

Title On order and prohibition
Category Oral

Following Jespersen's (1917: 5-6) remarks on a number of Germanic languages, Horn (1989: 450) maintains that the 'negative first principle', i.e., the tendency to place negators before the items that they negate, may be even stronger in directives than in declarative sentences. The reason is that, from a functional point of view, the potential uncertainty about the polarity of a postverbally negated directive is risky. The addressee(s) may, for instance, do the exact opposite of what the speaker wants.

The present paper examines the crosslinguistic validity of this claim for the prohibitive, i.e., the grammatical structure that urges the hearer(s) to refrain from or to stop doing something. In the vein of Jespersen and Horn, we expect that languages with preverbal negation in the declarative have preverbal negation in the prohibitive too, but that languages with postverbal negation in the declarative may have postverbal as well as preverbal negation in the prohibitive. These hypotheses are tested by comparing the positions vis-à-vis the main verb (i.e., before and/or after) of the basic declarative negative clitic, affix, particle or auxiliary and of the prohibitive marker(s) in a geographically and genetically balanced sample of 179 languages (along the lines of Miestamo's 2005 'restricted sample').

At first glance, the results are not supportive of the hypotheses above. In more than eighty percent of the languages in the sample, the position of the standard negation and that of the prohibitive marker are the same. In one third of these cases, they both go after the main verb. More importantly, the number of languages that have preverbal negation in declaratives and postverbal negation in prohibitives (e.g. Una, Nadëb) is equal to the number of languages with the reverse distribution (e.g. Iraqw, Yareba).

At second glance, however, the 'negative first principle' fares much better. On the one hand, we would still argue that this principle is particularly significant in directive sentences. The sample includes a number of languages that may be regarded as tipping the balance in favour of Jespersen and Horn. In Nivkh, for instance, the declarative negator is always postverbal while one of the two prohibitive strategies is marked preverbally. On the other hand, it is clear that the word order in prohibitives is not only determined by the 'negative first principle'. In the last part of our paper, we examine three of the other factors. Firstly, the origin of the prohibitive marker may play a role. The Korean marker, for example, comes from a 'stop' verb and is postverbal, like all auxiliaries in the language. Secondly, the prohibitive may be pressured to follow the standard negation pattern. Apalaí, for instance, has a preverbally marked prohibitive and a postverbally marked one. The latter strategy, which is analogous to the declarative negation structure, is the more frequent one. Thirdly, the prohibitive may be modelled on other constructions. Yimas is a case in point: the traditional prohibitive marker is a prefix, just like the standard negator, but younger speakers prefer to use a postverbally marked prohibitive that resembles another construction, the so-called 'desiderative'.

References

- Horn, L.R. (1989) *A Natural History of Negation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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