



How to say ‘not yet’  
without saying ‘no(t)’.

Africa and beyond.

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## Introduction

### (1) Swahili (Bantu)

Je, u-me-oa?                      – **Bado**  
Q 2SG-ANT-marry                      still

‘Are you married? – **Not yet.**’

(personal knowledge)

### (2) Kalamang (West Bomberai)

Ka he namgon? – **Tok**  
2SG already married                      still

‘Are you married? – **Not yet.**’

(Visser 2020)

Type of “negatives without a negator” (Miestamo 2010)

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# Introduction

## van Baar's (1997: 295) universal

- a. [...] a **STILL**-expression [...] as an **isolated expression** [...] **invariably** used for [...] **NOT YET**.
- b. [...] **only in languages which have an internal negation** of the relevant **STILL** expression

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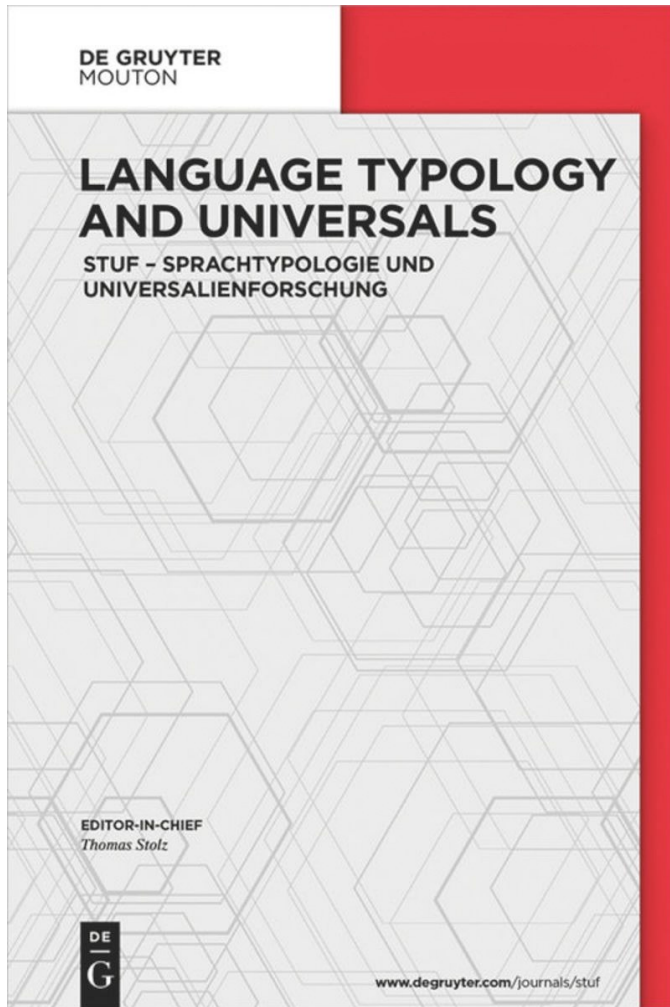
# Introduction

## Questions:

- a. Where (which Ig.'s, which contexts) is STILL as NOT YET found?
- b. What's the functional motivation?

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# Introduction



Persohn, Bastian. 2024. When 'still' means 'not yet'. *STUF – Language Typology and Universals* 77.

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# Definitions

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## ALREADY

Plausible course of events in which a situation has *not yet* come into existence

(e.g. van der Auwera 1998, Löbner 1989)

'I'm hungry already'

→ I might have become hungry only later

# Definitions

## STILL

- a. persistence of (affirmative polarity) situation
- b. plausible discontinuation scenario

## 'I'm still hungry'

- a. I was hungry before
- b. I might *no longer* be hungry



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# Definitions

## NOT YET

- a. persistent non-happening
- b. plausible actualization scenario

'I'm not hungry yet'

- a. I wasn't hungry before
- b. I might be hungry by now

# Definitions

NOT YET  $p$

'I'm not hungry yet'

$\equiv$  STILL  $\neg p$

$\equiv$  'It's still the case  
that I'm not hungry'

$\equiv$   $\neg$ ALREADY  $p$

$\equiv$  'It's not already the case  
that I'm hungry'

German *noch nicht*,  
Spanish *todavía no*,  
etc.

Classical Nahuatl  
*aya* < ah-ye 'NEG-already'

English  
*If you haven't ... already ...*

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# Definitions

## Excluded

### (3) Spanish

No le he dicho nada... **todavía**  
'I haven't told him anything... yet'

### (4) Swahili

**Bado** kidogo  
still a\_little  
'Still a bit, a little later, not quite yet'

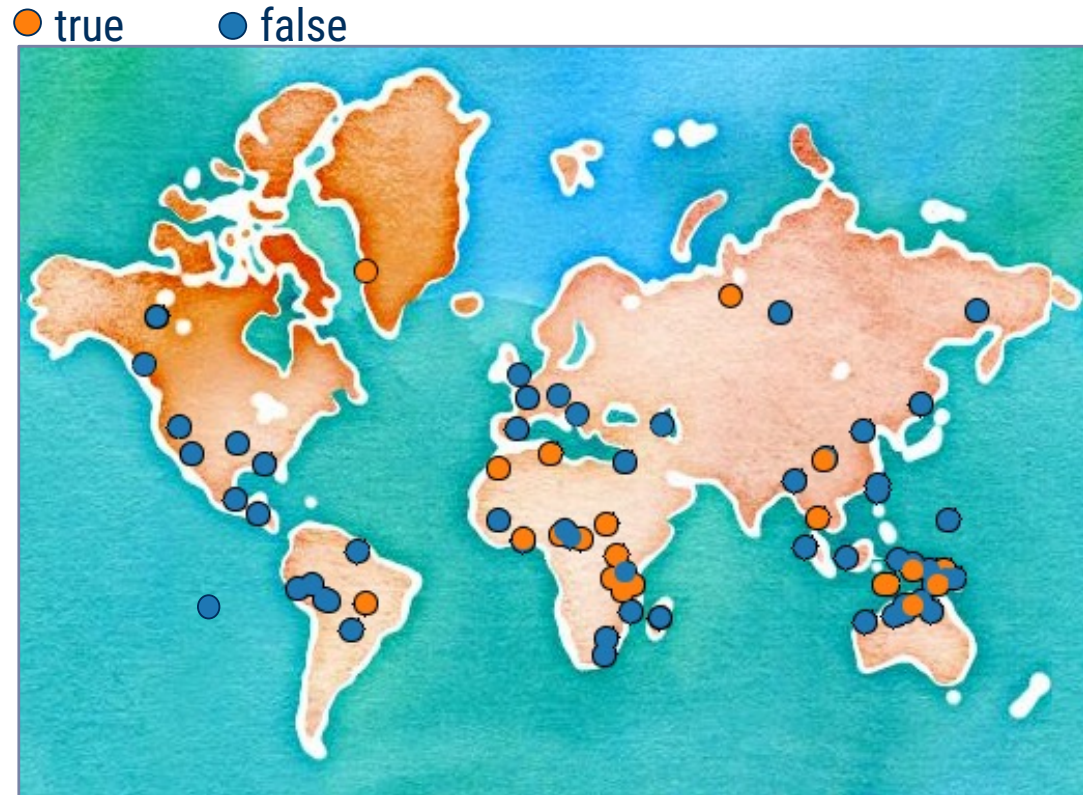
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## Key findings

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## STILL as NOT YET

- All six macro-areas
- Incl. large parts of Africa
- Notably absent in Europe



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## Key findings

### Atlantic-Congo

Adama Fulfude *tawon*

Nyangbo *ka-*

Sango *de*

Bende *syá-*

Manda *(a)kona*

Ruuli *kya-*

Swahili *bado*

### Afro-Asiatic

Tashelhyit Berber *sul*

Tunisian Arabic *māzāl*

### Katla-Tima

Tima *blɪr*

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## Key findings

### Contexts:

1. No overt predicate (incl. “isolated” uses)
2. Less-than-finite and/or dependent predicates
3. Specific lexical aspects
4. Specific position in clause

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## Key findings

### **van Baar's (1997: 295) universal**

[...] as isolated expressions [...] invariably [...] NOT YET [...]

[...] only in languages which have an internal negation [...]



## Key findings

[...] as isolated expressions [...] invariably [...] NOT YET [... ]

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### (5) English

A: D'ya think she'll go back to work Kevin?

B: No .. I don't think she will to be honest with you.

A: <sigh>

B: **Still.**

A: I don't blame her.

(BNC KBC, cited in Lewis 2019)

## Key findings

[...] as isolated expressions [...] invariably [...] NOT YET [... ]

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### (6) Modern Hebrew

A: Anaħnu holxim le-aħer la-hofaʕa!  
'We are going to be late to the show.'

B: Lo batuaħ. ʕaxšav ha-ramzor hofex le-yaroq.  
'That's not certain. The traffic light is turning green now.'

A: ʕadayin  
'Still...' (Yael Greenberg, p.c.)

## Key findings

[...] only in languages which have an internal negation [...]

### (7) Bende (Bantu)

U-**syá**-lí?

2SG-still-COP

'Haven't you (cooked) **yet**?

– N-**syá**-lí.

1SG-still-COP

– **Not yet.**'

(Abe 2015)

- **syá-** does not combine with negation
- NOT YET otherwise:  
STILL + INF
- same for Ruuli *kya-*

## Key findings

[...] only in languages which have an internal negation [...]

### (8) Blagar (Timor-Alor-Pantar)

Ana na nat ?ila? – **Jedun**.  
2sg thing eat go still  
'Have you eaten already? – **Not yet.**'

(Steinhauer 2014)

- *(j)edun* not attested with negation
- polarity determined by position

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## Key findings

### Implicational relationship

**“Isolated” STILL as NOT YET entails** that the same item forms part of an expression for NOT YET **in more saturated environments** (which may or may not involve a negator)

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## A closer look

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## A closer look

### Contexts:

1. No overt predicate (incl. “isolated” uses)

2. Less-than-finite and/or dependent predicates

3. Specific lexical aspects

4. Specific position in clause

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Type 1:  
No overt predicate



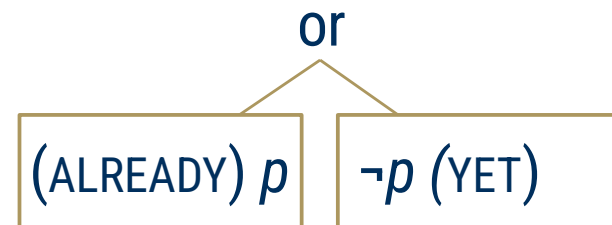
## No predicate: disjunction

### (1) Swahili (Bantu)

Je, u-me-oa?            – **Bado**  
Q 2SG-ANT-marry       still

‘Are you married? – **Not yet.**’

- At stake: attainment of situation
- Denotation of Q (simplified):



- Stand-alone STILL expression  
meaningful only re:  $\neg p$   
 $\equiv$  NOT YET  $p$   
 $\equiv$   $\neg$ ALREADY  $p$

## No predicate: disjunction

### (9) Tunisian Arabic

Minna      šhar    yṭīb      iš-šṣīr  
from.here   month it.is.ripe   ART.DEF-barley

ām-il-qamḥ                      māzāl.  
but-ART.DEF-wheat            still

‘Within a month, the barley will be ripe,  
but the wheat won’t yet.’

(Marçais and Guìga 1958–1961)

- QuD: attainment of a state
- Disjunctive sets:  
ripe vs. unripe grains
- Same logic.  
Meaningful only  
re: wheat ...

STILL ¬ripe

≡ NOT YET ripe

≡ ¬ALREADY ripe

—  
No predicate: holophrastic ‘wait!’, etc.

### (10) Japhug (Sino-Tibetan)

**Pɣkh**-ije    tɕe                    <guan>    makɣtɔβz je!  
still-SFP    LNK                    turn\_off    don't        SFP

‘**Wait**, don't hang up [your phone].’ (Jacques 2021)

- Similar cases with “true” NOT YET items
- Even “filling in” an affirmative can yield a negative reading:  
e.g. ‘[I] still [want to tell you smth]’ > ‘Hang on’

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Type 2:  
Less-than-finite/dependent predicates

## Less-than-finite/dependent predicates

### (11) Ruuli (Bantu)

Tu-**kya**-li    **ku**-ika    ku    n-zala                    y-a            maani.  
1PL-still-COP    INF-arrive    LOC    NCL9-famine                    NCL9-of            strength  
'We have **not yet** reached terrible famine.'

(Molochieva et al. 2021)

- Conventionalized inference:  
persistently pending sit. > persistent negative state
- Cf. Güldemann (1996, 1998), Nurse (2008), Veselinova & Devos (2021)

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## Less-than-finite/dependent predicates

### (11) Kagulu (Bantu)

Ni-**ng'ati** ni-lim-**e**.

1SG-still 1SG-cultivate-SBJV

'I have **not yet** cultivated.'

(Molochieva et al. 2021)

### (12) Achumawi (Palaihnihan)

**Nám** t-ǎ·má

still 3SG.SUBORD-eat

'He is **not** eating **yet**.'

(de Angulo 1930)

- Suggests: probably more wide-spread

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Type 4:  
Linear position

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## Linear position

### (13) Blagar (Timor-Alor-Pantar)

Qangu veng qangu	na	<b>jedung</b>	PRED
at.that.time	1SG	still	kiki.
			small

'At that time I was **still** a little child.'

	PRED		
N-iva	guru	<b>jedun.</b>	
1SG-mother	teacher	still	

'My mother is **not** a teacher **yet**.'

(Steinhauer 2014,  
Steinhauer & Gomang 2016)



## Linear position

### Synchrony

- Clause-final position  
locus of standard negation

- Covert, but kind of  
compositional:

STILL

+ “meaning” of position

### Diachrony

- Comparison with neighbours:
  1. embracing negation  
[NEG PRED NEG]
  2. NOT YET by analogy  
[NEG PRED STILL] or [STILL PRED STILL]
  3. Erosion:  
[NEG PRED NEG]
  4. Analogy again:  
[NEG PRED STILL] or [~~STILL~~ PRED STILL]

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## Conclusions

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# Conclusions

## Negatives without negators

- Are rare ... (Miestamo 2010)
- ... but perhaps less so with phasal expressions
- where they come in multiple “flavours”

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Thank you for your  
attention!