often, but not always, implies information irretrievably lost or unavailable and the phrase offers a convenient way out of a personal and active statement *ami jani na* ‘I don’t know’. In sentence (19) we have a genitive verbal noun *bolar* ‘of the saying’ attached to *kichu* ‘something’. This is also a very common structure and is, from an illocutionary point of view, equivalent to shifting the attention away from the speaker. If we compare these two sentences

- (i) active *ami ar kichu korbo na* I won’t do anything more.  
 (ii) with *neimār korar ar kichu nei* There is nothing more for me to do.

we see immediately that the structure with *nei* is not only impersonal but implies an abdication of responsibility. In fact, taking a step away from syntax to the communication level, the word *nei* in itself has a somewhat fatalistic air and is often accompanied by an open-handed waving gesture to indicate that there is nothing to be done.

Like *noy*, *nei* also has a modal role in connection with non-finite verb forms, this time with the infinitive. In *ekhane thakte nei* ‘it is not appropriate



to stay here', *nei* adds the element of suitability, permission or acceptability. I have not yet encountered many live examples of this structure, but it belongs to a pattern of a particular type. Some common verbs in connection with certain non-finite verb forms take on a modal meaning, for instance *eṭa hoōyar noy* 'this should not occur/happen', *eṭa korte hobe* 'this has to be done', *ekhane thakte ache* 'it is permissible to stay here', *eṭa kora yay* 'it is possible to do this'. The verbs involved in these structures are predominantly verbs of being and the verbs *yaōya* 'go' and *cola* 'move'.

Table 3 shows a preliminary overview of these structures.

Table 3.

Non-finite verb form	+	3rd person verb form		modal meaning
		pos	neg	
cond. part.	<i>gele</i>	<i>hoy</i>	<i>hoy na</i>	sufficiency
cond. part.	<i>gele</i>	<i>cole</i>	<i>cole na</i>	sufficiency
inf.	<i>yete</i>	<i>hoy</i>	<i>hoy na</i>	obligation
inf.	<i>yete</i>	<i>ache</i>	<i>nei</i>	permission
cond. part.	<i>gele</i>	–	<i>noy</i>	appropriateness
vbN (gen.)	<i>yaōyar</i>	–	<i>noy</i>	compulsion
vbN	<i>yaōya</i>	<i>yay</i>	<i>yay na</i>	possibility

### (3) The properties of *ni*

*ni* has a different status from *nei* and the forms of *no-*. It is not a negative verb but a negative particle used together with simple present-tense verb forms, and is usually classified as the negative of the present perfect and of the past perfect. This classification is based on the non-appearance of the expected forms *\*korechi na* (present perfect) and *\*korechilam na* (past perfect), not a very reliable base for interpretation. What we do know is that, in addition to the simple present negative *ami kori na*, we have the structure *ami korini* and that there is clearly a difference of tense between these two forms in that *ami korini* has a past tense meaning. This is a vague but safe place to start.

Rafiqul Islam in his 2001 condensed grammar *Bangla Byakaran Samikha* points to a fundamental difference between *na* and *ni*. *na* is an independent particle, *ni* is not. In written language *ni* is often attached to the verb form, *na* is written separately. But this is merely a convention and has no bearing on the internal connection between these forms. A Bangladeshi variation of *ni* is *nai*, and this is frequently separated from the verb form in writing. From what we have seen earlier, there is no doubt that *na* has the monopoly on being the illocutionary negative particle, but how does *na* differ from *ni* in its adverbial use? In addition to its negative function *ni* has a tense element built into it and is therefore more closely linked to the present-tense verb form—it has a doubly changing effect on the verb form. Rafiqul Islam makes much of the fact that *ni* cannot stand on its own and this is a valid observation. *ni* always follows a simple present verb form directly, no adverbial can be inserted between the verb and *ni*, and *ni* never occurs on its own in answer to questions.

It is disconcerting to see that even something as basic as the actual verb forms used is a matter of disagreement. Qazi Din Muhammad calmly states that 'the use of the particle *ni* with the simple present is found to function as the corresponding negative implications of the perfective present and

progressive and perfective past in all aspects and persons and grades' (1963: 33). What he is saying is: *ami khai ni* is the negative not only of the present perfect *ami kheyechi* and past perfect *ami kheyechilam* but also of the past continuous *ami khacchilam*. Smith (1997) makes no mention of the past continuous in this context but allows the occasional use of *korechilam na* (the past perfect) (p. 23). Our starting position is therefore far from clear. In order to refute Muhammad's claim, all we need to do is to find some examples of past continuous uses with *na* and this is easily done.

- (26) *bhūruta kaṭiye uṭhte parchilen na onuradha*  
Onuradha was unable to overcome her fear.  
(27) *osommanṭa ekebare bhulte parchilen na*  
He was unable to forget the slight.

These sentences suggest that the *ni* negation does not apply to the past continuous but they are taken from the same novel and both involve the verb *para* 'be able to' so we need to look a bit further.

- (28) *ami kichu bolchilam na* I wasn't saying anything.  
(29) *pranobeś ki uttor deben bhebe pacchilen na*  
She could not imagine what Pranobesh would reply.  
(30) *sthir thakte para sombhob hocchilo na*  
It was not possible to remain quiet.

All of these are instances of past continuous verb forms negated with *na*, and since this confirms the general consensus on which tenses are affected by the *ni* negation, we can safely assume that Muhammad's claim is wrong. Smith's statement that the past perfect negative is occasionally formed with *na* is more difficult to refute—the fact that I have not found any examples for this is insufficient proof. But since he is talking about an occasional occurrence rather than a grammatical rule, we can leave this with a question mark.

It is much more important and interesting to try and establish the semantic properties of these *ni* structures. Designating the present and past perfect as their area of application is a default solution and does not yet tell us very much. In dealing with real language we cannot speculate about what a sentence would have been without the negative element. We can only go by what we find, and it is reassuring to find sentences like:

- (31) *sabu ar tar premik eksathe thakte śuru koreche ki koreni khobor peye lōkṭir strī gāye hajir holo*  
The man's wife turned up in the village with news about whether Sabu and her lover had started living together or not.

where the positive *koreche* and negative *koreni* forms appear in direct juxtaposition.

An indication of past perfect contexts is given in these examples:

- (32) *kichu ekṭa bolte ceṣṭa korechilen tini kintu golar svor phōṭeni*  
He tried to say something, but his voice failed him. (lit: his voice didn't emerge)  
(33) *tarpur ṭhik ki hoyechilo tāke janayni se*  
Exactly what happened afterwards, he didn't tell him.

These are fairly firm indicators of a tense-context, but from a functional point of view we are on safer ground referring to the structure in question as the *ni* past tense rather than as the present and past perfect negative.

In order to get a firmer grip on these structures, let us have a look at past-tense negative verb forms in general. In sentences (29) and (30) the past continuous negative forms have a particular purpose and are the logical forms to use. Bengali tense use often seems arbitrary to us but it has its own semantic logic. Both these verb forms occur in narrative, simple past contexts. In sentence (29) the past continuous tense expresses the ongoing frustrating worry about what the husband's reaction might be. In sentence (30) the continuous verb form, in spite of the stative properties of *sombhob hoōya* 'be possible' adds the itchy restlessness which the author wants to convey. No other tense would have had the same effect. These kinds of examples are not frequent but when they do occur, they are used for specific purposes. In neither case is the *ni* past tense a likely alternative. Apart from the past continuous we have the simple past *ami khelam na* and the past habitual *ami khetam na*. In order to establish the role of the *ni* past tense, we need to take all these forms into account. Anderson is wrong when he says that the simple past *korlam na* is unusual. There are plenty of examples like (34) with or without time adverbials:

- (34) *se din ar keu elo na*  
No-one else came that day.

Gillian Ramchand in her article 'Two types of negation in Bengali' sets out to ascertain the semantic range of the *ni* past tense through the analysis of linguistic features and with complete disregard to traditional categorization. We need this kind of purely linguistic focus because it offers an objective analysis of contemporary language. If we want to classify the *ni* form appropriately, we need something more tangible than somewhat arbitrary traditional assumptions.

Ramchand's article offers a new approach and I was fascinated by her attempt to prove that the present perfect is semantically incompatible with the *na* negative. I was thinking along the same lines and would have liked to come up with a clear semantic distinction between sentences like *ami khelam na* (simple past with *na*) and *ami khai ni* (*ni* past tense). One fairly clear semantic component is that of volition. While *ami khai ni* is the simple reporting of a fact, *ami khelam na* contains a deliberate element 'I didn't eat because I didn't want to eat'. Ramchand sees the distinction in the aspective features involved in the two tenses, the simple past and the present perfect. Briefly stated, she says that a perfective aspect cannot be made incomplete. A comparable structure in English is a sentence containing 'already' which represents a perfective/completive aspect. The only way to negate an already completed action is to abandon the completedness and revert to an unfinished state of events by replacing already with yet, e.g. 'I have already seen him' becomes 'I have not seen him yet'. In the move from the completed *ami kheyechi* 'I have eaten' to a negation of this event we have to change the completive verb form. The reasoning behind this can be shown even more clearly if we look at the common Bengali compound verb structure of a perfective participle plus the verb *phela* 'throw'. In many ways, this structure is the epitome of perfectivity or completedness. *ami bhat kheyechi* means 'I have eaten' or 'I have eaten the rice'. *ami bhat kheyechi* means 'I have eaten the rice up'. This sentence cannot be negated. In order to express the negated concept, the verb *phela*, with its completive aspect, needs to be removed and the simple verb form restored *ami bhat khai ni* or *ami bhat šeṣkori ni* 'I have not finished the rice' i.e. 'there is still some left'.

Ramchand's analysis is thorough and careful and adds a new perspective to the understanding of these forms. She lacks, however, a realistic view of

Bengali tenses. This is perhaps simplifying her arguments more than is admissible but it seems to me that her understanding of the present perfect is based on this aspective feature of completion, a telic reading, whereas the simple past has to her an inherently atelic character. These issues need further consideration, but they take us far beyond our present topic to a semantic analysis of Bengali tense use. Add to this the distributional factor of these tenses: the main use of the simple past is in narrative text while the *ni* past tense is the more common tense in spoken language.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the *ni* past tense, I have carried out a random study of narrative texts (mainly fiction) on the initial assumption that the *ni* past tense does not mix well with simple past tense storytelling. From normal everyday spoken use of the form, it is easy to get the impression that it has a 'not yet' feature built into it. If we compare the simple past *ami bajare gelam na* and the *ni* past tense *ami bajare yai ni* both sentences can be translated as 'I didn't go to the market'. In order to clarify the difference between these two sentences, we can add time adverbials and have

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| simple past          | (i) <i>ami gotokal bajare gelam na</i><br>I didn't go to the market yesterday. |
| <i>ni</i> past tense | (ii) <i>ami ekhonō bajare yai ni</i><br>I haven't yet gone to the market.      |

This is the kind of pattern we would like to find and which corresponds well with English tense use, i.e. the semantic difference between simple past and present perfect. It is also the pattern that Ramchand identifies. Using time adverbials to test semantic features is a valid and useful procedure and, indeed, in a great number of cases the distribution of time adverbials seems to confirm our desired pattern. Let us look at some examples:

- (35) *ekhane emon kichu ekhonō ghoṭeni*  
Nothing like that has happened here yet.
- (36) *apnake tō bola hoy ni*  
You have/had not been told.
- (37) *keno etodin tōmar songe yōgayōg rakhte parini, seṭa tōmar oṭjana noy*  
You know why I was unable to stay in touch with you for so long.
- (38) *ami onek khōj korechi kintu kopi pai ni*  
I searched a lot but have not found any copies.
- (39) *se kokhonō biyete raji hoy ni*  
She has never agreed to marriage.

Even in the absence of overt time adverbials these sentences have a perfective character which indicates a future change, e.g. in (36) it can be assumed that the addressee will now be told, in (37) that contact has now been restored, in (39) that the lady in question is now changing her mind about getting married. But is the use of the *ni* past tense restricted to such contexts? What about its use in simple past narrative contexts? Given the fact that in such contexts we find frequent leaps to the simple present or the past perfect and therefore a general instability of tense use, there is no indication at all that the *ni* past tense does not fit into these contexts. Here are three poignant examples:

- (40) *pranobeś yokhon nije theke boleni tokhon e niye kōutuhol prokaś korāṭa obhabonīyo*  
When Pranobesh didn't say anything himself, it would have been unthinkable to reveal his curiosity.

- (41) *tar bōn tulu bombete phōn korechilo. tader khobor nebar por lainṭa prañobeśke dite bollo. omla tokhon take bolen prañobeś bombete nei. kōṭhay gechen seṭa tulu jante cayni*

His sister Tulu phoned Bombay. After hearing their news she asked to speak to Pranobesh. Amla told her that Pranobesh was not in Bombay. Tulu didn't ask where he had gone.

- (42) *strīr soṅge mithyacarer jonyo kharap lagchilo prañobeśer. kintu e chaṛa ki korar ache? moner gōpon alōchaya-ghera omśe ātipāti kore khūjeō protaronar samanyo obhiyōḡtukuō paōya gelo na. na omlake tini ṭhokanni*

Pranobesh felt bad about lying to his wife. But what else could he do? Even diligently searching the darkest recesses of his mind he could find no charge of deceit. No, he had not cheated Amla.

In (40) we have in one neat sentence a convincing indication that the *ni* past tense can occur with a fixed point time adverbial (*yokhon*) and refer to a past event. In (41) we have a simple series of events with the usual mixture of tenses. We have two negatives. The first one *prañobeś bombete nei* is reported speech. In Bengali this is usually conveyed directly, so the simple present in this sentence is expected. The second one is in the *ni* past tense. Out of the many passages I examined I chose this relatively simple one to show that the *ni* past tense is used for completed actions (or non-actions) in the past without any indication of our 'not-yet' feature. Example (42) is even more convincing. The last sentence *na omlake tini ṭhokanni* serves as a summing-up of a past tense train of thought and actions with no connection to the present tense. A more thorough investigation will have to be done on these past-tense negatives, but this should be in connection with tense use in general.

In addition to these fairly straightforward findings, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that there is a style issue involved here. The more colloquial the style, the more *ni* past tenses appear. In novels with a more formal style we often have a change to the simple present or the present continuous for negative statements. It is almost impossible to draw any firm conclusions on this, but we can be sure that the *ni* past tense is a fully participating member of past tense narrative verbal variations.

#### IV. Syntactic realities

##### (1) Overlap of *nei* and *noy*

Learners of Bengali have a certain amount of difficulty in distinguishing between the uses of *nei* and *noy*. We can explain to them that *nei* is the negative of *ach-*, *noy* the negative of the zero verb; we can say that sentences with *nei* involve absence, sentences with *noy* the non-equation of two elements, but the structures can indeed become very close. If we look at example sentence (3) *se poth amar noy* 'this is not my way' we can replace *noy* with *nei* and translate the sentence as 'I don't have that option'. We may want to change the word order to *amar se poth nei* to see that this is the same structure as *amar gaṛi nei* 'I don't have a car'. But word order is fairly flexible in Bengali and the underlying structure is not always easy to detect. In Milne's *Practical Bengali Grammar* we find the sentence:

*bina nimontrone sekhane yaōya amar iccha noy*  
I don't wish to go there without an invitation.

Milne's book has many errors in it and we are tempted to regard this as one of them because we expect *amar iccha nei* 'I have no wish'. But a *nei* structure would clearly require the verbal noun *yaōya* to be in the genitive: *amar sekhane yaōyar iccha nei* 'of me the wish of going is not'. With a nominative verbal noun an equational reading is entirely possible 'to go there my wish is not'. The meanings are to all intents and purposes the same, but the example shows not only that these kinds of sentences need very close reading, but also that the fluctuation between nominative and genitive verbal nouns, which is sometimes dismissed as sloppiness, in fact has a much more solid syntactic basis. Syntactically, in structures with *nei* the immediately preceding noun is the sentence subject, while everything else serves to modify this subject, e.g. *amar sekhane yaōyar dorkar nei* 'of me the need of going is not', *dorkar* 'need' is the subject and *amar sekhane yaōyar* 'of my going there' qualifies this need. In structures with *noy* we are dealing with two nominative elements, the subject and the complement in an equational relationship.

This relationship status can sometimes be obscured by omission of the subject. We had this in sentences (9) and (12) and we have it here:

- (43) *ekhon समय প্রতিবাদ করার প্রতিবাদ শুধু নয় প্রতিরোধ করার*  
Now is the time to protest, not only to protest, but to prevent.

The basic sentence is *সময় প্রতিবাদ করার নয়* 'the time is not to protest'. This is a more uncompromising statement than *ekhon প্রতিবাদ করার সময় নেই* 'now there is no time to protest' would be, and it shows that the abstract nouns mentioned above are by no means automatically linked with *nei*. In some sentences the copulative structure is plain to see:

- (44) *মানুষ শুধু প্রেমের কারণে নয়*  
Human beings don't just exist for love.

But in sentences like (45), again from Milne, we need to identify the nominative subject *taha* 'that' in order to grasp fully the structure.

- (45) *সে যে আমাকে কি বিরক্তো করে তুলিবেচিলো তাহা আর বলিবার কথা নয়*  
I can't adequately express how greatly he annoyed me.

The second part of the sentence can be glossed as

<i>taha</i>	<i>ar</i>	<i>bolibar</i>	<i>kotha</i>	<i>noy</i>
that	more	of the saying	word	is not

If we leave out the non-essentials *ar* 'more' and *bolibar* 'of the saying', and look at

<i>taha</i>	<i>kotha</i>	<i>noy</i>
that	word	is not

we see that this is exactly parallel to, for instance,

<i>ta</i>	<i>mithya</i>	<i>noy</i>
that	lie	is not

'That is not a lie'.

This detailed demonstration of a structure which is intuitively accessible to native speakers has a significance beyond the learning needs of foreigners because it offers a real insight into the way syntactic structures reflect semantic realities. This level of understanding opens up the logic of Bengali grammatical structures in a new way and alerts us to these intriguing case variations.



Here are three sentences from Abdul Rouf Choudhury's novel *Pordeshe Porbasi*, which show the same pattern.

- (46) *tobe ekṣetre somoy tō boṛo kotha noy*  
But time is not the real issue here.

The equational structure is easy to see here. In both the following sentences, however, a combination of *kotha* with *nei* would be more usual, and we note that the use of *noy* causes the sentence subjects (*niculōk* (47) and *osubidhe* (48)) are in the nominative, where *nei* would have required the genitive. The possible *nei* versions of the sentences are given in brackets:

- (47) *imilyaṅde tō kṛṣoker mōto niculōk thakar kotha noy*  
(*imilyaṅde tō kṛṣoker mōto niculōker thakar kotha nei*)  
But in England such lowly people as farmers are not supposed to exist.
- (48) *apnar kōnō osubidhe hoōyar kotha noy*  
(*apnar kōnō osubidhar hoōyar kotha nei*)  
You are not supposed to have any problems.

These examples show the complex internal structuring of Bengali sentences. Unfortunately, the matter does not end there. Whilst it is true that sentences with *noy* need a nominative subject, they do not always have a nominative complement. We have seen this in simple structures like

<i>boṭi</i>	<i>amar</i>	<i>noy</i>
the book	mine	is not
‘The book is not mine’.		

But we also find it with verbal nouns

- (49) *e kolkatar goṅgay ki ek ṭan ache taha bhōlbar noy*  
There is some attraction in the Ganges in Kolkata which is unforgettable.

For our purposes, we need only look at the basic structure

<i>ta</i>	<i>bhōlbar</i>	<i>noy</i>
that	of the forgetting	is not

There is no sign of any hidden, modal meaning in this. If we had come across this sentence in isolation, we might have taken it as an instance of ellipsis, short for *ta bhōlbar jinis noy* ‘this is not a thing to be forgotten’ but alongside the simple *boṭa amar noy* ‘the book is not mine’ we can accept it as a complete sentence and at the same time take note of the wide semantic range of the genitive. As I said at the end of section (1), I do not yet have enough examples of this kind for a proper analysis and, taking sentence (49) into account, it is clear that the modal character of these structures is by no means certain. Nor are the structures themselves clearly defined.

Both the infinitive with *nei* and the genitive verbal noun with *noy* express a prohibition, though whether these imply a strict ‘must not’ or a less severe recommendation ‘not to’ has not yet been examined conclusively.

We can have:

- (50) *pōna mach*                      *dhorte*                      *nei*  
fingerling                      to catch                      is not  
‘To catch fingerlings is not allowed’.

or

- (51) *pōna mach*                      *dhorbar*                      *noy*  
 fingerling                      of the catching                      is not  
 ‘Fingerlings are not to be caught’.

In sentence (52) we have, with the same structure, an element of necessity rather than prohibition.

- (52) *ta*                      *amader*                      *bole debar*                      *noy*  
 this                      to us                      of the saying                      is not  
 We don’t need to be told this. Or, indeed  
 It is not up to us to say this.

The modal element is there in these sentences but it seems to have a wide semantic range. The syntactic scaffolding alone does not tell us enough.

## (2) Positioning of *na*

This section can be subdivided into the following occurrences of *na*:

- (i) *na* following a finite verb form;
- (ii) *na* preceding a finite verb form for emphasis;
- (iii) *na* preceding a finite verb form in subordinate clauses;
- (iv) *na* preceding a non-finite verb form.

(i) The negative particle *na* follows the verb and, since verbs usually come at the end of sentences, *na* is generally the last word in a sentence. Rafiqul Islam interprets the fact that *ni* is usually attached to the verb form as a particularly close connection. The connection between verb form and *na* is, however, almost as close. I have found only one instance of the particle *tō* inserted between the two.

- (53) *arō dujon yatri peye gele tōmake niye yete kōnō osubidha hobe na kintu pacchi tō na.*  
 If two other passengers can be found, there won’t be a problem taking you. However, I’m not finding any.

*tō* is an adversative particle which strengthens the effect of *kintu* ‘but’. It could just as easily have been placed after *na*. Examples like this—and there are only very few—show that the verb form and *na* are not entirely inseparable but that they have a strong adherence to one another.

There are two regular patterns for *na* preceding the verb and they are syntactically linked to one another: subordinate clauses and non-finite verb forms.

(ii) But first we have an emphatic use of *na*:

- (54) *na ache bamla bhaṣa, na ache bamla bibhag*  
 There is no Bengali language and there is no Bengali department.  
 (55) *na yabo bombete, na yabo kōthaō, ekhanei thakbo tōmar soṅge*  
 I’m not going to Bombay, I’m not going anywhere. I’ll stay here with you.

These examples are relatively rare but all the more striking. In (54) we have not only a reversed order of verb and negative particle but also the combination of *ache* with *na*. Ferguson has another similar example:

- (56) *sekhane na ache ghor-dor, na ache kichu*  
There are no houses there, there is nothing.

It seems from these few examples that this word order is linked to an anaphoric sentence arrangement, a string of parallel structures. This use of *na* before a finite verb form can be considered a rhetoric device for emphasis. One other instance of preceding *na* is found in (57) with a third person imperative:

- (57) *amar chele ache. ar keu asroy na dik, se debei*  
My son is there. Let no one else give shelter—he will give it.

It seems likely to me that this is the normal position of a negation with a third person imperative rather than an emphatic device, but I have not seen enough examples to corroborate this. For the moment, I will classify it here.

(iii) The system of subordinating clauses and their relationship to the main clause is quite different in Bengali from in English. Although my research in this area is still incomplete, I can make some preliminary comments. Every subordinating conjunction has a corresponding conjunction in the main clause. In fact, the existence of a correlative in the main clause can be taken as a definitional feature for subordination in Bengali. Conjunctions without a correlative are coordinating. We have here a very interesting overlap of word classes which has not been recognized as such. The familiar concept of relatives and co-relatives is recognized for relative clauses of the type *ye-se* ‘he-who’, *ya-ta* ‘that which’ and by extension for conjunctions like *yemon-temon* as-as. It also applies to pairs like *yodi-tahole* ‘if’, *yodiō-tobuō* ‘although’, *yokhon-tokhon* ‘when’. Instead of having a clear distinction between pronouns and conjunctions, we have the phenomenon of correlation, to which pronouns as well as conjunctions are subject.

But how does this affect negation patterns? The particle *na* can precede a finite verb form in subordinate clauses, but not in main clauses, except for emphatic use as shown above. With some conjunctions this change in word order is almost obligatory, e.g. in sentences with *yodi* ‘if’.

<i>tumi yodi na yaō</i>	if you don't go
<i>uni yodi ese na thaken</i>	if he hasn't arrived
<i>byṣṭi yodi na hoto</i>	if it didn't rain

With other conjunctions the positioning of *na* seems to be linked to aspectual features such as progressiveness:

- (58) *yotokṣoṇ na rumi asche ekhanei opekṣa korben*  
As long as Rumi didn't turn up he would wait for her here.

In the same novel, a few paragraphs later, the same concept is given with *yokhon*—*na* appears after the verb.

- (59) *yokhon rumi elo na tokhon sāja keyatolay phire elen*  
When Rumi didn't turn up he went straight back to Keyatala.

The difference between *yotokṣoṇ* and *yokhon* is their extension in time. While *yotokṣoṇ* refers to an extended period ‘as long as, for as many moments as’, *yokhon* gives us a point in time ‘when, at that moment’. In another context we find:

- (60) *kintu yodin na prthibī dhvōmso hocche, totodin tō manuṣer onner*  
*soṁsthan korte hobe*

But as long as the world is not on the point of extinction, provisions have to be made for man to eat.

We can therefore provisionally state that with durative conjunctions the negative particle is drawn into the phrase, appears before the verb form and often, but not always, forms a close semantic unit with the conjunction, implying 'as long as not', whereas with positional (point in time) conjunctions, *na* comes after the verb form.

In an essay on the difficulties of unifying the language, very poignantly, there is:

- (61) *yotokṣoṇ nirokṣorta dīr na hobe ebom deṣer sorbosadharoṇ ontoto ekhonkar obosthay ō ek śo joner modhye sotokora ṣaṭjon sotyii śikṣalabh na korbe totodin bamlabhaṣar ō unnoti duḥsadhyo*  
 As long as illiteracy is not abolished and while at least at the moment 60% of the population don't benefit from education, an improvement in the Bangla language is hard to accomplish.

What does the author mean by improving the Bangla language? There does not seem to be much wrong with it and it is clear that the negative particle plays its own subtle role in the semantic interplay of sentence parts and in retaining the internal balance which is so typical for this language. In the cases where *na* is placed before the verb it loses its exposed sentence-final power but it gains a stress which is never present when *na* follows the verb.

(iv) *na* preceding a non-finite verb form: I started with the hypothesis that in Bengali all negation is on the sentence level, that *na* at the end of a sentence negates the whole sentence. But this somewhat rigid regime is loosened up in connection with non-finite verb forms. Non-finite verb forms play a crucial role in Bengali syntax. In fact, they are so prominent that where two or more actions or events are related and reported together, a non-finite verb form is almost always the first port of call. Subordinate clauses with finite verb forms are usually only the back-up option. Let us have a brief look at what non-finite verb forms can do in places where English has subordinate clauses.

English subordinating conjunctions can be grouped into the following semantic areas:

- Time (after, before, when, while, since, until)  
 The perfective participle can deal with anything related to sequences of events (when, after, before). The present participle exists for the purpose of expressing simultaneity (while). For 'since' and 'until' the verbal noun with the postpositions *theke* 'from' and *poriyonto* 'until' are the obvious choices.
- Cause and effect (because, since, now that, as, in order that, so)  
 The locative verbal noun can express cause, so does the genitive verbal noun with the postposition *jonyo* 'for' (because, since) or the postposition *pore* 'after' (now that). Anything relating to purpose or effect can be expressed through an infinitive (in order that/in order to).
- Opposition (although, even though, whereas, while)  
 The adversative particle *ō* added to the conditional participle or to the perfective participle can cover most of these meanings. Verbal nouns with postpositions such as *sottveō* 'despite' or *poriborte* 'instead of' have a similar function.
- Condition (if, unless, whether or not, even if, in case)  
 Again, the conditional participle is the main candidate for expressing these concepts. Verbal nouns with the postposition *pache* 'unless' offer another option.

This very roughly indicates the wide range of non-finite uses in Bengali and it is no wonder that negation patterns are also affected by it. By positioning the negative particle *na* before non-finite verb forms we gain dramatically the possibility of internal negation. I will restrict myself to two examples for each verb form. There is often a considerable difference between the Bengali sentence structure and an idiomatic English translation, so an approximate gloss is also given.

—Verbal noun

- (62) *tai byaparṭa ar naṛacaṛa na korai bhalo*  
 so this matter more stirring not doing good  
 ‘So it would be good not to stir up this matter any further’.
- (63) *tini na asbar poryonto kōnō kaj hobe na*  
 he until not coming any work will not be  
 ‘Nothing will get done until he arrives’.

The nominal character of verbal nouns has the effect that a preceding *na* becomes almost equivalent to a prefix so that we think of non-arrival, non-occurrence. But this melding together of negative and verb form is not restricted to verbal nouns.

—Conditional participle

Glosses for the conditional participle are given as ‘if doing, going, saying’, etc. This is not very idiomatic in English but it preserves the person-neutral character of the form.

- (64) *kokhonō kokhonō jōr na korle cole na*  
 sometimes force if not doing does not go  
 ‘A little bit of force now and then is necessary’.
- (65) *sokal na hole kichui kora yabe na*  
 morning if not becoming something the doing will not go  
 ‘Nothing can be done before morning’.

In (65) we have the very common form *na hole* ‘if not becoming’, which is used by itself as a conjunction meaning ‘if not, otherwise’. Here again one feels that the negative and the conditional participle meld into one semantic unit.

- (66) *na paōya gele ek ek kore*  
 not finding if going one by one  
*onyo haramjadagulōr baṛi yabo*  
 the houses of the other scoundrels I will go  
 If she is not found I will go to every single house of the other scoundrels.

In sentence (66) it is difficult to decide whether the negative particle belongs to the verbal noun or to the conditional participle. The two non-finites form such a close unit that the negative embraces both forms and a change to *paōya na gele* ‘the finding, if not going’, would, in my opinion, make no difference.

The occurrence of *na hole* in sentence (65) and dealing with conditionals brings us back to the peculiar role of *noile* ‘if not, otherwise’, which was mentioned earlier on. As I said, I feel that this form has moved away from its original, verbal character and has become an isolated lexical unit. There are many cases where verb forms take on the role of another word class. We have *diye* ‘having given’, *niye* ‘having taken’, *kore* ‘having done’, *theke* ‘having stayed’—all of these can all but lose their verbal character when used as postpositions

or adverbs, but they can at any time revert to being full verb forms. The form *noile* has lost its environment. There are cases where *na hole* and *noile* are interchangeable, but in (65), for instance, *noile* could not be used because it is no longer capable of fulfilling its conditional function within a syntactic structure. It is not possible to say *\*sokal noile* nor even *\*ta noile*. Let us look at the following three sentences to establish the uses of *noile*.

—*noile*

- (67) *prothome khōj kore dekhben ekhon histri klas hocche kina. yodi hoy opekṣa korben. noile ei dīparṭmēṭer chatrochatrī beyara yake pan take onurōdh korben...*

First he will find out if there is a history class going on now. If so he will wait. If not, he will ask the students or staff of this department

...

In this sentence *noile* appears in direct juxtaposition to *yodi hoy* ‘if it is’ and has its full conditional character.

- (68) *rate ghumer modhye seṭa bujhiya theke geche. noile sokal uṭṭhei take mone porbe keno*

This understanding must have come to him during his sleep in the night. Otherwise why would it be on his mind as soon as he woke up in the morning?

The syntactic relationships are getting blurred here. There is no longer any sense of equating a subject with a complement—instead *noile* calls the whole previous statement into question. This is by far the most common use of *noile*, at the beginning of a sentence with no syntactic ties. Sentence (69) makes this even clearer:

- (69) *tār esomoy kolkatay asa tader pokṣe bhaloi hoyeche, noile ei mase bombe chuṭṭe hoto*

His coming to Kolkata at this time was convenient for them. Otherwise they would have had to shoot off to Bombay.

We have a perfect equational relationship in the first sentence, which can be rendered with a zero verb and negated with *noy*:

*tār kolkatay asa tader pokṣe bhalo (noy)*

His coming to Kolkata is (not) convenient for them.

The second sentence, starting with *noile* is, however, not concerned with this equation, only with the consequences of his whereabouts. *noile* has lost its verbal character and become a coordinating conjunction meaning ‘otherwise’. I take this as sufficient grounds to claim (see p. 248) that *noile* is no longer, either syntactically or semantically, used as the conditional participle of the verb *no-*.

—Perfective participle

- (70) *kōnō uttor      na diye                      tini      takiye                      thaken*  
any answer    not having given    he      having stared      stays

He kept staring without answering.

- (71) *e kotha      svīkar na kore                      upay      nei*  
this word    not having admitted    way      is not

There is no denying this.



The perfective participle is, of course, the main candidate for sentence-internal negation, simply because it is the most common non-finite form. Negated perfective participles can, as in (70), often be translated with ‘without’ when we are looking at a sequence of events, but we need to have a closer look at the catchment area of the sentence-final negative particle. I was surprised to find the following interpretation in Clinton Seely’s *Intermediate Bengali* (p. 306). He interprets the sentence

*sekhane giye tar soᅅge dekha korlam na*  
 there having gone with him seeing I did not as  
 \*I didn’t go there and I didn’t meet her,

but accepts a separation of the two verb forms in:

*sekhane giyeō tar soᅅge dekha korlam na*  
 there although having gone with him seeing I did not as  
 I went but didn’t meet her.

I can only assume that this is a straightforward mistake. The concessive *ō* in the second sentence adds a semantic nuance but it cannot change the truth conditions of the sentence. In both sentences the act of going is not subject to the negation. The interpretation of these sentences may have been influenced by mixed compound verb structures such as *niye yaōya*, *bhule yaōya*, *rekhe yaōya*, whose internal set-up is very different to that of two sequential but separate verbs. In

*ami take niye yaini*  
 I him having taken I did not go

we cannot accurately guess at the real events without more information. In most cases the sentences will mean: ‘I went but I didn’t take him with me’, which means that the sentence-final negation affects the first, but not the second of the two verbs. The more usual way of stressing the fact that the visit happened without him would be to say:

*ami take rekhe giyechi*  
 I him having left I went

but the structure with *niye yaōya* is perfectly acceptable. The reason for this somewhat unorthodox state of affairs is quite simply the fact that these compounds are in a constant process of semantic bleaching and the finite verb *yaōya* ‘go’ can at times be an almost meaningless attachment to the main verb *neōya*, as it is in the compound *bhule yaōya* ‘forget’, where in most cases no ‘going’ takes place at all. But the situation is quite different where two consecutive actions or events are described. Since every perfective participle is capable of having its own negative particle, there is no reason to assume that a sentence-final negation extends to preceding verbal actions and I have seen no evidence of it.

—Infinitive

(72) *tader soᅅge sob somoy jhogra na korte para yay na*  
 with them always not to quarrel be able does not go

It is impossible not to quarrel with them all the time.

(73) *se din theke onuradhar soᅅge kotha na bolte aroᅅbho korechilen*  
 from that day with Anuradha not to speak he began  
 From that day onwards he started not speaking to Anuradha.

In both of these sentences we have conjunct verbs, a noun-verb combination which is negated. This is no coincidence. Combinations of a simple verb infinitive and a following verb like *para* 'be able to', *caōya* 'want', *yaōya* 'go', *deōya* 'allow' are much less likely to have a negated infinitive, e.g. ? *ami take na yete dilam* 'I allowed him not to go'. This is due to the semantic awkwardness of such structures more than to a syntactic consideration, and Bengali is more likely to reformulate the concept in a positive sentence, e.g. *ami take thakte dilam* 'I allowed him to stay'. An infinitive followed by another verb often functions as the object of this verb, the two verb forms represent one concept and this is why internal negation is rare but syntactically quite possible, particularly in negative sentences:

*se take bhat na khete deyni.*  
She didn't allow him not to eat.

### V. Conclusion

Linguistic phenomena like negation do not occur in isolation. Perhaps this is one reason why Bengali linguists have been somewhat negligent of this feature—it simply does not occur to them to separate negatives from the rest of the language. Every occurrence of a negative rubs shoulders with features like tense, syntactic hierarchy, the status of a verb form, case issues and word order; and at every step of the analysis one has to avoid getting sucked into the uncertain quagmire of other grammatical issues. Separating out the grammatical feature of negation, as I have done here, can be seen as an artificial exercise, an isolation of only one piece of the puzzle, but a close observation of one area gives us not only a focus but a firmer starting point for these other issues and a much better understanding of which questions need to be asked. As a result of this analysis of negation patterns, we can identify the following areas for further research:

- case use;
- tense use;
- syntactic subordination;
- the overlap of verbs of being in Bengali.

In the following areas some progress has been achieved. We have seen:

- the uses of *nei* and *no-* and a clearer dividing line between the two uses;
- the semantic range and tense use of the negative particle *ni*;
- a classification of *noile* as a lexical conjunction;
- the flexibility gained by internal negation;
- a new way of looking at subordination in Bengali.

### REFERENCES

#### Primary literature—Journals

- Bangla Journal* Vol 4, 1–2, Toronto, April–August 2002  
 Vol 5, 1, Toronto, December 2004  
*Kali o kolom* (Ink and Pen), Vol. 7, Dhaka, August 2004  
*Desh*, Kolkata, February 2005

#### Fiction

- Ahmed, Humayun. 1991. *Ekjon mayaboti*. Dhaka: Noroj Kitabistan.  
 Bandopadhyay, Atin. 1987. *Ekti joler rekha*. Kolkata: Pratibhash.  
 Choudhuri, Abdul Rouf. 2003. *Pordeshe porbasi, Inglyander dinguli*. Dhaka: Pathok Shomabesh Books.

- Debi, Moytrei. 1986. *Bidhi o bidhata*. Kolkata: Praima Publications.  
 Debsen, Nobonita. 1996. *Sita theke shuru*, Kolkata: Anondo Publishers.  
 Haq, Hassan Azizul. 1973. *Jibon ghoshe agun*. Dhaka: Khan Brothers.  
 Haydar, Rashid. 1988. Dhaka: *Mabuhai* Aksar.  
 Hossein, Selina. 1987. *Nirontor ghotadhvoni*. Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House.  
 Majumdar, Samaresh. 1998. *Daybondhon*. Kolkata: Anondo Publishers.  
 Ray, Praphullo. 1997. *Otol joler dike*. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing.  
 ——. 1981. *Akaser nice manush*. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing.

### Non-fiction

- Poscimbanga Bangla Academy. 1993. *Prosongo banglabhasha* (essays).  
 Ara, Begum Jahan. 2005. *Bangla bhasha prosongo*. Dhaka: Hemi Books.  
 Murshid, Ghulam. 1992. *Kalantore bangla godyo*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.

### Secondary literature

- Anderson, James Drummond (the elder). 1920. *A Manual of the Bengali Language*. Cambridge (reprint, 1962).  
 Bangla Academy. 1993. *Prosongo Banglabhasha* (essays). Kolkata: Poscimbanga Bangla Academy.  
 Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. 1926. *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*. Kolkata: Calcutta University Press.  
 Dakshi, Alibha. 1995. *Learning Bengali, A Self-Tutor on a Phonetic Basis*. Kolkata: Subarnarelcha.  
 Islam, Rafiqul. 2001. *Bangla byakoron somiksa*. Dhaka: Globe Library.  
 Milne, W. S. 1913. *A Practical Bengali Grammar*. Kolkata  
 Muhammad, Qazi Din. 1963. *Some Syntactic Structures of Bengali in PL* (Pakistani Linguistics).  
 ——. 1969. *Bangla Kryiapod*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy Potrika.  
 Ramchand, Gillian. 2001. 'Two types of negation in Bengali' (unpublished).  
 Sarkar, Pabitra. 1998. *Poket Bangla Byakoron*. Kolkata: Ajkal Publishers.  
 Seely, Clinton B. 2002. *Intermediate Bengali*. Munich: Lincom Europa.  
 Smith, W.L. 1997. *Bengali Reference Grammar*. Stockholm: Association of Oriental Studies.  
 Thompson, Hanne-Ruth (PhD) 'Toward a definitive grammar of Bengali: a practical study and critique of research or selected grammatical structures', SOAS, 2003.