

EXISTENTIAL AND STANDARD NEGATION IN NORTHERN DENE¹

OLGA LOVICK

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

This paper is a comparative analysis of existential and standard negation across Northern Dene. There are two strategies for existential negation: some languages use a negative verb, while others use a negative morpheme reconstructed as **da-we*. Standard negation involves negative inflection in some languages; most of them require additional preverbal or postverbal negative particles. The languages without negative inflection also fall into two groups. Some use a preverbal morpheme reconstructed as **da-we*, while the others use a postverbal negative auxiliary related to the negative verb used in existential negation. The data surveyed here demonstrates that standard negation with **da-we* is widespread in the Northern Dene languages, suggesting that it is an older negation strategy than has been assumed in the literature. The author also shows that the postverbal auxiliary is the result of the negative existential cycle and demonstrates that Dene languages share typological tendencies for the placement of negative particles.

[KEYWORDS: Northern Dene languages, negation, comparative morphosyntax, inflection, particles]

1. Introduction. In this paper, I provide a systematic and inclusive overview of the expression of two types of negation in Northern Dene: negation of existence and standard negation.

The heterogeneity of negative strategies for standard negation in the Dene language family is well established. Krauss (1969:73) already observed that it is “difficult to establish what the negative forms in Proto-Athapaskan were like.” He noted several strategies involving pre- and postverbal material as well as negative inflection in the Alaskan languages but also pointed out that this issue was not adequately documented and analyzed in all languages in the family at that

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All errors in of fact or representation are my own (although I do not take responsibility for transcriptions prepared by others).

time. Half a century later, many gaps in the documentation have been filled, and two comparative studies of Dene negation by Leer (2000) and van Gelderen (2008a) have been published (these studies are introduced in more detail in **1.3.3**). Building on those two studies and incorporating material from almost all members of the Northern Dene group, I will show that there are two very old negation strategies as well as several innovations. The inclusion of negation of existence in this study sheds light on the historical development of standard negation in some of the languages discussed here.

The paper is structured as follows. The remainder of this section contains background information: a brief introduction to the Dene language family is given in **1.1**; the data and conventions used in this study are described in **1.2**; and some typological background on negative polarity is given in **1.3**. This section closes with a discussion of the two earlier comparative accounts of Dene negation, Leer (2000) and van Gelderen (2008a), following which I refine my goals. The data is presented in the following two sections: **2** describes existential negation and **3**, standard negation. Three points emerging from the data are discussed in more detail in the following sections. **4.1** is concerned with the relative age of (standard) negative strategies within the Dene language family. **4.2** provides evidence for the existential negative cycle in Northern Dene. **4.3** offers some commentary on the position of (periphrastic) negative markers in the language group, showing that it reflects broad typological tendencies.

1.1. The Dene languages

1.1.1. Affiliation, classification. The Dene language family (also known as Athabascan) is a group of more than fifty indigenous languages spoken across a large area in western North America. It is part of the Na-Dene family, which also includes Eyak and Tlingit; more recently, a link to the Yeniseian languages in Siberia was proposed (Vajda 2010).

The Dene languages (i.e., the Na-Dene family excluding Eyak and Tlingit) fall into three areal groups or branches: the Pacific Coast languages spoken in Oregon and Southern California, the Southern or Apachean languages in the American Southwest, and the Northern languages spoken in interior and southern Alaska and in northern and western Canada.

The internal structure of the Northern Dene group is a matter of some debate. Goddard (1996:5) lists the following “consensus classification” for Northern Dene; see, however, Krauss and Golla (1981:68–69) for a discussion of the problems with the family-tree approach to classification in the entire language family but particularly regarding the Northern branch. Each language name is followed by its ISO 639-3 code.²

² I have changed the language names used by Goddard to those currently in use. I also added Middle Tanana, which shares the ISO 639-3 code for Lower Tanana. Slavey, Mountain, Bearlake, and Hare also share an ISO 639-3 code, as do Taltsaot'iné and Dëne Sųliné. The ISO codes are also used in the maps shown later in this paper.

- Southern Alaskan** Ahtna (aht), Dena'ina (tfn)
- Central Alaska–Yukon** Deg Xinag (ing), Holikachuk (hoi), Denaakk'e (koy)
- Tanana-Tutchone** Upper Kuskokwim (kuu), Lower and Middle Tanana (taa), Tanacross (tcb), Upper Tanana (tau), Northern Tutchone (tut), Southern Tutchone (tce)
- Gwich'in-Han** Gwich'in (gwi), Han (haa)
- Cordillera** Tagish (tgx), Tahltan (tah), Kaska (kkz), Tsek'ene (sek), Dane-zaa (bea)
- Mackenzie** Slavey (sla), Mountain (scs), Bearlake (scs), Hare (scs), Tłı̨chǫ Yatı̨i (dgr), Dëne Sų́lıné (chp), Taltsaot'iné (chp)
- Central British Columbia** Babine-Witsuwit'en (bcr), Tsilhqút'ín (clc), Dakelh (crx), Nicola?
- Tsetsaut (txc)**
- Tsuut'ina (srs)**

I chose to follow this classification because it is supported to some degree by the data on negation presented in **2** and **3** and thus provides shorthand labels for language groups. It will also become apparent, however, that, as originally suggested by Krauss and Golla (1981), there are numerous instances where the negation data does not support this classification system, pointing to other linkages and groupings instead.

1.1.2. Morphology. Dene languages are renowned for their complex, almost entirely prefixing, verb morphology, which is often represented using a template detailing the relative order of morphemes within the verb. The template in table 1 from Hoijer (1971) is intended as a generalization across the entire language family; as pointed out by K. Rice (2000:404), this generalization misses much of the variation between and even within languages. Also missing from the template in table 1 are positions for suffixes and/or enclitics, which are common in particular in the Northern languages.

The basic lexical unit, consisting of the verb stem plus one or more often discontinuous lexical prefixes, is known as the verb theme. Inflectional and derivational prefixes are interspersed with lexical ones. Verb stems consist (historically

TABLE 1
A PAN-DENE TEMPLATE (HOIJER 1971)

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
				Deictic		Mode/	Subject		
Adverbial(s)	Iterative	Pluralizing	Object	subject	Adverbial	aspect	pronoun	Classifier	Stem

at least) of a root plus one or more aspectual suffixes (see also Leer 1979 for a comparative study and Kari 1979 for a case study of Ahtna). In many daughter languages, aspectual stem suffixation is no longer transparent, but productive suffixes such as negative polarity, nominalization, or imperative are attested in several languages.

Of the other lexical categories, only nouns and postpositions can be inflected, for possessor and postpositional object, respectively. Non-inflectable lexical categories commonly reported are adverbs, modifiers, and “particles”, a catch-all category including evidential and modal markers, speech act indicators, discourse markers, demonstratives, interjections, modifiers, nonverbal predicates, and others.

1.1.3. Syntax. The complex verbal morphology of the Dene languages has resulted in a descriptive bias skewed in favor of morphology and against syntax. Kibrik and Markus (2009:slide 26) observe for example that “[t]he real specialty in Athabaskan lies in morphology, not syntax.” For the present paper, two syntactic features of Dene languages are relevant. First, due to the intricate verb morphology, verb forms are syntactically complex (see K. Rice 2000; Rice and Saxon 1994, 2005). Second, although Dene languages are generally verb-final, many languages employ postverbal particles and enclitics, which are often, but not necessarily, modal in nature. (Postverbal material in Northern Dene is described by K. Rice 1989 for Slave, Cook 2004 for Dëne Sų́líné, Holton and Lovick 2008 for Dena’ina, and Welch 2015 for Thchǒ Yatii.)

1.2. Data. Most of the data for this study comes from published and unpublished sources on Northern Dene languages; some data also comes from my own fieldwork. Some authors use phonemic, some orthographic notation; no effort was made to standardize data representation, since this likely would have introduced mistakes.³ I did, however, make an attempt to standardize glossing. To

³ The modern orthographies used for Northern Dene resemble each other; the following notes describe the general tendencies. **Vowels.** Vowel symbols usually represent IPA cardinal vowels, e.g. <ɪ> corresponds to /i/, <a> to /a/, <u> to /u/. Double symbols represent long or peripheral vowels; single symbols represent short or centralized vowels. Vowel length is distinctive in some languages but not in all. Nasal vowels are marked with an ogonek: <ą, ɨ, ɔ, . . .>. Some languages distinguish tone; high tone is marked by an acute accent <á>, low tone by a grave accent <à>, falling tone by a caret <â> and rising tone by a haček <ǎ>. **Consonants.** In all languages, there is a three-way stop contrast between voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, and ejective stops and affricates. Voiced symbols are used to represent the unaspirated stops and affricates and voiceless ones for the aspirated and ejective ones: thus <d> /t/, <ɬ> /tʰ/, and <tʼ> /tʼ/. Many languages have an interdental consonant series represented by <ddh, tth, tthʼ> (affricates) and <dh, th> (fricatives). Dane_zaa has a dental series instead written as <d_z, t_s, t_sʼ, z, s_s>. <J, ch, chʼ, zh, sh> represent the postalveolar series in most languages. Four Alaskan languages distinguish between front and back velar (or uvular) consonant series; this distinction is written differently in each language. In most languages, <gh, x> represent velar fricatives. Glottal stop is phonemic in all languages and represented by <ʔ> or <ʔʼ>. There is a lateral affricate and fricative series in all languages. The lateral fricatives are written as <l, lʰ> in most languages. Lateral affricates are represented by

conserve space (and to reduce the potential for mistakes), I opted not to provide interlinear morpheme glosses; instead, I provide word glosses detailing (in verbs) subject and object person and number, a lexical gloss, aspectual information, and polarity information; in nouns, possessor person and number and a lexical gloss; in postpositions, object person and number and a lexical gloss; in other lexical items, either a lexical or a grammatical gloss.⁴

1.3. Negation. Leaving aside the problems of defining “negative polarity” (see Givón 1984:chap. 9 or Dixon 2012:chap. 21 for discussion of this issue), I should clarify which types of negative constructions I investigate here. Miestamo (2007) identifies several types of negative constructions: (i) standard negation, (ii) negation of directives, (iii) negation of nonverbal and existential clauses, and (iv) negative indefinite pronouns. Additional topics include (v) negation of subordinate clauses (Miestamo 2013), (vi) noun phrase negation and (vii) negative adverbs (both Dryer 2013a), and (viii) negative polarity items.

In this paper, I focus on standard negation and negation of nonverbal and existential clauses.⁵ The constructions of interest are briefly introduced here.

1.3.1. Standard negation. The term *standard negation* refers to the negation of declaratives. The contrast between an affirmative and a negative declarative in English is given in (1):

- (1) English
- (1a) I like cats.
- (1b) I don't like cats.

Typologically, standard negation can be expressed morphologically (this includes affixation, reduplication, and prosodic means) or syntactically by negative particles, auxiliaries, or negative words of uncertain category (Dryer 2013a). As shown below, both morphological and syntactic strategies are attested in Northern Dene.

Dahl (1979:89–96) extensively discusses the placement of syntactic negators in the clause. He notes two tendencies: (i) uninflected negative particles occur

<dl, tl, tl'> in Alaskan languages but by <dl, tl, tl'> in most Canadian ones. Some languages distinguish plain and labialized velar consonants; in those languages, labialization is indicated by a <w> or <w'>. In other languages, <w> represents a labiovelar approximant. Most languages use some symbols that are not shared across the wider family; the reader is advised to consult the sources in the bibliography for more information about each language.

⁴ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: 1—first person, 2—second person, 3—third person, AREAL—areal, CT—contrastive topic, EX—existential, FOC—focus, FUT—future, INCEP—inceptive, IPFV—imperfective, ITER—iterative, NEG—negative, NEGEX—negative existential, NOM—nominalizer, OPT—optative, PL—plural, PFV—perfective, PROG—progressive, PROH—prohibitive, Q—question particle, SG—singular.

⁵ This decision was made largely for practical reasons: including more constructions would have added considerably to the bulk of the paper. A follow-up study on negative directives is planned.

predominantly in preverbal position (p. 91), while (ii) negative auxiliaries tend to occur postverbally, in particular in verb-final languages (pp. 91–92). As I will show in this paper, both tendencies are attested in Northern Dene.

One aspect of standard negation that has attracted the attention of a number of researchers is the fact that it often undergoes cyclical developments, where negators are reinforced by emphatic elements, which over time are reanalyzed as negators, leading to (at first) the presence of two negative particles in the same clause and eventually to the loss of the original negator. This process is known as Jespersen’s cycle in Dahl (1979:88) and elsewhere; van Gelderen (2008a) looks at this type of cycle in Dene.

1.3.2. Existential negation. The second type of negation considered here is existential negation, that is, the assertion that a particular entity does not exist. The expression of existential negation frequently differs from that of standard negation. A typological overview of strategies for existential negation can be found in Veselinova (2013); Turkish, for example, uses a negative existential predicate (2b) that is different from the affirmative one (2a).

(2) Turkish

(2a) su var
water EX
‘there is water’

van Schaaik (1996:25)

(2b) su yok
water NEGEX
‘there is no water’

van Schaaik (1996:25)

As noted originally by Croft (1991) and expanded by Veselinova (2014), existential negation is a common source of standard negation; Croft dubs this the “negative existential cycle.” A dedicated negative existential marker is over time extended in function to include the domain of standard negation, first only partially, then entirely (see 4.2 for more detail on this process). I show in this paper that there is clear evidence for the negative existential cycle at least in part of the language family.

1.3.3. Negation in Dene: Earlier accounts. Standard negation has been the focus of two comparative studies. Leer (2000) reconstructs two negative prefixes, **i*’- (in negative perfectives) and **zə/s(ə)*- (in negative non-perfectives, i.e., in imperfective, future, and optative forms),⁶ in addition to a negative perfective stem suffix **-l* and a negative enclitic **=(h)e*. He demonstrates that negative

⁶ An anonymous reviewer suggested that I address this asymmetry in more detail. While I agree that this is an interesting point, it is not the focus of this paper; thus I will not discuss this issue further.

morphology exists in two geographically separated groups within the Northern Dene languages (the Alaskan group plus Witsuwit'en, Tsilhq'út'in, and Dakelh in northern British Columbia) as well as in Tlingit and Eyak but not in the remainder of the Dene language family. He notes that Tanacross and Upper Tanana (both Alaskan) have no reflex of the negative non-perfective prefix **zə/s(ə)-* and that negation in the non-perfective modes is marked only by tonal patterns and stem changes in these two languages (Leer 2000:104; the loss of the **zə/s(ə)-* in these two languages was originally noted by Kari 1993).

Leer (2000:123) further reconstructs a negative particle **(?i)le?* originating as "the third person negative stative imperfective form of the verb 'to be,'" which he states has reflexes in Ahtna, Biblical Gwich'in, Kaska, Dakelh, and Tsilhq'út'in.⁷

As the focus of Leer's (2000) study is on morphological negation, he does not include information about languages relying on periphrastic negation. His "Comparative Athabaskan Lexicon" (Leer 1996a), however, fills this gap to some degree. His entry on the stem **le·* 'be' lists the "negative auxiliary" (his term) **q-ù·-le·=he* 'it does not exist, there is none', which is a negative imperfective form of the verb theme 'to be' with an areal prefix.⁸ He notes the existence of reflexes of **q-ù·-le·=he* in Upper Denaakk'e, Gwich'in, Dëne Sųliné, and Dakelh, glossing it as 'negative enclitic' (file 1/61). Elsewhere in this document, he reconstructs the negative particle **də-we· (?)* (question mark in the original) with the meanings 'no' and 'not'. He lists reflexes with these meanings for Tsetsaut, Tsek'ene, South Slavey, and Tsuut'ina, plus several languages from the Southern and Pacific Coast branches (file d/65). The "Comparative Athabaskan Lexicon" does not contain examples of these particles in context.

The second study of standard negation in Dene is by van Gelderen (2008a, 2008b). (The first study focuses on the Dene language family, while the second one offers a wider typological context.) Van Gelderen (2008a) argues in favor of the existence of negative cycles in the Dene language family. As such, and in contrast to Leer (2000), she does pay attention to negative particles. Drawing on evidence from a handful of languages, van Gelderen (2008a:56) identifies a *d*-initial negator (including the Southern Dene discontinuous negative marker *doo . . . da* and Hare *du*) and an *l*-shape negator (including the negator *yile* in Hare, *hile* in Dëne Sųliné, and 'ele' in Ahtna). She further suggests that morphologically negative verb forms in Lower Tanana and Denaakk'e contain "an incorporated auxiliary" (pp. 56–57), thus obscuring the distinction between morphological and syntactic strategies. It should be noted that this last claim cannot be substantiated. The Lower Tanana form is the result of morphophonemic

⁷ He notes however that the Kaska and Tsilhq'út'in forms contain an /a/ vowel that is not predicted by regular historical developments.

⁸ This verb theme belongs to the neuter verb theme category, which is characterized by perfective morphology in semantically imperfective forms. The form **q-ù·-le·=he* 'it does not exist, there is none' is thus formally perfective yet semantically imperfective.

processes involving a reflex of the **zə/s(ə)*-reconstructed by Leer (2000) and the D-classifier, while *l* is the regular reflex of **z* in Denaakk'e. I will ignore this point in the remainder of this paper.

Van Gelderen (2008a: 57) claims that the *d*-shape (my expression) and the *l*-shape (hers) are the "two main negative strategies" in the language family. She further argues that since the *l*-forms occur "closer to Alaska," they should be considered to be older and that the *d*-form is the result of a negative cycle following the loss of the *l*-form (pp. 57–58). Since she conflates the *l*-form with the morphological strategies reconstructed by Leer (2000), the role of the latter in her analysis is, at best, unclear.

My focus in this paper differs from that of the other two authors in several respects. First, I limit myself to Northern Dene, excluding the other two branches of Dene as well as more distantly related Eyak and Tlingit. In order to show the variety of forms in particular in Alaska, however, I aim to include information about as many Northern Dene languages as possible, rather than picking a few (van Gelderen 2008a) or only investigating those with morphological negation (Leer 2000). Additionally, I pay attention to both morphological and syntactic strategies and particularly to the interaction of both. Finally, I do not limit myself to the investigation of standard negation but include data on negation of existence, demonstrating that at least one of the non-morphological negative strategies in this language group is the result of the negative-existential cycle identified by Croft (1991), thus strengthening van Gelderen's (2008b) argument in favor of the universality of negative cycles.

2. Negation of existence. Northern Dene languages fall relatively neatly into two groups regarding the expression of existential negation. The first group uses a reflex of a negative verb, the second one a reflex of a negative particle reconstructed by Leer (1996a) as **də-we* 'no, not'.⁹ The data is summarized in table 2 and visualized in map 1. The column "Reconstruction" lists the likely morpheme(s) in Proto-Dene according to Leer (1996a). The column "Status" provides information on the lexical status of the contemporary morpheme; this information is not available for all languages.

2.1. Negative verb. The Southern and Central Alaskan plus the Tanana (but not the Tutchone) languages, Gwich'in, and Han all use a reflex of the negative verb **q-ù-le* = *he* reconstructed by Leer (1996a).¹⁰ (This is a negated

⁹ Sharon Hargus (p.c. Apr. 20, 2019) points out that the tone marking present in many languages using a reflex of this morpheme cannot be explained using Leer's reconstruction. I have no explanation but suggest that the reconstruction may have to be modified to include constriction.

¹⁰ Leer (1996a, 1/59) calls **q-ù-le* = *he* a negative auxiliary. I refer to it as a negative verb, assuming a strict definition of the term "auxiliary" as a verb involved in the formation of verbal paradigms. In the construction under discussion, the reflex of **q-ù-le* = *he* occurs as predicate, not as part of a predicate.

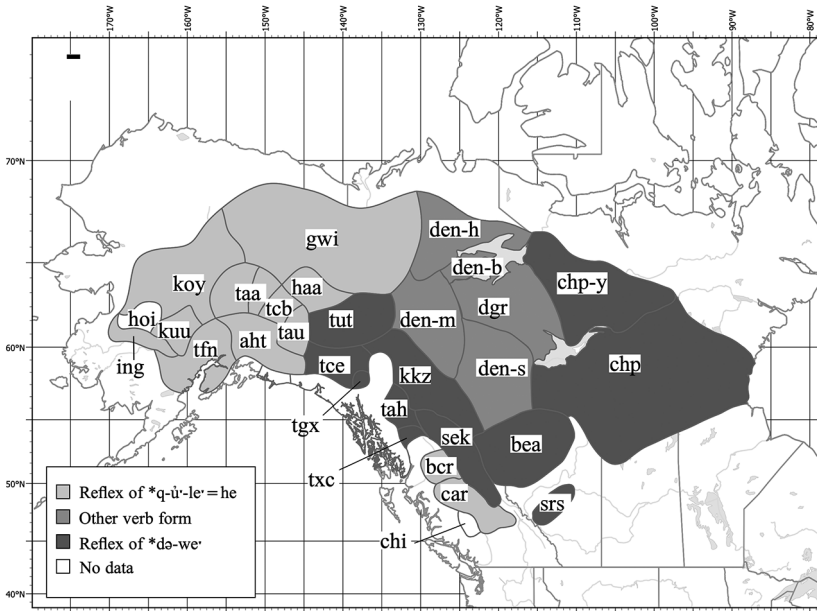
TABLE 2
NEGATION OF EXISTENCE

	Language	Negator	Reconstruction	Status	Source
Southern Alaskan	Ahtna	kole	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Kari (1990:244)
	Dena'ina	qul	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Kari (n.d.)
Central Alaskan - Yukon	Deg Xinag	qul	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Deacon et al. (2007)
	Holikachuk		no information		
	Denaakk'e	kkele	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Jetté and Jones (2000:328)
Tanana-Tutchone	Upper Kuskokwim	qul	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Collins (1972)
	Lower Tanana	kwlá	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Tuttle (2009)
	Tanacross	kól	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Arnold, Thoman, and Holton (2009:184–85)
	Upper Tanana	(oo)kól	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Lovick (2020:305–6)
	Northern Tutchone	hedú	*dǎ-we·		Tom Tom and YNLC (1995)
	Southern Tutchone	äjù	*dǎ-we·		YNLC (2005:8)
Han-Gwich'in	Han	kǒ	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Henry and YNLC (2004)
	Gwich'in	kwàa	*q-ù·-le·=he	nonverbal predicate	Montgomery and YNLC (1994)
Cordillera	Tagish	hadu'	*dǎ-we·		Wren, Kemble, and YNLC (1994)
	Tahltan	dú:e	*dǎ-we·		Hank Nater (p.c., April 6, 2019)
	Kaska	nedúé	*dǎ-we·	verb?	YNLC (1990:38)
	Tsek'ene	nǐdùè	*dǎ-we·		Hargus (2002:107)
	Dane-zaa	(na)dué	*dǎ-we·		own data
Mackenzie	Slavey	húle	*q-ù·-le·=he	verb	K. Rice (1989:1106–8)
	Mountain	húle	*q-ù·-le·=he	verb	K. Rice (p.c., Apr. 13, 2019)
	Bearlake	whíle	*q-ù·-le·=he	verb	K. Rice (1989:1106–8)
	Hare	húle	*q-ù·-le·=he	verb	K. Rice (1989:1106–8)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Language	Negator	Reconstruction	Status	Source	
Tł̥ich̥o Yatì	gòh̥j̥=le		Verb	Welch (p.c., Oct. 24, 2018)	
	while	*q-ù'-le'=he	Verb	Welch (p.c., Oct. 24, 2018)	
Dëne Sų́líné	dódí	*d̥a-we'		Cook (2004:298)	
British Columbia	Witsuwit'en	wel̥ew	*q-ù'-le'=he	Verb	Hargus (2007:571)
	Tsilhq'út'in		no information		
	Dakelh	hooloh	*q-ù'-le'=he	Verb	Poser (p.c.)
Tsuut'ina	dùwàh	*d̥a-we'	Verb	Cook (1984:95)	
Tsetsaut	əbe'	*d̥a-we'		Leer (1996a:d/65)	

form of the verb ‘to be’ with an areal prefix.) In all of these languages, this verb has been reanalyzed as a stem and functions as nonverbal predicate (3). While the negative enclitic is still clearly visible in Ahtna and Denaakk'e, it has been absorbed into the (reanalyzed) stem in most other languages.



MAP 1—Negation of Existence in Northern Dene

- (3a) Ahtna
 tikaan=di kole
 wolf=CT NEGEX
 ‘there are no wolves’

Kari (1990:244)

- (3b) Denaakk’e
 too kkele
 water NEGEX
 ‘there is no water’

Jetté and Jones (2000:328)

- (3c) Dena’ina
 yuh kił qul
 inside boy NEGEX
 ‘the boy is not inside’

Kari (n.d.)

- (3d) Upper Tanana
 neeshyi’ kól
 1PL:food NEGEX
 ‘we had no food’

Lovick (2006–present)

In all Alaskan languages surveyed, the reanalyzed stem allows person/number inflection for the direct object position. (The indefinite prefix *k’-* in (4a) has this shape regardless of its syntactic role, but *vi-* in (4b) is clearly an object prefix.)

- (4a) Dena’ina
 k’qul
 INDEF:NEGEX
 ‘there is nothing’

Kari (n.d.)

- (4b) Deg Xinag
 George vuqul.
 G. 3SG:NEGEX
 ‘George isn’t there’

Deacon et al. (2007)

A few languages use non-reanalyzed verb forms in existential negation. In Dakelh (William Poser, p.c., March 19, 2019), the existential negator is the negative form of the verb ‘to be’ inflected for areal (5a). This form is structurally identical to the existential negator reconstructed by Leer (1996a) for Proto-Dene

but has not undergone reanalysis; Poser finds that this verb may be inflected for person subject (5b). (This also suggests that the areal prefix (*whu-* in (5)) is lexicalized in the negative existential.)

(5) Dakelh

(5a) ludi hooloh
tea AREAL:exist:IPFV:NEG
'there is no tea'

Poser (p.c., March 19, 2019)

(5b) whusloh
1SG:exist:IPFV:NEG
'I am absent'

Poser (p.c., March 19, 2019)

A similar origin is likely for the Witsuwit'en existential negator *wewew* (Sharon Hargus, p.c., March 19, 2019). Although *wewew* cannot be inflected for person subject (Hargus 2007:571), Hargus (p.c., March 24, 2019) reports the existence of the following forms that contain the areal prefix *wi-* (6a) and the indefinite prefix *c'i-* (6b). The initial *we-* in both forms is an obligatory negative prefix; see 3.1.2.

(6) Witsuwit'en

(6a) Yikh wewew
house AREAL:NEGEX
'no houses'

Hargus (p.c., March 24, 2019)

(6b) ts'e'in wec'iwew
many INDEF:AREAL:NEGEX
'not too many (e.g., beaver)'

Hargus (p.c., March 24, 2019)

K. Rice (1989:1006–8) also suggests that the existential negator *húle*, *while* in Hare, Slavey, and Bearlake is a fully inflected verb form rather than a reanalyzed auxiliary. Nicholas Welch (p.c., October 24, 2018) treats Tłı̄chǝ *while* as a “suppletive negative existential . . . clearly contain[ing] a fused negative” (7) but notes that the etymology is unclear and that the form does not look as if it contained an areal subject.¹¹

¹¹ In the same email, Welch reported several additional strategies for existential negation, e.g., using the standard-negated form of the existential verb *gǝłhǝ* or of a classificatory verb form. These strategies are not discussed here.

- (7) Tłı̄ch̄o
 segha beh while
 1SG:for knife NEGEX
 ‘I don’t have a knife’

Welch (p.c., October 24, 2018)

Thus, some languages (Dakelh, Witsuwit’en, Hare, Slavey, Bearlake, and Tłı̄ch̄o) use a negative verb form, but more common is the use of a reanalyzed stem resulting from a negative verb.

2.2. *d*-initial particle. The second group of languages uses a reflex of **də-we* ‘no, not’ reconstructed by Leer (1996a). This group includes the Tutchone languages plus the Cordillera group, Tsetsaut, Tsuut’ina, and Dëne Sų́líné. **də-we* also underlies the independent negative *dáudí*, *dódí* in Hare and Bearlake—see K. Rice (1989:1107)—and *adyú* in Dane-*zaa* (Jung et al. 2004–8). Although this morpheme is not of verbal origin, it functions as a nonverbal predicate, as illustrated in (8).

- (8) Kwadacha (Ft. Ware Tsek’ene)

- (8a) K̄oh wəmah ḡule w̄il̄e.
 house around willows AREAL:be:IPFV
 ‘There are willows around the house.’

Hargus (2002:107)

- (8b) K̄oh wəmah ḡule n̄id̄ùè.
 house around willow NEGEX

‘There are no willows around the house.’

Hargus (2002:107)

As table 2 shows, the reflex of **də-we* has developed a prefix-like element in many languages, for example, *n̄i-* in Kwadacha and *he-* in Northern Tutchone. This is reminiscent of the ‘peg prefix’ occurring in many Dene languages when a verb stem is not accompanied by any overt prefixes. Haiman (2018:330) suggests that function of the (verbal) peg syllable may be ‘avoidance of phonological slightness’; a similar explanation is plausible for this nonverbal predicate as well.

Dëne Sų́líné uses the existential negator *dódí*, *dáudí* (9), which is possibly related to the *d*-initial morpheme.¹²

¹² The Dëne Sų́líné expression *dúwé*, *dúyé*, *dúé* ‘it is difficult, it is hard’ is also a reflex of **də-we* according to Leer (1996a: d/65). *Dúwé*, *dúyé*, *dúé* is however never used in existential negation, although it may be used in standard negation; cf. Cook (2004:299).

- (9) Dëne Sųliné
 tsąba dódí
 money NEGEX
 ‘there is no money’

Cook (2004:298)

2.3. Additional comments. Although the languages use different morphological material in the expression of existential negation, the strategies are very similar. Regardless of its etymology, the existential negator functions as a nonverbal predicate in most languages; only Dakelh, Witsuwit'en, and the Mackenzie group (excluding Dëne Sųliné) use a negative verb. Two additional commonalities between the nonverbal negators can be identified. Across the entire language group, the existential negator is extremely productive in the formation of idioms expressing undesirable properties (2.3.1). In at least two languages, it has become reanalyzed as a verb stem and allows aspectual and modal inflection (2.3.2).

2.3.1. Semantic shift and idiom formation. Semantic shift from the absence of an entity to the presence of an undesirable property is attested across the language family, regardless of the etymology of the existential negator. Example (10) contains a small selection of idioms common across the family. Blindness is frequently lexicalized as an absence of eyes (10a; 3c); deafness and an associated refusal to listen to advice are lexicalized as an absence of the inner ear (10b)¹³ and stupidity and thoughtlessness as an absence of a head (10c) and mind (10d), respectively. In Upper Tanana, negating the existence of a person using *kól* is a common euphemism for death (10e).

- (10a) Slave
 mendaá húle
 3SG:eye NEGEX
 ‘s/he is blind’

K. Rice (1989:1107)

- (10b) Ahtna
 udzii kole
 3SG:hearing NEGEX
 ‘s/he is deaf/reckless/obstinate/doesn't pay attention’

Kari (1990:244)

¹³ In many Northern Dene languages, there is a lexical distinction between the outer and inner ear. The sense of hearing is located in the inner ear.

- (10c) Denaakk'e
 betlee' kkele
 3SG:head NEGEX
 's/he is immature, stupid'
 Jetté and Jones (2000:328)
- (10d) Upper Tanana
 miinj' kól
 3SG:mind NEGEX
 's/he is thoughtless'
 Kari (1997)
- (10e) Upper Tanana
 shnaq kól
 1SG:mother NEGEX
 'my mother was gone / had passed away'
 Lovick (2006–present)

Analogous idioms resulting from this type of semantic shift can also be observed in the languages using a reflex of **da-we*; to wit, Pasamonik (2012:92) lists ten idioms using Dane-zaa *adyué'*, *nadyué'*, *wodyué'*. By contrast, the data cited by S. Rice (2012:42–43) for Dëne Sų́líné suggests that this strategy is much less common in that language.

2.3.2. Reanalysis as stem. It was demonstrated in 2.1 that in many languages in the group, the reflex of **q-ú'-le'*=*he* functions as a reanalyzed stem and may be inflected for direct object. In Upper Tanana, the reflex *(oo)kól* functions as a defective verb theme allowing not only direct object prefixes (11a) but also (limited) verbal inflection for the inceptive perfective (which often has the meaning 'be about to' (11b)) and the future (11c).

- (11) Upper Tanana
- (11a) mbookól
 3SG:NEGEX
 'he was absent / had passed away'
 Lovick (2006–present)
- (11b) nuteekól
 2SG:INCEP:PFV:NEGEX
 'you (SG) are about to die'
 Lovick (2006–present)

- (11c) nelsüü utaakól
 2SG:money FUT:NEGEX
 ‘you (SG) won’t have any money’

Lovick (2006–present)

The stem also bears the high tone characteristic of negative stems in this language (see 3.1). Object inflection is also reported for the other Alaskan languages, but aspectual/modal inflection appears to be unique to Upper Tanana.

The existential negator historically derived from **də-we* also has been reanalyzed as a verb stem in at least one language. Cook (1984:25) shows that in Tsuut’ina, it may take a *gh*-perfective as well as an incorporate:

- (12) Tsuut’ina
 túyídùwà or túwídùwà
 water:PFV:NEGEX
 ‘there is no water’

Cook (1984:25)

Similar reanalysis is not described for the other languages. It is, however, worth emphasizing that reanalysis as a (defective) verb theme takes place regardless of existential negator’s etymology.

2.4. Interim summary: Existential negation. There are two major strategies for existential negation across Northern Dene. All of the Alaskan languages employ a reanalyzed stem deriving from a negative auxiliary reconstructed by Leer (1996b) for Proto-Dene as **qù·le* = *he*; the languages in the Mackenzie group (apart from Dëne Sų́líné) and the British Columbia groups use a productive auxiliary form cognate to this. The Tutchone languages and the Cordillera group plus Tsuut’ina and Tsetsaut employ a nonverbal predicate cognate to a morpheme reconstructed by Leer (1996b) as **də-we* ‘no, not’.

Although these strategies are not cognate, their functions have been expanded in parallel fashion. Both give rise to semantic shift resulting in the formation of structurally and semantically regular idioms describing undesirable properties. Additionally, both allow limited affixation and have been reanalyzed as verb stems in at least one language each. Thus, the two groups of languages use the same strategies and functional expansions regardless of the morphological material involved. In the next section, I show that an additional parallel development has taken place with respect to standard negation.

3. Standard negation. It is well established (Krauss and Golla 1981; Leer 2000; van Gelderen 2008a) that Northern Dene languages fall into two groups regarding standard negation. The Alaskan (with the exception of Gwich’in

and Han) and Central British Columbia subgroups have dedicated negative inflection accompanied in most languages by negative (pre- or postverbal) particles. The remainder of languages do not have morphological inflection. As already suggested by van Gelderen (2008a), however, the situation is actually more complex than that, as the languages without morphological negation also fall into two groups depending on their standard negator, which is in most of these languages related to the existential negators discussed in 2. Thus, three broad groups can be identified: languages with morphological negation; languages using a negator cognate with **də-we*; and languages using a negator originating as a (negative) verb or auxiliary. This situation is complicated further by the fact that negative auxiliaries in standard negation are also attested as an additional negative strategy in languages with morphological negation.

Table 3 summarizes standard negation across Northern Dene. It contains information on negative inflection as well as optional or required preverbal and postverbal particles.¹⁴ Competing negative strategies within a language are given on separate lines. It is conceivable that information on competing negative strategies is incomplete for a number of these languages.

Map 2 visualizes the information contained in table 3. In the following sections, the major patterns emerging from table 3 are described and illustrated.

3.1. Morphological negation. Dedicated negative inflection is attested in the Southern and Central Alaskan languages, the Tanana group (excluding the Tutchone languages), and in British Columbia. A detailed comparative study of negative morphology in Dene languages (including the more distantly related languages Eyak and Tlingit) is available in Leer (2000); in this paper I give only a brief summary of his findings.

Leer's (2000:103) reconstructions indicate the existence of two negative prefixes: **i*'- in negative perfectives and **zə/s(ə)*- in negative non-perfectives, that is, in imperfective, future, and optative forms. While the reflex of negative perfective **i*'- is a mode prefix replacing the (affirmative) perfective prefix, the non-perfective negative prefix is a qualifier (Kari 1993:52).

Morphological negation in an Alaskan language is illustrated in table 4 for the Ahtna verb theme *O+Ø+yaan* 'eat O'. This verb theme requires a \emptyset -conjugation marker in the imperfective and a *gh*-conjugation marker in the perfective. All forms are inflected for third person singular subject acting on third person singular object (this is the initial *i*- or *y*- prefix in the data below). Here and elsewhere in this section, negative morphology is bolded.

Without going into morphophonemic detail, it is clear from table 4 that *ghi*- in the affirmative perfective is replaced by *i*-, a reflex of **i*'-, in the negative,

¹⁴ Optional particles are given in parentheses.

TABLE 3
STANDARD NEGATION

	Language	Preverbal	Neg. Infl.	Postverbal	Source	
Southern Alaskan	Ahtna	'ele'	+	–	Kari (1990:66)	
	(MW) ¹	k'ali'i	+	–	Kari (1990:250)	
	Dena'ina (IU)	nch'u	+	–	Tenenbaum (1978:112)	
	(O) ²	k'usht'a	+	–	Boraas (2012:99f.)	
Central Alaskan - Yukon	Deg Xinag	–	+	ts'in'	Deacon et al. (2007)	
		–	–	qul	Chapman and Kari (1981)	
	Holikachuk	(ine')	+	(ts'in')	Maillelle (1987)	
	Denaakk'e (Upper)	–	+	–	Jetté and Jones (2000:5)	
		–	–	kkele	Jetté and Jones (2000:328)	
Tanana-Tutchone	Upper Kuskokwim	–	+	(ts'e')	Collins (1972)	
	Lower Tanana	–	+	–	Tuttle (2009)	
	Tanacross	k'á	+	–	Holton (2000:233)	
	Upper Tanana	k'à(t'eey)	+	–	Lovick (2020:459–61)	
		la	–	ha'	own data	
	Northern Tutchone	edu, eju	–	–	Tom Tom and YNLC (1995:5)	
Southern Tutchone	äju	–	–	Allen and YNLC (1994:16)		
Han-Gwich'in	Han	–	–	kö	Henry and YNLC (2004)	
	Gwich'in	–	–	kwaa	Montgomery and YNLC (1994)	
	Bib. Gwich'in	ʔəlit	+	–	McDonald (1911:16–17)	
Cordillera	Tagish	edū	–	–	Wren, Kemble, and YNLC (1994)	
	Tahltan	dú:e	–	–	Hank Nater (p.c., April 6, 2019)	
	Kaska	dułq̄	–	–	Moore (2002:572)	
	Tsek'ene	ʔədu	–	–	Hargus (2002:106)	
	Dane-zaa	ad(y)u	–	–	own data	
Mackenzie	Slavey	–	–	yíle ³	K. Rice (1989:1101)	
	Mountain	–	–	yíle	K. Rice (p.c., April 13, 2019)	
	Bearlake	–	–	yíle	K. Rice (1989:1101)	
	Hare	–	–	yíle	K. Rice (1989:1101)	
		du	–	–	K. Rice (1989:1103)	
		du	–	–	yíle	K. Rice (1989:1104)
	Tłı̄ch̄o Yatı̄i	–	–	-le	Ackroyd (1982:39)	
Dēne Sų́líné	–	–	híle ⁴	Elford and Elford (1998:368)		

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Language	Preverbal	Neg. Infl.	Postverbal	Source
British Columbia	Witsuwit'en	we-	+	-	Hargus (2007:370, 434)
	Tsilhqút'in	lha	+	-	Cook (2013:499)
	Dakelh (SL)	(?aw) ɬ-	+	-	Poser (In prep.)
	(S)	(?aw) tʃá-	+	-	Poser (In prep.)
	(SK, L) ⁵	(?aw)	+	-	Poser (In prep.)
		-	-	iloh	Poser (In prep.)
	Tsuut'ina	dú	-	-	Cook (1984:37)
	Tsetsaut		no information		

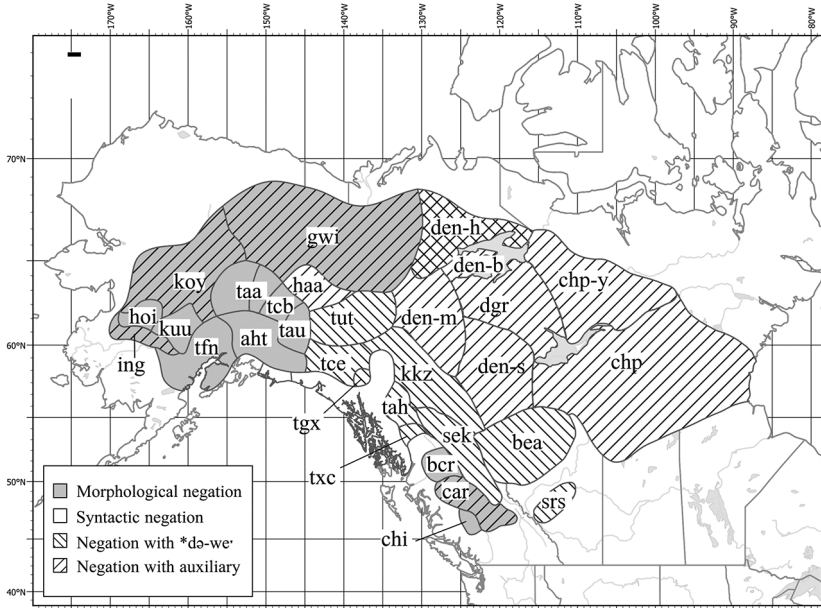
¹ Ahtna dialects are M—Mentasta, W—Western.

² Dena'ina dialects are I—Inland, U—Upper Inlet, O—Outer Inlet.

³ This morpheme has several allomorphs; see K. Rice (1989:1101).

⁴ This morpheme has several allomorphs; see Elford and Elford (1998:368).

⁵ Dakelh dialect abbreviations are SL—Stuart Lake, S—Southern, SK—Saik'uz, L—Lheidli.



MAP 2—Standard Negation in Northern Dene

TABLE 4
NEGATIVE INFLECTION IN AHTNA (FROM KARI 1990:680)

	Affirmative		Negative	
Imperfective	iyaañ	's/he's eating it'	'ele' isyaane	's/he's not eating it'
	Ø-Ø-		Ø-z-	
Perfective	ighiyaan'	's/he ate it'	'ele' yiyiile	's/he didn't eat it'
	gh-i-		Ø-i-	
Future	itayiiñ	's/he will eat it'	'ele' itasyiile	's/he won't eat it'
	gh-Ø-		gh-z-	
Optative	yuyaan'	's/he should eat it'	'ele' yusyaane	's/he shouldn't eat it'
	ghu-Ø-		ghu-z-	

while the non-perfective negative forms (imperfective, future, and optative) contain *s-*, a reflex of **zə/s(ə)-*. The negative perfective stem contains a historic **-l* suffix, which often raises the stem vowel (Leer 1979:45). Also, all negative forms contain a vocalic stem suffix (this morpheme is reconstructed by Leer 2000:123 as enclitic **=he*), which is absent in the affirmative forms. This stem suffix has the additional effect of voicing the stem-final consonant if a voiced counterpart is available. In most Alaskan Dene languages, the negative suffix creates a new syllable.

Most Alaskan Dene languages require a negative particle in addition to negative morphology, for example, Ahtna *'ele'*; this is discussed in 3.1.1–5.

In Tanacross and Upper Tanana, both spoken in eastern interior Alaska, the reflex of **zə/s(ə)-* has disappeared almost entirely (Leer 2000:104; see also Kari 1993:53).^{15,16} Instead the paradigm has been reorganized. The regular

¹⁵ This prefix still exists in a few fossilized negative directives in Upper Tanana: *dadhijñay* 'don't SG talk', *dadhijñaqy* 'don't SG do it', *dadhij'qy* 'don't SG mess with it', all of which also have plural forms but no first or second person forms.

¹⁶ Van Gelderen (2008a:60) reinterprets Kari and Leer and claims that in Upper Tanana "the inner negative and suffix head are mostly lost (although complex tonal changes remain)." It should be clarified that the reflex of **i'-* is retained consistently and that the negative suffix is clearly detectable in segmental changes to the stem. In the form *k'aa tinaktän* 'I won't freeze it' (Kari 1993:52) that van Gelderen's claim is based on, the negative stem *tän* has the affirmative counterpart *tänh* ending in a voiceless nasal. Additional segmental stem changes are illustrated in table 5. It

TABLE 5
NEGATIVE INFLECTION IN UPPER TANANA (LOVICK 2006–PRESENT)

	Affirmative		Negative	
Imperfective	ineh'j̥h	's/he's looking at it'	k'ət'eey inèh'áj̥	's/he's not looking at it'
	Ø-Ø-		Ø-`-	
Perfective	inj̥h'j̥j̥	's/he looked at it'	k'ət'eey inìh'ím̥	's/he didn't look at it'
	aa-j̥-		Ø-ì-	
Future	itnah'j̥j̥ł	's/he will look at it'	k'ət'eey itnàh'j̥j̥ł	's/he won't look at it'
	aa-Ø-		aa-`-	
Optative	inuh'j̥j̥	's/he should look at it'	k'ət'eey inùh'j̥j̥	's/he shouldn't look at it'
	Ø-u-		u-`-	

conjugation and mode prefixes are retained in the non-perfective modes, and a low (Upper Tanana) or high (Tanacross) tone resulting from the constriction in the negative perfective prefix *i'- is present in the non-perfective modes as well, as illustrated in table 5 for Upper Tanana. (Both low and high tone are indicated in this example, even though this is not usually done in the practical orthography.) Additionally, negative polarity is expressed in the stem. The negative stem enclitic *=*he* has been absorbed into the stem syllable with sometimes idiosyncratic effects as illustrated in table 5; see Leer (1996b) for general discussion of this areal feature, Holton (2000) for details about Tanacross, and Lovick (2020) for details about Upper Tanana. Note that the suffix confers a high pitch even in Upper Tanana (Lovick 2016:262), which is otherwise classified as a language with lexical low tone.¹⁷

Negative inflection is also attested in several Dene languages of Central British Columbia, as illustrated in table 6 using data from Witsuwit'en. This verb theme takes a Ø-imperfective and an *s*-perfective in the affirmative forms. In the negative perfective form, the conjugation/mode complex *sə-* has been replaced

is also likely that the loss of the non-perfective negative prefix is due to the general loss of voiced fricatives in this language. /ð/ is the only voiced fricative in the phoneme inventory, and it is attested in only two morphemes, only one of which is productive (Lovick 2020:53).

¹⁷ This high pitch is noticeably and consistently different from not tonally specified syllables (see Lovick 2020:chap. 7 for discussion). It is as yet unclear whether this high pitch can be classified as phonemic or whether it is part of a prosodic pattern; Holton (2005:263) voices a similar concern regarding extra-high pitch in Tanacross.

TABLE 6
 NEGATIVE INFLECTION IN WITSUWIT'EN (HARGUS 2007:357, 371)

	Affirmative		Negative	
Imperfective	hæcldes	'I'm singeing it'	wenəzæclɔdets	'I haven't singed round O'
Perfective	sæcldez	'I singed it'	wenicɔdæs	'I didn't singe round O'
Future	tacldes	'I'll singe it'	wentæzicɔdets	'I won't singe round O'
Optative	ucldes	'let me singe it'	wenəzuclɔdets	'don't let me singe round O'

by *i-*. In the non-perfective forms, a negative prefix *z-* is added. All negative forms additionally contain an obligatory disjunct prefix *we-* discussed in 3.1.2.¹⁸ Negative verb forms also consistently have different stems than their affirmative counterparts, which is possibly a reflex of the enclitic **(h)e*.

Within the languages with morphological inflection, additional distinctions about (optional or obligatory) negative particles and prefixes can be made.

3.1.1. No additional negative prefixes or particles. Only Denaakk'e (Jetté and Jones 2000:5) and Lower Tanana (both central Alaska) use no additional negative particles or prefixes with standard negation, as illustrated in (13) for Lower Tanana. These two languages are among the least fusional in the family. As a result, negative morphology is not obscured (much) by morphophonemic processes, and the non-perfective negative prefix *th-* is clearly visible in (13). The presence of a high tone on the negative verb suffix further enhances the contrast to affirmative forms.

(13) Lower Tanana

(13a) yettha
 3SG:bark:IPFV
 '[the dog] is barking'

Tuttle (2009:32)

(13b) k'wda yethttha'á
 now 3SG:bark:IPFV:NEG
 'it is not barking now'

Tuttle (2009:32)

3.1.2. Negative disjunct prefix. Witsuwit'en, part of the British Columbia subgroup, also does not require negative particles, but Hargus (2007:370)

¹⁸ The prefix *n(ə)-*, which is also present in all negative forms, is a qualifier that has nothing to do with negation; it instead contributes the meaning 'round object'.

notes that “[a]lmost all negative verbs contain a disjunct prefix *we#*” in addition to negative inflection, as illustrated in table 6 (evidence for the bound status of this prefix is given in Hargus (2007:434)).

Several varieties of Dakelh also require a disjunct prefix in negative forms. Poser (in prep.:109–10) notes that the Stuart Lake dialect requires a disjunct prefix *t-*, while “most Southern dialects” require *t/a-*. No disjunct prefix is required in the *Saik’uz* and *Lheidli* dialects.

The remainder of languages with negative morphology utilize a variety of negative particles. Preverbal particles are more common, but postverbal ones are attested in Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, and Upper Kuskokwim. Regarding the material used with negative verb forms, two regional clusters and one noncontiguous group of languages can be identified.¹⁹

3.1.3. Obligatory particle *ts’e’*, *ts’in’*, *ts’i(n)*, *nch’u*, *nts’u*. A cluster of languages in western Alaska uses particles *ts’e’* (Upper Kuskokwim), *ts’in’* (Deg Xinag), *ts’i(n)* (Holikachuk), and *nch’u*, *nts’u* (Dena’ina, Inland and Upper dialects), co-occurring with negative verb morphology. While these particles are clearly cognate,²⁰ their origin is unclear. In all four languages, the negative particle is identical or at least similar to the postposition ‘toward P’, which also functions as an adverbializer and (in some of them) as a clause-final coordinating conjunction (Lovick 2010). Leer (1996a) lists a Proto-Dene morpheme **P+tš’an’* ‘to P, toward P’ that also has these functions. Semantically more plausible, however, may be an origin as the homophonous stem **tš’an’* in the form **k’yə-tš’an’* ‘differently, wrongly, incorrectly’ (Leer 1996a). Kibrik (2011:241) glosses this morpheme as ‘particle’. In Upper Kuskokwim and possibly in Holikachuk, this particle seems optional and occurs in postverbal position. In Deg Xinag and Dena’ina, this particle is obligatory.²¹ In Deg Xinag, *ts’in’* is postverbal (14), while Dena’ina *nch’u* is always preverbal (15). (I return to this oddity in 4.3.)

(14) Deg Xinag

(14a) ginondidoy idistth’onh
robin 1SG:hear:IPFV

‘I hear a robin’

Deacon et al. (2007)

¹⁹ The preverbal particle *ine’* in Holikachuk likely originates as the independent negative ‘no’. The origin of the preverbal negator *k’ushi’a* in Outer Inlet Dena’ina (which always co-occurs with negative verb forms) is unclear, as is that of the optional preverbal particle *law* in Dakelh.

²⁰ The Dena’ina form looks quite different because this language has not undergone the Great Northern Series Shift (Leer 1996b) but has undergone dramatic vowel changes.

²¹ This claim is based on reading through narrative text: Tenenbaum (2006) for Inland Dena’ina, Kari and Fall (2003) for Upper Dena’ina, and Chapman and Kari (1981) for Deg Xinag.

- (14b) Beth ididhistth'igg ts'in'
Beth 1SG:hear:IPFV:NEG NEG
'I can't hear Beth'

Deacon et al. (2007)

- (15) Dena'ina (I)

- (15a) gheshyul
1SG:SG.walk:IPFV:PROG
'I'm walking'

Tenenbaum (1978:112)

- (15b) nch'u zgheshyul
NEG 1SG:SG.walk:IPFV:PROG:NEG
'I'm not walking'

Tenenbaum (1978:112)

3.1.4. Obligatory particle *k'ali'i*, *k'á*, *k'à(t'eeey)*. A second Alaskan cluster (Western and Mentasta Ahtna, Tanacross, and Upper Tanana) employs a preverbal particle that may be related to the Proto-Dene focus marker **q'a* 'also, too' (Leer 1996a). This particle always co-occurs with negative inflection. Ahtna *k'ali'i* additionally contains a form of the negative particle 'ele' (see 3.1.5); Upper Tanana *k'à(t'eeey)* often contains the adverbializer and intensifier *t'eeey*. Tanacross *k'á* and Upper Tanana *k'à(t'eeey)* only mark negatives and do not have any focus functions; the Ahtna cognate also functions as an emphatic marker, according to Kari (1990:250). Upper Tanana *k'à(t'eeey)* is illustrated in table 5 above.

3.1.5. Obligatory particle 'ele', *ʔəlít* ~ *elyet*, *lha* Leer (2000:123–25) reconstructs a Pre-Proto-Dene negative particle **(?i)le?*, analyzed as the "third person negative imperfective of 'to be'" (p. 124). In Ahtna (see table 4) and Biblical Gwich'in, a reflex of this particle co-occurs with negative verb forms. It appears that in Biblical Gwich'in (this variety is no longer spoken but is documented in the writings of Archdeacon Robert McDonald), morphological negation plus preverbal *elyet*²² existed alongside the syntactic strategy using postverbal *kwa*, which is the only strategy attested in contemporary Gwich'in (see 3.2.1 below).

- (16) Biblical Gwich'in

- (16a) kasuhndui kkwa
1SG:know:IPFV NEG
'I know not'

McDonald (1911:16)

²² This particle is written as *ʔəlít* in Leer (2000:124).

- (16b) elyet kadhisinjik
 NEG 1SG:know:IPFV:NEG
 ‘I don’t know’

McDonald (1911:17)

Leer (2000:124) further suggests that Kaska and Tsilhqút’ín may also employ a reflex of this particle, although he points out that the vowel of this particle is not predicted (p. 125). In Tsilhqút’ín, *lha* co-occurs with negative morphology (Cook 2013:chap. 8), while Kaska does not have negative morphology and only uses preverbal *dulq̣* (see table 3). The preverbal particle *la(h)* in the secondary Upper Tanana Dene strategy in table 3 is also potentially cognate with the Kaska and Tsilhq’útín morphemes. It is, however, possible that the particles in Tsilhq’út’ín, Kaska, and Upper Tanana are not cognate to **(ʔi)leʔ* and are rather a reflex of a Proto-Dene focus marker **la n* (Leer 1996a:1/4)—a common origin for negative markers.

Clear cognates of **(ʔi)leʔ* are also attested in the Mackenzie group, as discussed in 3.2.1.

3.2. Syntactic negation. Northern Dene languages without morphological negation rely exclusively on syntactic or periphrastic negation. Interestingly, several languages with negative inflection also use these strategies. Again, languages fall into several groups based on the negative particle they use.

3.2.1. Particle deriving from auxiliary. In a number of Northern Dene languages, the standard negator is a reflex of a negative auxiliary. In most languages where it occurs, this negator is formally related or even identical to the existential negator (see Table 7); the exception to this generalization is the Mackenzie group, where it is possibly the same as **(ʔi)leʔ* (discussed in 3.1.5). In all languages where it occurs, this particle occurs in postverbal position, which is consistent with the observation that negators deriving from auxiliaries tend to occur postverbally in verb-final languages (Dahl 1979:91)

This negative strategy is illustrated in (17) for (contemporary) Gwich’in (Old Crow dialect).²³ Example (17a) illustrates an affirmative verb form, which does not change when followed by the standard negator *kwa* in (17b). The same

²³ Van Gelderen (2008a:60) attempts to link the negator in Han and Gwich’in to the negative particle in Tanacross (*k’á*), Upper Tanana (*k’á(t’ee)*), and Upper Ahtna (*k’ali’i*) described in 3.1.4, based on a personal communication from Gary Holton. I find this phonologically implausible, as ejective consonants do not typically correspond to aspirated ones, and instead follow Leer (1996a) in treating the Han and Gwich’in morphemes as reflexes of the Proto-Dene auxiliary **q-ú-le=he*.

TABLE 7
 REFLEXES OF NEGATIVE AUXILIARY IN STANDARD AND EXISTENTIAL NEGATION

	Language	Standard postverbal	Existential postnominal	Source
Southern Alaskan	Ahtna		kole	Kari (1990:244)
	Dena'ina		qul	Kari (n.d.)
Central Alaskan - Yukon	Deg Xinag Denaakk'e	qul kkele	qul kkele	Deacon et al. (2007) Jetté and Jones (2000:328)
Tanana- Tutchone	Upper Kuskokwim		qul	Collins (1972)
	Lower Tanana		kwlá	Tuttle (2009)
	Tanacross		kól	Arnold, Thoman, and Holton (2009:184–85)
	Upper Tanana		(oo)kól	Lovick (2020:305–6)
Han-Gwich'in	Han	kö	kö	Henry and YNLC (2004)
	Gwich'in	kwaa	kwaa	Montgomery and YNLC (1994)
Mackenzie	Slavey, Mountain, Hare, Bearlake	yíle	húle, whíle	K. Rice (1989:1106–8)
	Tłı̨cḥo Yatı̨	-le	gòḥı̨-le whı̨le	Welch (2015) Welch (p.c.)
	Dëne Sı̨lıné	hı̨le	dódf̣ ı̨	Cook (2004:298)
British Columbia	Dakelh	iloh	hooloh	Poser (in prep.)

morpheme is used in existential negation (17c); note that the stem *kwaa* also seems to be part of the independent negative word *akwa*' in the same sentence.

(17) (Contemporary) Gwich'in

(17a) Nı̨jı̨htth'ák.
 1SG>2SG:understand:IPFV
 'I understand you (SG)'

Montgomery and YNLC (1994:53)

(17b) Nı̨jı̨htth'ák kwaa.
 1SG>2SG:understand:IPFV NEG
 'I don't understand you (SG)'

Montgomery and YNLC (1994:53)

- (17c) Zhòh kwàa.
 wolf NEGEX
 ‘there are no wolves’

YNLC (1991:17)

In the Mackenzie group, the standard negator cliticizes to the negated verb (or, in the case of Tł̥ichò Yatì, to the TAM complex; see Welch (2015:272)). In Dëne Sų́líné, *híle* frequently coalesces with the preceding verb stem and changes the stem tone to high (18). That language uses a different morpheme to express existential negation, as shown in (9) above.

- (18) Dëne Sų́líné
 (18a) shéhest̥i
 3PL:eat:IPFV
 ‘they are eating’

Lovick (2009–present)

- (18b) shéhest̥ile (< shéhest̥i=híle)
 3PL:eat:IPFV=NEG
 ‘they are not eating’

Cook (2004:106)

In the Mackenzie group as well as in Han and Gwich’in, the negator originating as a negative auxiliary seems to be the only strategy for standard negation. In Deg Xinag, the Upper dialect of Denaakk’e, and Dakelh, however, using the existential negator following an affirmative verb form is a secondary strategy alongside morphological negation. Jetté and Jones (2000:328), for example, state that in the Upper dialect of Denaakk’e, “instead of the prefixed and suffixed negative, the enclitic *kkele* can be used after the verb without prefixation.” They do not note any differences in meaning. The two negative strategies are illustrated in (19).²⁴ The form in (19a) shows the affirmative, (19b) the corresponding morphologically negated form. (Negative morphology is bolded.) Example (19c) gives an alternative negated form characterized by affirmative morphology and the presence of the postverbal negator *kkele*.²⁵

²⁴ The capital letters following the form indicate the dialect: U—Upper, C—Central, L—Lower.

²⁵ The *n*-prefix in (19a) and (19c) is the conjugation marker, which is absent in the morphologically negated form (19b). Note that (19a) and (19c) differ from each other with respect to syllabification of this prefix and to length of the stem vowel. I have no explanation for these differences.

(19) Denaakk'e

(19a) kk'onseneeyh (no dialect information provided)

1SG:work:IPFV

'I work'

Jetté and Jones (2000:796)

(19b) kk'oleseneyaa (CLU)

1SG:work:IPFV:NEG

'I do not work'

Jetté and Jones (2000:328)

(19c) kk'oneseneyh kkele (U)

1SG:work:IPFV NEG

'I do not work'

Jetté and Jones (2000:328)

Sharon Hargus (p.c., March 19, 2019) notes that in Deg Xinag, the existential negator *qul* negates stative verbs (20) and may also be used in negation of active verbs.

(20) Deg Xinag

(20a) ningilanh

3SG:be.lazy:IPFV

's/he is lazy'

Hargus (p.c., March 19, 2019)

(20b) iningilanh qul

3SG:be.lazy:IPFV NEG

's/he is not lazy'

Hargus (p.c., March 19, 2019)

Information from Dakelh offers some hints about the diachronic development. Comparing morphological negation to periphrastic negation with *ilerh* (*iloh* in contemporary Dakelh; see table 3), Morice (1932:212) comments:

Occasionally, the same idea [as morphological negation] will be rendered by a verb in the affirmative followed by the adverb *ilerh* (*nten thēnadetli ilerh*, this person does not pray, instead of *thēna-ldestli*)' but this is a **child-like way of speaking which is not to be commended** [emphasis mine], and which cannot be normally resorted to, except in passing and in connection with verbs which are essentially negative or privative, such as *hwonezesni*, to be foolish, idiotic: *hwonezesni ilerh*, not to be foolish.

Poser (in prep.:110) comments extensively on periphrastic negation in contemporary Dakelh. He notes that it is more common in some varieties than in others, which may be due to different degrees of contact with English. In Southern varieties, periphrastic negation has almost entirely replaced the negative optative and is common with stative verbs. In all varieties, periphrastic negation is common when “countering expectations” (21). The negative particle *ʔaw* is also used in this construction.

- (21) Dakelh
 ʔaw ʔadatesdʌʔʌs iloh. Njan ʔadonʌʔʌs.
 NEG 1SG:make.shavings:FUT NEG 2SG 2SG:make.shavings:OPT
 ‘I’m not going to make shavings. You do it.’

Poser (in prep.:110)

Taken together, the statements by Morice and Poser suggest that the periphrastic construction in Dakelh, originally associated with child language and with a subset of negative or privative verbs, has been extended in function, although it still cannot be used in the entire range of contexts for morphological negation. Hargus’s comments about Deg Xinag suggest a similar situation. Jetté and Jones (2000:328) suggest that in Upper Denaakk’e, at least, the two constructions are equivalent. In the remainder of languages that use a reflex of a negative auxiliary in standard negation, the periphrastic construction seems to have replaced negative inflection entirely. Thus, Northern Dene languages illustrate different stages of the negative existential cycle identified by Croft (1991); I return to this point in 4.2.

3.2.2. *d*-initial particle. Another group of Canadian Dene—the Tutchone and Cordillera languages, as well as Hare, Tsetsaut, and Tsuut’ina—uses a negative particle that likely derives from the Proto-Dene negative particle reconstructed by Leer (1996a) as **də-we*; this is illustrated in (22) for Dane-zaa.

- (22) Dane-zaa

- (22a) astl’u
 1SG:knit:IPFV
 ‘I’m knitting’

Jung et al. (2004–8)

- (22b) adyú astl’u
 NEG 1SG:knit:IPFV
 ‘I don’t knit’

Jung et al. (2004–8)

In Kaska (23), *dułq̄* 'NEG' seems to also contain a cognate of the lateral-initial particle described in 3.1.5. In some verbs, it may be shortened to *du-* and prefixed to the verb.

(23) Kaska

(23a) *dułq̄ meyēsđh*
 NEG 1SG:know:IPFV
 'I don't know (it)'

Moore (2002:572)

(23b) *dūmeyēsđh*
 NEG:1SG:know:IPFV
 'I don't know (it)'

Moore (2002:572)

In all these languages apart from Hare, this negative particle is formally related to the morpheme used for existential negation. But while these morphemes are related, they are not identical in most languages, as comparison in table 8 shows. The first difference concerns prefixation. It was noted in 2.2 that the existential negator originating as **də-we* has developed a prefix in many languages. The same is true for the standard negator, but as the comparison in table 8 shows, different prefixes are used for the two types of negators. The second difference concerns clausal position. The existential negator functions as non-verbal predicate and thus occurs in clause-final position. The standard negator precedes the verb in all languages where it occurs, as demonstrated by the Dane-*zaa* and Kaska examples above.

Van Gelderen (2008a) notes that a cognate morpheme is used in negation in the other two branches of the Dene language family, as in (24) (de Reuse and Goode 2006):

(24) San Carlos Apache

(24a) *Hastiin dážhó nđzil.*
 old.man very 3SG:be.strong:IPFV
 'The old man is very strong.'

de Reuse and Goode (2006:59)

(24b) *Hastiin doo dážhó nđzil da.*
 old.man NEG very 3SG:be.strong:IPFV NEG
 'The old man is not very strong.'

de Reuse and Goode (2006:59)

TABLE 8
REFLEX OF **də-we* IN STANDARD AND EXISTENTIAL NEGATION

	Language	Standard preverbal	Existential postnominal	Source
Tanana- Tutchone	Northern Tutchone	edu, eju	hedú	Tom Tom and YNLC (1995:5)
	Southern Tutchone	äju	äjù	Allen and YNLC (1994)
Cordillera	Tagish	edū	hadu'	Wren, Kemble, and YNLC (1994)
	Tahltan	dú:e	dú:e	Hank Nater (p.c., April 6, 2019)
	Kaska	dułǫ́	nedúé	Moore (2002:572), YNLC (1990)
	Tsek'ene	ʔədu	nɪdùè	Hargus (2002:106)
	Dane- <u>z</u> aa	ad(y)u	(na)dué	own data
Mackenzie	Hare	du		K. Rice (1989:1103)
	Dëne Sų́liné		dódí	Cook (2004:298)
	Tsuut'ina	dú	dùwàh	Cook (1984:37)

The origin of **də-we* is unclear. Van Gelderen (2008a:59) attempts to establish a link of this morpheme to an interrogative marker. She suggests two candidates for cognates: Denaakk'e *doo* 'sentence final interrogative particle' in Jetté and Jones (2000:149) and Ahtna *nduu* 'where'. It should be noted, however, that the interrogative use is only one function of Denaakk'e *doo*, which is otherwise glossed as 'emphatic' (Jetté and Jones 2000:149). Cognates of *doo* function as contrastive topic markers 'how about, as for' in several Alaskan languages, for example, *tdu*, *du* in Ahtna (Kari 1990:160), =*hdi* in Dena'ina (Lovick 2010:178–82), and *du* in Upper Tanana (Lovick 2013).²⁶ Van Gelderen's (2008a:59) second possible etymology for this marker as cognate to Ahtna *nduu* 'where' is somewhat more plausible. Kari (1990:138) suggests *nda* as the most likely abstract form underlying most interrogatives in Ahtna, and Leer (1996a:d/22) lists **də* as an 'interrogative formant'. It is conceivable that this **də* is related to the negator **də-we*.

Another possibility I wish to propose here is a link between **də-we* and an archaic verbal prefix attested in several Alaskan languages used for the formation of prohibitives. It requires the verb to be in the negative imperfective (negative morphology is bolded in (25–27)). Kari (1990:137; 2005) links this prefix to a yes/no question clitic, which is different from the interrogative formant described in the preceding paragraph.

²⁶ Leer (1996a:d/67) reconstructs these particles as **duʔə* with the meanings 'also; and'.

(25) Ahtna

(25a) *dinii*

2SG:talk:IPFV

‘say that!’

Kari (1990:304)

(25b) ***dadzine***

2SG:talk:IPFV:NEG:PROH

‘don’t talk’

Kari (1990:137)

(26) Lower Tanana

(26a) *do’it’anh?*

2SG:do:IPFV:Q

‘what are you doing?’

Kari (2005)

(26b) ***dodhit’ana***

2SG:do:IPFV:NEG:PROH

‘don’t do it’

Kari (2005)

(27) Upper Tanana

(27a) *Dii ch’a d̥ih’ay?*

what FOC 2SG:act.on:IPFV:NOM

‘What are you messing with?’

Lovick (2006–present)

(27b) ***dadhij’ay***

2SG:act.on:IPFV:NEG:PROH

‘don’t mess with it’

Lovick (2006–present)

This may be similar to the ‘frozen’ use of *du* that K. Rice (1989:1105) notes in a few verb forms in the Slave complex, for example, (28).

(28) Slavey

duyegháéhndi

3SG>3SG:leave.behind:PFV?

‘he left it behind, he left it alone’

K. Rice (1989:1105)

Semantically, a link between prohibition and standard negation is plausible. The prefix occurs at the left edge of the verb word in all languages, which is compatible with a development as a preverbal particle. It is, however, worth noting that morphemes of this shape are very common in the language family (Kari 1990:136–39 lists 14 different items (*n*)*da* in Ahtna), which decreases the confidence level with which I suggest this link. Without more rigorous semantic reconstruction, a firm link between the negator reconstructing **də-we'* and interrogative or prohibitive clitics or affixes cannot be established.

4. Discussion. In the preceding sections, I provided an overview on the form of existential and standard negation across Northern Dene. I now turn to the discussion of some of the more intriguing aspects of this overview.

Although standard negation in Dene languages is reported to have very diverse strategies (the original observation was made in Krauss 1969:73 and reiterated in van Gelderen 2008a:49), the overview presented in this paper has shown that this is not actually the case. There are, in fact, only two major strategies for standard negation in Northern Dene: morphological negation (with or without additional particles) and negation using a preverbal reflex of **də-we'*. The mutual exclusivity of these two strategies is discussed in 4.1. The third, notably less common, strategy for standard negation is the result of the negative existential cycle, discussed in 4.2. Finally, I discuss the position of negative particles of Dene and show that aside from negators resulting from the negative existential cycle, there is a strong tendency for them to occur in preverbal position (4.3).

4.1. Two major strategies. It is striking that none of the languages using a reflex of **də-we'* have productive negative inflection, which is clearly visible in map 2 above.²⁷ Related to this is the fact that using a reflex of **də-we'* is the

²⁷ Hargus (2002:108) points out that one verb in Kwadacha Tsek'ene shows evidence of negative inflection in both prefix and stem domain.

- (i) Kwadacha
- (ia) Sharon zoh γəsʔi
Sharon only 1SG:see:IPFV
'I only see Sharon.'
- (ib) ʔədu əsʔih
NEG 1SG:see:IPFV:NEG
'I don't see her'

most widespread negative strategy in the Dene language family, since it is attested also in the Southern and Pacific Coast branches (see van Gelderen 2008a for discussion and examples). Thus, this strategy must already have been available before the time when the Pacific Coast languages separated from the rest of the Dene family, which may have happened as recently as around 500 BCE (Krauss and Golla 1981:68). The fact that negation using **dā-we* is not attested in Eyak or Tlingit (unlike morphological negation; see Leer 2000) may be indicative of morphological negation's being older. Nonetheless, the existence of **dā-we* in all branches of the Dene language family points to its being a very old negative strategy.

This distinguishes these two strategies from negation using an auxiliary. This strategy is attested only in the Northern branch, and only in small portions thereof: in the Mackenzie group, in Gwich'in and Hare, and, as a secondary strategy, in Deg Xinag, Upper Denaakk'e, Dakelh, and Biblical Gwich'in. Furthermore, as discussed in 4.2, there is clear evidence of this strategy being the result of the negative existential cycle posited by Croft (1991), and several stages of this cycle are attested within this group. This suggests, contrary to the claim made by van Gelderen (2008a:57–58), that negation using an auxiliary is, in fact, a more recent strategy than morphological negation or using a reflex of **dā-we*.

4.2. The negative existential cycle in Northern Dene. The data in 2 and 3 presented clear evidence (at least in some Northern Dene languages) for the negative existential cycle originally posited by Croft (1991). I briefly review Croft's typology of existential and standard negation before discussing its application to Northern Dene.

For languages exhibiting little or no internal variation in the expression of existential and standard negation, respectively, Croft identifies three types. In type A, the same negator is used in standard and existential negation. In existential negation (29b), it simply combines with the existential predicate. (The Syrian Arabic data is cited after Croft 1991:7.)

(29) Syrian Arabic

(29a) mā baʕref
NEG 1SG:know
'I don't know'

Cowell (1964:383)

(29b) Šu mā fī ḥada bəl-bēt?
Q NEG EX someone home
'Isn't there anyone home?'

Cowell (1964:384)

In languages belonging to type B, the negative existential predicate is formally distinct from the standard negator. Most Alaskan Dene languages fall into this group; in Upper Tanana, for example, standard negation is expressed by inflection plus a preverbal particle (see table 5) and existential negation is expressed by the negative existential predicate *kól* (see (3d)).

In type C languages, such a negative existential predicate is also used to express standard negation (Croft 1991:6). This type can be illustrated by contemporary Gwich'in, in which *kwaá* functions both as verbal and existential negator (see (17) above). These languages differ from those in type A in that the negator does not combine with the (affirmative) existential predicate but replaces it.

Croft (1991:6) further observes that there are languages with synchronic variation between these stages, where several competing strategies exist for the expression of standard or existential negation.²⁸ He argues that this points to a directional cycle with $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow A$.

As noted above, most of the Alaskan languages—Dena'ina, Ahtna, Upper Kuskokwim, most varieties of Denaakk'e, Lower Tanana, Tanacross, and Upper Tanana—as well as the Central British Columbia language Witsuwit'en belong to type B, with morphological standard negation and a nonverbal negative existential predicate for existential negation. In contemporary Gwich'in and Han, the existential negator has been extended in function and is now used for both negative existential and standard negation (type C in Croft's classification). Dakelh, Deg Xinag, and Upper Denaakk'e represent a transitional stage between B and C, where the existential negator is used in some instances of standard negation but has not entirely replaced it. It is unclear where Biblical Gwich'in is to be placed on this cycle. Both strategies are attested, yet additional information about use and restrictions is not available at this time.

Not all stages of the negative existential cycles are attested in Northern Dene: stage A, where standard negation is used in verbal and negative existential contexts, and the transitional stage between C and A, as well as that between A and B, are absent.²⁹

In the languages where the existential negator is a reflex of **dā-we·*, a similar cyclical development cannot be motivated, even though almost all of these languages clearly use a related morpheme as the standard negator (see table 8). Precisely because of this overlap, it cannot be determined which of the two functions should be taken as basic and was subsequently extended. It is equally possible that the formative **dā-we·* has been polyfunctional from the outset. In

²⁸ In Type A ~ B, for example, existential negation may be expressed using a standard negator combined with an existential predicate or using a special existential negator. Croft (1991:7–8) cites Balinese and Hungarian as examples of this type.

²⁹ A similar observation was made by Veselinova (2014:1338–39) for the negative existential cycle in the Slavonic and Polynesian language families.

attempting to link **də-weʔ* with interrogative markers, van Gelderen (2008a, 2008b) suggests that these languages have undergone Jespersen's cycle, but, as discussed in 3.2.2, establishing this historical link is not straightforward, and there is no evidence whatsoever of transitional stages between morphological negation and **də-weʔ* negation. I instead follow Leer's (2000) more conservative approach of treating **də-weʔ* as having negative force in itself, rather than as having acquired negative functions as the result of cyclical developments.

4.3. Position of syntactic negators. In her comparative study of Dene morpheme order, K. Rice (2000) claims that (standard) negation in this language family is always expressed using an "enclitic" (p. 341) or "syntactic suffix that has scope over the entire verb word" (p. 318). Her choice of words suggests the presence of a postverbal element involved in standard negation in all Dene languages. I have shown here (echoing remarks made originally by Hargus and Tuttle 2003:108) that this is not an accurate description for all Northern Dene languages. Instead the language group reflects several competing tendencies regarding the placement of the standard negator observed by Dryer (2013b) in his large-scale typological study.

The most common order typologically, as noted by Dryer (2013b), is to place the negative word before the negated verb. This is the case in all Dene languages using a reflex of **də-weʔ*. Hargus (2002:114–15) suggests that the preverbal position of *ʔədu* in Kwadacha may be due to there having been a postverbal *da* morpheme, similar to the negator used in the Southern Dene languages (see (24) above). Given the prevalence of cognates of Kwadacha *ʔədu* without a postverbal particle in Northern Dene, however, I am not certain whether this argument needs to be made at all, or whether the strong typological tendency observed by Dryer (2013b) is sufficient to explain the preverbal placement of *ʔədu* and its cognates. Placing the negative word after the verb (e.g., in Gwich'in and Han as well in those Mackenzie languages in which the negator does not cliticize to the verb complex) is much rarer typologically. Dahl (1979:91) finds postverbal negators are common in verb-final languages, particularly if the negator is an auxiliary—precisely what we observe in Northern Dene.

Turning to the languages with morphological negation, it is striking that all of them use double negation (using negative prefixes and suffixes) and most use triple negation involving either a preverbal or a postverbal negator. Six languages (Ahtna, Dena'ina, Tanacross, Upper Tanana, Dakelh, and Tsilhq'út'in, plus Biblical Gwich'in, which is no longer spoken) use preverbal negators, while only three (Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, and Upper Kuskokwim) use a postverbal one. Again, the preference for preverbal negators can be said to exist in Northern Dene. In fact, this can explain one of the more puzzling facts about negator placement in Alaskan Dene. As discussed in 3.1.3, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Upper Kuskokwim, and Dena'ina use cognate negators, but while it

occurs postverbally in the first three languages, it is always preverbal in Dena'ina. Possibly the placement in Dena'ina is a more recent development caused by the universal preference for preverbal negators observed by Dryer (2013b). A similar argument has been made by van Gelderen (2008a) regarding the preverbal placement of the negator 'ele' in Ahtna and *ʔalit* in Biblical Gwich'in, both of which originate as an auxiliary and thus were likely postverbal at a prior stage.

The existential negator in all languages occurs in clause-final position, regardless of whether the negator is an analyzable verb form (e.g., Hare, Bearlake, Slavey, Tłı̄chǝ, Dakelh) or a nonverbal predicate (all other languages). Nonverbal predicates generally occur in the same position as verbal ones, so this is not surprising.

5. Summary. This overview over negation in Northern Dene has shown several things. First, there are only two widespread strategies (morphological negation and negation using **də-we'*) for standard negation. Negation using an auxiliary is not nearly as common as the other two strategies and is likely to be the relatively recent output of the negative existential cycle originally postulated by Croft (1991). Second, across the Northern Dene group, there are only two strategies for existential negation: a negative auxiliary and a reflex of Proto-Dene **də-we'*. Despite their different etymology, the existential negators have developed very similarly across the language family, giving rise to parallel idioms and reanalysis as verbal stems. This indicates that negation in Northern Dene is actually less diverse than has been previously suggested. The major source of diversity in the language family lies in the choice of reinforcing particle employed by those languages with morphological negation; these may be focus markers, auxiliaries, or an adverb with the meaning 'different'—all of these are common origins for negative particles typologically. Northern Dene languages also exhibit the typologically common trend of preverbal negators.

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