

A Descriptive Typology of Privative Markers in Australian Languages
Category: either oral or poster

The privative marker, usually glossed as ‘without’ or ‘lacking,’ occurs, according to Dixon (2002), in almost all Australian languages, typically as a negative counterpart to a proprietive suffix, which is glossed as ‘having’ or ‘with’ (Nordlinger 1998). This paper uses a genetically diverse sample of about twenty-five Australian languages to describe and explore the basic phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of privation. From this investigation, a number of cross-linguistic tendencies in privation are found, including that privation and negation are closely tied both in form and function; for example, there is frequently overlap in phonological form between privatives and other negation markers, such as is found in Wirangu:

- (1) *nganha gidya-maga*
I child-NEG
‘I haven’t got any children’ (Hercus 1999: 57)

This overlap of form may also occur with negatives other than clausal negators: in Innamincka, for instance, the privative is an allomorph of the free form *pani*, ‘none, nothing’ (Breen 2004: 116). This overlap in phonological form suggests a possible origin for privative markers in negation, standard or otherwise.

An examination of the morphological behavior of privatives in the languages of the sample also sheds light on this possible origin in negation, in addition to discovering certain typological tendencies in the behavior of clitics versus affixes and inflection versus derivation. It is impossible to give a unified cross-linguistic analysis of the morphological nature of privatives based on their lexical selectional requirements and interaction with case and other affixes; instead, there is language-specific variability in their morphological status as clitics or affixes. This variability supports a cross-linguistic analysis in which privatives may be historically derived from negative markers, and currently exist along a cline of grammaticalization, from an independent negative morpheme, to a negative clitic, to a negative affix.

This relationship between privative markers and negation is also found in their syntactic and semantic behavior, where in some languages privatives may be used in double negation or may even function as predicate negators:

- (2) *ngumbanmarri wajiyangu*
Your-PRIV betrothed
‘not your betrothed’ (Evans 1995: 159)

Additionally, privatives show some of the typological characteristics of standard negation as described in Miestamo (2007), including the distinction between symmetric and asymmetric negation, in which privative markers may be structurally or semantically restricted relative to their positive proprietive counterparts. In surveying the details of some of these asymmetries across the languages of the sample, this paper enhances a cross-linguistic understanding of linguistic negation generally and privative negation specifically, as well as contributes to the typological literature on Australian languages.

References

- Breen, Gavan. 2004. *Innamincka Talk; A grammar of the Innamincka dialect of Yandruwandha with notes on other dialects*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Dixon, R.M.W. 2002. *Australian Languages: Their Nature and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Evans, Nicholas D. 1995. *A Grammar of Kayardild*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hercus, L.A. 1999. *A Grammar of the Wirangu Language From the West Coast of South Australia*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Miestamo, Matti. 2007. Negation – An Overview of Typological Research. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1 (5): 552-570.
- Nordlinger, Rachel. 1998. *A Grammar of Wambaya, Northern Territory (Australia)*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.